
How Brown were the Conservationists? Naturism, Conservation, and National Socialism, 1900–1945

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Frank Uekoetter, *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 230 pp., \$23.99 (pb), ISBN-13 9780521612777.

John Alexander Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900–1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 354 pp., \$55.00 (hb), ISBN-13 9780804700153.

How green were the Nazis? Tackling this deceptively simple question has proved to be one of the most popular research agendas in recent German environmental history. Inquiries about green Nazis investigate links between National Socialism and ideas and actions we presently label ‘green’, such as ecological thought or environmental movements. The most popular subset of this literature has focused on the relationship between the German conservation movement and National Socialism. There are compelling reasons for examining this link more closely. For one thing, the conservation cause appears to have prospered in the Third Reich. The National Socialist period witnessed the passage of Germany’s first national conservation law, a bill one scholar has labelled ‘one of the industrialised world’s most wide-ranging conservation laws’ of the time.¹ Furthermore, both conservationists and National Socialists availed themselves of language generally attributed to the other group. Beginning in the 1980s scholars raised the question of ideological affinities between Nazis and conservationists. Some called attention to institutional links between the conservation community and the National Socialists, noting the repugnant racist

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¹ Charles E. Closmann, ‘Legalizing a *Volksgemeinschaft*: Nazi Germany’s Reich Nature Protection Law of 1935’, in Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc and Thomas Zeller, eds., *How Green were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005).

proclamations of individual nature protectors.² In her political biography of Walther Darré, Anna Bramwell argued that the Nazi minister of agriculture espoused green ideas and claimed the existence of a 'Green Party' in Hitler's Germany.³ Since the early 1990s, a stream of studies has appeared that almost unanimously contests the notion of a close ideological connection between conservationism and National Socialist ideology. The two works under review are a continuation of this dialogue. Taken together, they provide a context for comprehending the emergence and character of conservation ideology and a model for understanding the movement's historical development during the Nazi period.

In *Turning to Nature*, John Alexander Williams reminds us that the intense historiographical focus on the nature protection movement can obscure the broader cultural context in which it originated. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the intensifying processes of industrialisation and urbanisation caused fundamental changes in German society and the environment as well. In the eyes of many Germans, these transformations were not for the better, and many expressed their views on how the new circumstances should be improved. In this expanded version of his Ph.D. thesis, Williams traces the organisational and ideological history of the German nature protection movement and several other cultural associations that advocated 'turning to nature' as a means of coping with these perceived societal problems. Williams argues that although these 'naturist' groups offered natural solutions to the various crises they experienced, their actions represented neither a flight from reality nor a rejection of modern developments.

Williams's thesis is a direct response to seminal works of intellectual history that previously labelled naturist thought as irrational, antimodern and anti-Enlightenment – and therefore an ideological stepping-stone to National Socialism. Scholars such as George Mosse, Fritz Stern and Klaus Bergmann claimed that German intellectuals' peculiar obsession with the idea of Romantic nature made them hostile towards those modern forces they blamed for disfiguring the German landscape. Taking their cue from these elites, ordinary Germans also turned their backs on modernity, expressing their discontent by retreating to nature en masse. Naturist organisations transmitted 'agrarian Romanticism' and folkish ideas throughout German society, paving the way for widespread support of National Socialism.⁴ Williams challenges the assertion that turning to nature at the turn of the twentieth century implied a desire to return to an idyllic past. Such interpretations, he maintains, are based on narrow sources and teleological assumptions that privilege fringe elements in German culture. While turning to nature seemed primitive

² See the two works by Gert Gröning and Joachim Wolschke-Buhlman: 'Naturschutz und Ökologie im Nationalsozialismus', *Die Alte Stadt*, 10 (1983), 1–17; and *Die Liebe zur Landschaft. Teil III: Der Drang nach Osten. Zur Entwicklung der Landespflege im Nationalsozialismus und während des Zweiten Weltkrieges in den 'eingegliederten Ostgebieten'*, *Arbeiten zur sozialwissenschaftlich orientierten Freiraumplanung* 9 (Munich: Minerva-Publ., 1987).

³ Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party* (Bourne End: Kensal, 1985).

⁴ Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); Klaus Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft* (Meisenheim: 1970).

to historians in the 1960s, Williams argues that naturist movements sprang from rational considerations and the very modern desire to create a new and better future. Furthermore, naturist attitudes never remained static, rather they frequently shifted in response to Germany's numerous crises. Conservationists and other naturist associations did not follow a direct path from 'naturism to Nazism' (p. 5). In fact, Williams views his naturist groups as 'reformist alternatives' (p. 261), organisations that represented 'alternative pathways for the German people that *might* have succeeded if given time' (p. 102).

