



Creating space for nature

Biodiversity at Heidelberg Materials



Quarries provide a unique opportunity to support biodiversity.

As a company that engages in extractive activities, we acknowledge our impact on nature and the accompanying social responsibility. We therefore ensure that the conservation of biodiversity is a key consideration in all our quarry development activities.

While a common perception is that quarries are bare places devoid of life, this could not be further from the truth. These areas of economic activity can contribute to nature restoration efforts. They support habitats that are rarely found in today's intensively used landscapes; these habitats in turn harbour many threatened species.

The core of our strategy is a deep understanding of our footprint, where negative impacts may occur, and how we can positively contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss. Working across five continents, we strive to understand the environments where our sites are located and what species they interact with across the whole quarry life cycle, so that we can set out key actions.

Building a nature positive future

Responsible land management begins with deep understanding.

Biodiversity loss is at a critical point, and to reverse this negative trend, action is needed by everyone. However, this is not a new topic for Heidelberg Materials. We have a long history of biodiversity management in our quarries. Scientific studies over the years have proved the value of quarries in habitat and species protection. As the wider landscape becomes more and more fragmented and intensively used, this value continues to increase.

As a producer of building materials, Heidelberg Materials has an impact on the land during the extraction of raw material. During the opening and running of an extraction site we interact with various natural habitats and the many species living within the site. Biodiversity is therefore an essential element of our [Sustainability Commitments 2030](#). Society is closely intertwined with biodiversity, and the extent of this relationship is often vastly undervalued. Whether it's clean air and water, providing medicines and raw materials, or the food on our tables and our overall mental wellbeing, humanity is critically dependent on the services provided by a healthy environment and an ecosystem in balance.

Action on the ground

The Heidelberg Materials biodiversity programme is both ambitious and visionary for the building materials industry. Nature Positive is the core aim of our biodiversity commitments and includes the following key principles.



1 Reducing our operational impact

We have committed to allocating a minimum of 15 % of the area within all our active quarries as “Space for Nature”. The life of a quarry can range from 15 to over 100 years, and nature can easily colonise a space within one to two years. The low nutrient conditions and relatively low disturbance can result in many unique species quickly setting up home in our sites. To ensure such species are accommodated and that we do not inadvertently impact nearby high biodiversity value areas, we implement biodiversity management and action plans in our quarries around the world.



2 Restoring nature

We actively advocate for restoration, supporting the European call for a Nature Restoration Law and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. We integrate biodiversity features in our reclamation activities and contribute globally to habitat restoration efforts. These include *Banksia* woodland in Australia, alvar grasslands in Northern Europe, native forests in Togo, and wetlands across a number of countries that have subsequently been designated as protected areas under European or national law. In our effort to restore more habitat than our operations impact, we monitor our progress, and are committed to annually reporting the amount of land reclaimed.



3 Controlling invasive alien species

Invasive alien species are a key driver of biodiversity loss. In particular, invasive alien plant species can quickly colonise the bare substrates found in our quarries, and then spread into the wider landscape or be transported through the sale of our aggregates. This makes their control an important part of our biodiversity conservation actions. To support operations with the identification and management of invasive plant species, we provide regional guidelines that identify the worst plant invaders, offer in-depth invasive species management options, and also deliver training.



4 Maximising our contribution

To ensure the greatest biodiversity gains, while also furthering science and biodiversity management, we open our quarries on a regular basis to external nature specialists and enthusiasts through our nature-based competition, the Quarry Life Award. We also collaborate in partnerships with nature conservation organisations to help create greater awareness of the importance of biodiversity, and invest in educational programmes and nature-based scientific research.

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We use biodiversity management plans to mitigate any potential negative impacts our sites may have on biodiversity, in particular protected species as well as areas of high biodiversity value within proximity to our operations. This helps ensure we maximise the opportunities for nature to recover.

Dr. Nicola Kimm

Member of the Managing Board of Heidelberg Materials and
Chief Sustainability Officer



A great example of habitat restoration of a lost ecosystem is found at our Needingworth gravel quarry. Through a local collaboration with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, representing BirdLife's UK Partner) the Ouse Fen Nature Reserve has been established. Once completed, the entire site will see the restoration of about 700 hectares of wetland habitat including the largest reedbed in the UK, spanning 460 hectares. The reserve is targeted to support a wide diversity of wetland fauna and flora including a number of breeding pairs of key bird species such as marsh harriers, bitterns, and bearded tits.. The rare bitterns, which are slowly recovering in the UK from near extinction in the mid-1990s, are steadily growing in number of recorded breeding pairs.

