Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research (ITAW)

Profile and Structure

The University of Veterinary Medicine Hanover, Foundation, (TiHo) has reorganized and expanded its wildlife research: TiHo Scientists at the office in Büsum, Schleswig-Holstein, are now working on marine mammals, including harbor seals, gray seals, harbor porpoises, dolphins and minke whales. Extensive research efforts target not only the North and Baltic Seas but also other European waters and Polar Regions. Domestic terrestrial wild animals, such as hoofed game, pheasants, black grouse, hares, wolves, wisents, lynx and wildcats, have been a focus of TiHo’s Hanover facilities for many years and are now joined by marine mammals. To merge these two research areas, the University of Veterinary Medicine Hanover, Foundation, established a new institute, named the Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research (ITAW), with Prof. h. c. Dr. Ursula Siebert at the helm.

Within the discipline of wildlife biology, ITAW focuses on basic research, applied research and monitoring. Research is concentrated on diseases in wild animals and diseases transmittable between humans and animals, so-called zoonoses. Other areas of interest include habitat use, bioacoustics, wildlife behavior, nutrition and management, as well as the ecology of wild animals as it relates to issues of environmental protection and conservation. ITAW aims to elucidate the biology and ecology of wild animals and to investigate the influence of anthropogenic activities on wildlife.

The Institute offers unique educational opportunities in the field of wildlife research for PhD programs and doctoral, master and bachelor theses in the specialties of veterinary medicine, biology, landscape conservation and forestry. The Institute is integrated in the course curriculum of the University of Veterinary Medicine and, in addition, offers lectures and internships in wildlife biology to students matriculated in biology programs. It is the first facility in Germany accredited by the European College of Zoological Medicine to offer specialized education in wildlife population health. In addition, teleinjection courses are offered biannually.

Research of Marine Wildlife

It is the ITAW s particular research areas that makes it unique in the field of marine mammal studies in Germany and in certain areas throughout Europe and the world. Research on marine mammals was initiated in Büsum, Schleswig-Holstein, in 1988/1989 after the first harbor seal die-offs had been observed. Scientists began investigating habitat use (telemetry, population surveys, bioacoustics) of harbor seals, gray seals and harbor porpoises, as well as the health status of these animals. Current research is targeting at the effects of offshore wind farms and the impact of fishery, trash and chemical burdens on marine mammals. In addition, the effects of underwater sound on the behavior and health of seals and harbor porpoises are being studied.

Here are some ongoing and completed aquatic projects to be found

Research of Terrestrial Wildlife

Scientists at TiHo have been conducting wildlife research since 1980. Mutual relationships between native wild animals and environmental factors have been the primary focus of research. Examples of current research projects include, the decline in pheasant populations, infectious diseases in predators, population development of hoofed game and black grouse, and the associated damage in Lower Saxony, scientific monitoring of the natural re-establishment of wolves in Lower Saxony, as well as the continuous monitoring of wild animals, conducted jointly with the hunters of Lower Saxony, which has produced information on population sizes and the occurrence of different native wild animal species for more than 20 years.

Here are some ongoing and completed terrestrial projects to be found