Williams's conclusions are based on case studies of some of the 'most interesting and significant' naturist organisations in early-twentieth-century Germany. Alongside bourgeois conservationists, Williams also devotes chapters to nudist and hiking groups from the social democratic subculture, and to youth hikers, suggesting how different categories of identity coloured responses to the societal changes all Germans experienced. After briefly tracing the institutional history of each naturist organisation, Williams turns to the abundant writings they produced in pursuit of state and public acceptance. These often took the form of speeches, journal articles, pamphlets, books and requests for funding. It is within their formulaic declarations of Germany's various crises and their prescribed natural solutions that Williams find his subject matter. Mining these 'ideal narratives', he reveals naturists' changing attitudes towards German society and its future, and towards nature as well.

Turning to Nature makes the case that to consider nature protection in isolation is to miss the forest for the trees. Williams shows that conservation was only one of a variety of related responses to the rapid changes of the nineteenth century. Vibrant naturist organisations arose in other sectors of German society, and their agendas diverged radically from the conservative conservationist programme. Naturist movements in the social democratic subculture turned to nature with a far different outlook from bourgeois nature protectors. Their ideal German society lay in the future, and their activities reflected this forward-looking attitude. Socialist nudists cast off their clothes as a means of coping with the ravages of industrial and urban living. The movement was founded in 1924, when a Berlin schoolteacher, Adolf Koch, opened his first School for Health Pedagogy and Body Culture. Koch's regimen proved popular and by the end of the decade thirteen Koch schools had been opened, in most major German cities. Socialist nudism also enjoyed the support of prominent German scholars and politicians. Williams's second example of socialist naturism, the socialist hiking movement, was actually founded by an outstanding politician – albeit a future one. Around the turn of the twentieth century in Vienna, future Austrian statesmen Karl Renner founded the Touristenverein 'Die Naturfreunde' with two other colleagues. Their immediate motivation was to help workers recover from the working week by increasing their access to the outdoors. The organisation became a true mass phenomenon, counting 15,000 members on the eve of the First World War and reaching a peak of 116,000 at the height of its popularity in 1923. Only the Workers' Exercise and Sports League and the Workers' Cycling League attracted more German workers. Hiking was not only popular among workers; it also became the activity of choice for the independent middle-class youth movement

and later for 'youth cultivation' (*Jugendpflege*) associations from all sectors of German society. Organised youth hiking was the outcome of a generational conflict between Germany's youth and concerned adults. Whereas Germany's young people viewed hiking as a means of increasing their autonomy in the ennobling natural realm, German youth cultivators agreed that hiking was an unobtrusive way to tame young passions and mould potentially wayward youth into ideal citizens. Youth hiking was first popularised by the Wandervögel (Ramblers), an independent middle-class youth association founded in a suburban Berlin secondary school at the end of the nineteenth century. Prior to the First World War, the Ramblers had expanded to three national organisations with a membership of 18,000 young people. The Wandervögel movement remained popular during the Weimar years when youth cultivation groups from all societal milieus followed its lead and promoted youth hiking. For a generation of Germans who ascended to political power around 1930, the Wandervögel experience was crucial in forming their conceptions of nature.⁵

After demonstrating the diversity of German naturism, Williams goes on to underline its complexity. Williams claims that naturist ideology cannot be considered a forerunner of reactionary National Socialism, as some scholars claim. While he also dismisses assertions of naturism's folkish or nationalistic character, his main concern is to reclaim naturist thought for modernity. By 'diagnosing the ills of modernity and developing ideal narratives of progress', he argues, 'naturist movements were creating the kind of reformist discourses that have powerfully influenced Western culture since the Enlightenment' (p. 257). Nudism, hiking and conservationism all took cues from the 'life reform' (*Lebensreform*) movement that won popularity in Germany in the late nineteenth century. Life reformers aimed to ameliorate the problems of industrial society by adopting more 'natural' lifestyles. According to the naturist analysis, one of the worst aspects of modern society was its detrimental effects on human health. Socialist naturists in particular rationalised that outdoor activity could aid recovery from industrial work and urban living. Williams argues that naturists' commitment to the idea of progress inherent in their reformist projects makes their projects thoroughly modern. By opposing the anti-modern label previously attached to naturist thought, Williams undermines the argument that naturists paved the way for reactionary National Socialist ideology. Of course, since the appearance of this argument four decades ago, a number of scholars have wondered whether the Nazis were truly so backward-looking.⁶ Williams, too, reckons that National Socialism was a modern ideology, in so far as it formed its own ideal narrative about German society. It was the Nazis' proposed solution to these problems, however, that truly separated naturism from National Socialism. 'Naturists at their best', Williams contends, 'sought

⁵ One important example is Alwin Seifert, a former Rambler and the most important landscape architect of the Nazi Autobahn project. See Thomas Zeller, *Driving Germany: The Landscape of the German Autobahn, 1930–1970* (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 31–33.