Helping nature to recover

Reversing the loss in biodiversity involves a commitment to restoring it. This is an integral part of our business model.

Together with climate change, the loss of natural habitats has put human livelihoods and the foundations for our economic activities at risk. To reverse the decline in biodiversity, simply protecting remaining natural places will not be sufficient – we need to invest in large-scale restoration. Habitat creation and restoration go hand in hand with the extraction of raw materials. However, high-quality restoration is key to helping biodiversity thrive. Heidelberg Materials works to provide the greatest gains for biodiversity when reclaiming our quarries back to nature.

When planning and implementing business activities, we manage our impacts on biodiversity in line with the sequential steps of the mitigation hierarchy – that is avoid, minimise, restore, and mitigate (through habitat creation and offsets where appropriate). Understanding that habitats take time to restore their ecological function, we practise progressive restoration wherever possible within our quarries. This includes making provision for areas of temporary nature and encouraging spontaneous restoration, which helps accelerate species recovery. Furthermore, we play an active role in industry associations to share practices around extraction site reclamation.

Working together for nature



Establishing key partnerships.

To truly move from biodiversity loss to gain, concerted effort is needed by everyone, working together at the landscape scale. Nature knows no boundaries, and this needs to be reflected in collaborative actions. Partnerships represent a strong element of our biodiversity strategy.

With many habitat types, millions of species, and all the interactions among these species, biodiversity is a complex topic. We need the support of partners to help us understand these intricacies if we are going to maximise our positive contribution. Across our geographic reach, we work with an extensive network of non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, and community groups, all sharing the

same vision to support nature and reverse its loss. Our largest partnership is with BirdLife International, who has been working alongside us for over 10 years to help increase biodiversity in our sites. The partnership has seen over 40 conservation projects in our quarries, regular screening of our sites in terms of their biodiversity sensitivity and impact assessments, and joint advocacy on various policy aspects.



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My hope is that corporates play their part not only in reducing environmental harm and improving the ecological value of their own estate, but also advocating for change within their sector to raise standards. I see that with Heidelberg Materials, and value the role that their leadership plays within the sector.

Martin Harper
CEO, BirdLife International

Reforestation in cooperation with Ghana Wildlife Society

Deforestation for farming and charcoal burning has driven the critically endangered *Talbotiella gentii* tree, a species endemic to Ghana, to near extinction. Working with the Ghana Wildlife Society, a BirdLife partner, our local operations have been supporting the scientific research on how best to restore forest fragments where this tree occurs, with over 4000 seedlings produced in our onsite tree nursery. To ensure the long-term survival of this species, engagement with communities and farmers is crucial, and the socioeconomic impact of *T. gentii* has been a focus of a Quarry Life Award project.



Inspiring others and creating opportunity

While most of our biodiversity projects are associated with quarries, we acknowledge that our other production sites can also provide accommodation for species. A perfect example is at our cement plant in Edmonton, Canada, where we have been supporting the breeding of peregrine falcons since 1992, with in total 120 young successfully fledged. The value of our efforts as part of the wider species recovery programme has seen the status of this bird in Canada reclassified from Endangered to Threatened.





THE
QUARRY LIFE
AWARD

5

Editions since conception

> 25

Countries involved

+ 150

Participating quarries

+ 1600

Submitted project proposals

~ 600

Selected projects

The Quarry Life Award is a scientific and education competition run at both national and international levels on a three-year cycle. It is targeted at scientists, university students, and non-governmental organisations as well as the communities neighbouring our sites and provides the basis to study and boost quarry biodiversity.

This competition aims to better understand what is living in our quarries, explore new methods to enhance habitats and species populations, and engage with the wider public about the importance of biodiversity. Heidelberg Materials uses the award-winning projects as a means for developing best practices for quarry management, which are then rolled out globally.

Since 2012, the competition has been the origin of hundreds of innovative ideas and projects to promote and protect biodiversity. In 2022, we introduced the new category “Nature Based Solutions”. This category looks for projects with a strong focus on addressing societal challenges through the protection, sustainable management, and restoration of natural and modified ecosystems, benefiting both biodiversity and people.

Find out more about the Quarry Life Award

www.quarrylifeaward.com

Visit us

www.heidelbergmaterials.com/en/biodiversity-and-land-use

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