⁶ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* (Munich: Piper, 1965); David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

a way to master industrial modernity by preserving the rights of human beings and of nature itself' (p. 263).

As this quote suggests, however, naturists did not always live up to their best ideals. Williams's juxtaposition of these diverse cultural organisations clearly illustrates how each group modified its original ideal narratives in response to the prevailing winds in German society. No naturist ideal narrative endured in its original articulation. Rather, naturist leaders modified their perspectives, often in response to circumstances beyond their immediate control. Sometimes the *deus ex machina* took the form of a 'moral panic', a campaign demonising certain elements of German culture as improper. Such onslaughts generally forced naturists into reactionary stances that jeopardised the emancipatory essence of these movements. Williams argues that a pre-war moral panic centred on homosexuality in the *Wandervögel* ranks encouraged young members to prove their masculinity through battlefield heroics, resulting in proportionately higher death rates. In the late Weimar period, socialist nudists adopted exclusionary membership policies and utilised increasingly eugenicist language in the face of societal discussions of 'trash and smut' (*Schund und Schmutz*) in German culture. At other times, naturist leaders modified their outlooks in response to major societal upheavals, especially the trauma of the First World War. That conflict heightened nationalist sentiments that crept into naturist discourses and encouraged more radical elements to speak their mind. The far-reaching effects of the war also emerged in unexpected ways. One fascinating example mustered by Williams is the dialogue surrounding the problem of 'wild hiking' (*wildes Wandern*) associated with the youth hiking movement. Beginning during the Great War, and resurfacing throughout the turbulent 1920s observers expressed their fears about the breakdown of adult authority by bemoaning the existence of packs of unruly youth on Germany's outdoor trails. By contrast, even the most radical naturists toned down their emergency rhetoric in calmer times. The relatively stable middle Weimar years in particular had this effect. But the onset of the world economic crisis and the disintegration of German democracy prompted many naturists to return to the panicked language of crisis.

Williams's analysis of conservation's ideal narrative shows that there was no direct path from nature protection to National Socialism, although he finds that the movements converged earlier than many scholars currently acknowledge. Williams aligns himself with a growing consensus of historians who emphasise the diverse roots and complex development of organised conservation.⁷ These scholars locate its emergence from the larger 'homeland protection' (*Heimatschutz*) movement.

⁷ Examples of this more recent literature are Raymond Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871–1971* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Andreas Knaut, *Zurück zur Natur! Die Wurzeln der Ökologiebewegung* (Greven: Kilda, 1993); William Rollins, *A Greener Vision of Home: Cultural Politics and Environmental Reform in the German Heimatschutz Movement, 1904–1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Friedemann Schmoll, *Erinnerungen an die Natur: Die Geschichte des Naturschutzes im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2004); Thomas Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity, 1885–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Brüggemeier et al., *How Green Were the Nazis?: Willi Oberkrome, Nationale Konzeptionen und regionale Praxis von Naturschutz, Landschaftsgestaltung, und Kulturpolitik in Westfalen-Lippe und Thüringen (1900–1960)* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004).

Nature protectors were mostly middle-class men who deplored the industrial transformation of Germany's regional landscapes. In the early years, conservation initiatives crystallised against high-profile development projects, such as hydraulic engineering schemes on the Rhine and the Isar. Beginning in Bavaria in 1905 and soon afterwards in Prussia and other German states, the state took an active role in nature protection with the creation of dedicated conservation agencies.

The ideal narrative of German nature protection began with a critique of the effects of industrialisation and the growth of cities on the landscape. Nature protectors considered Germany's rural landscapes to be anchors of identity and traditional social relations that had the power to heal Germany's social wounds. To fulfil these functions, however, the countryside required protection from the incursions of commerce and city. The conservation ethos thus represented a different understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, for it supposed a natural world dependent on human stewardship. Although many early conservation proclamations 'reek' of cultural despair, Williams argues that they did not represent a rejection of the status quo. Conservationists had no desire to halt economic development, and their demands always assumed the necessity of compromise with commercial interests. This was one reason why conservationists focused their early efforts on protecting unique natural features (*Naturdenkmäler*) as opposed to entire landscapes.

During the First World War, conservationists in the *Heimatschutz* movement eagerly contributed to the atmosphere created by heightened nationalist rhetoric, equating nature with the beleaguered German nation. Antisemitic voices in the community also became louder, although they remained a minority. In the wake of defeat and revolution, conservationists feared for the future of the German nation and worried about social revolution. They expressed their anxieties through rhetoric about the masses destroying the environment, but were largely unable to develop a narrative to attract Germany's workers into their fold.

By the mid-1920s, nature protectors realised that their message was not resonating and changed their rhetorical strategy. Drawing on the popularity of 'homeland studies' (*Heimatkunde*) they began to emphasise the concept of homeland, but the switch failed to increase popular support because of the vagueness of the concept. Conservationists recognised the ambiguity of this 'conceptual Trojan horse' (p. 233) and undertook an attempt to standardise the notion in the waning Weimar years. The new conservation ideology represented a 'utopian vision of a peaceful, racially homogenous national community, a vision that rhetorically brought together an allegedly harmonious past and a bright new technological future in order to help the German nation overcome its crisis in the present' (p. 241). The programme also had practical consequences, for it called for the management of entire landscapes (*Landschaftspflege*) as opposed to natural monuments. With the promise of a harmonised national landscape as the antidote to an increasingly riven German society, Williams perceives a rapprochement between conservationist and National Socialist ideology on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power.

Since Williams's analysis focuses on naturism prior to National Socialist rule, it has less explanatory power concerning naturists' behaviour during the Third Reich. After Hitler assumed power, each of Williams's naturist groups took steps to demonstrate

their political reliability and utility to the new regime. This ‘ignominious’ deference, Williams concludes, stemmed above all from ‘vulnerability as the Nazis tightened their grip’ (p. 261).

In *The Green and the Brown*, Frank Uekoetter offers a more detailed look at the history of one naturist group – the conservationists – during the National Socialist reign and offers a model that could be applied to understanding the history of other cultural associations during this time. Uekoetter has been engaged with the topic of conservation in Nazi Germany since he organised an academic conference on the topic at the behest of the German minister for the environment in 2002.⁸ He has expanded his own contribution into the first historical survey of conservation in Nazi Germany. In this well-organised and highly readable study, Uekoetter evaluates not only the contemporary published sources, but a substantial amount of archival material. The result is a balanced and differentiated analysis. Uekoetter shows that the German ‘greens’ indeed sported shades of brown. Nature protectors and Nazis shared certain ideological affinities, although not enough to explain the generally positive conservation dynamic in the Nazi era. That conservationists nevertheless achieved unprecedented organisational success during Hitler’s twelve-year Reich was an outcome of the polycentric nature of National Socialist governance. Conservation developments in the Third Reich were largely influenced by the Nazi state’s jumbled institutional landscape, with competing agencies and interests, and individual actors ‘working towards the Führer’. Within this chaotic framework, Hermann Göring pushed through Germany’s first national conservation legislation while simultaneously overseeing the intensification of environmental incursions required by the quests for autarky and rearmament. In this context as well, conservations leapt at new opportunities wherever they arose. This included ‘landscape advocates’ (*Landschaftsanwälte*) consulting on the construction of the Autobahn. Leading landscape planners also offered their expertise in the formulation the *Generalplan Ost*, plans that were ‘essentially blueprints for genocide’ (p. 155). The entire episode, according to Uekoetter, is evidence of the Nazis’ ability to seduce intellectuals, and serves as a warning to contemporary activists about the perils of forging political alliances with little regard for their moral implications.

Uekoetter argues that ideology alone cannot explain the ‘general dynamism’ that drove co-operation between the green and the brown, for ideological convergence between the two groups always ‘remained incomplete’ (p. 43). Part of this divergence was the inevitable result of the historic diversity of the German conservation movement. Like Williams, Uekoetter emphasises nature protection’s disparate roots and historical variability. This heterogeneity alone ensured that at most only parts of the conservation community had affinities with National Socialism. In fact, Uekoetter doubts that an overarching conservationist ideology ever existed; at most, he believes that conservationists shared a common identity, the conviction that they belonged to a ‘small group of idealists’ who ‘truly understood the peril nature was in and tried to do something about it’ (p. 21). Throughout its history the conservation

⁸ The results of this conference were published in Joachim Radkau and Frank Uekoetter, eds., *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2003).

community was also characterised by political aloofness. For a group yearning for social harmony, divisive party politics were abhorrent, and conservationists remained detached even as the Weimar Republic crumbled around them. Uekoetter notes that prior to the federal elections in summer 1932, conservationists worried more about the impact of campaign billboards and signs than the crucial contest's bearing on the Republic's future. Without conservationist support, the Nazis achieved their greatest electoral success and took a decisive step towards gaining power. After the National Socialist takeover, nature protectors no longer had the choice of remaining above the political fray. Their overtures to the Nazis demonstrate the existence of a considerable ideological gulf between the green and the brown. Adoption of antisemitic language could not conceal the reality that conservationists struggled in their attempt to portray conservation as a quintessentially National Socialist concern. Nature protection was simply not a priority for the new rulers. While members of the Nazi elite, such as Hermann Göring and Fritz Todt, had sympathy for environmental issues, the Führer was mostly uninterested in nature protection. Indeed, some of Hitler's most urgent policies were anathema to the conservation agenda. Rearmament could only mean increased strain on the natural environment, and the Führer's vow to leave 'no square metre of German soil' unploughed in the pursuit of agricultural autarky was antithetical to nature protection. Conservationists and Nazis also shared a number of other ideological incompatibilities, including diverging stances on Darwinism and the issue of *Heimat*. A not insignificant point of contention was elite conservationists' distaste for the Nazi concept of *Völksgemeinschaft* (people's community). Uekoetter asserts that the two groups did agree on 'ways and means': both enterprises were stridently anti-liberal and idealistic (pp. 41–2).

This weak common denominator cannot account for the often close co-operation between conservationists and Nazis. To explain the vitality of the conservation dynamic in the Third Reich, Uekoetter points to the broad realm of institutions. Institutional links forged during the Nazi period resuscitated and sustained conservationists' support for the regime and occasionally earned their outright enthusiasm. Conservationists' satisfaction with the National Socialist regime was augmented by the perception that the new state represented an improvement on the Weimar Republic. Although the Weimar constitution contained a clause making protection of natural monuments a duty of the state, conservationists viewed the failure of a Prussian nature protection bill as a substantial setback. For the first two years of National Socialist rule, conservationists' attitudes towards the state remained unfavourable. Harried by attempts at organisational synchronisation, and with little to show for early gestures of goodwill, the nature protection community was on the verge of giving up on the new regime. This dynamic changed abruptly with the passage of a national conservation law (*Reichsnaturschutzgesetz*) in 1935. The measure transformed the longstanding Prussian Agency for the Protection of Natural Monuments into the Reich Conservation Agency, and became the preferred resort for conservationists for the remainder of Hitler's rule. The truly revolutionary part of the law was its installation of landscape protection as a key goal of conservation. Comprehensive nature protection that went beyond the defence of unique natural

monuments now received a legal basis, guaranteeing conservationist involvement in all major development projects. As a bow to the National Socialist privileging of communal interests (*Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz*), the national conservation law also contained an indemnity clause, legalising expropriation without compensation, and giving nature protectors extraordinary leverage in their negotiation with property owners. In its particulars, the *Reichsnaturgesetz* was quite similar to the failed Prussian bill during the Weimar period. Uekoetter's analysis of the archival files reveals that the breakthrough in the Nazi era had more to do with the polycentric character of the Nazi state than National Socialist affinity for the cause. The National Socialist bill seemed destined once again to languish in bureaucratic limbo until Göring discovered the proposal and pushed for its passage. In a telephone call to the minister of education, he arranged for the transfer of conservation authority to his own Reich Forest Service (Reichsforstamt) and thereafter shepherded the law to fruition. Göring's stewardship of conservation legislation had little to do with his sympathy for the cause. Rather it was mostly an attempt to increase his prestige by collecting another official title. The passage of the national conservation law marked a turning point in the history of conservation during the Third Reich. From that point forward, 'conservationists acted under the opinion that the Nazi regime, unlike the Weimar Republic, was fulfilling their long held dreams' (p. 62).

In the second half of his book Uekoetter demonstrates that conservationists' sense of fulfilment had little to do with the actual reality of nature protection in the Third Reich. The Nazi state's legislative embrace of nature protection was exhilarating to a movement accustomed to its outsider status, and conservationists' expectations soared. The years after the passage of the national conservation law were heady times, a period of 'vibrancy, of enthusiastic work, of cooperation with a multitude of agents, a time when conservation had the ear of the powerful – in short a time of euphoria and hope' (p. 162). The actual conservation record during the National Socialist period, however, was far more ambiguous. 'Conservation work in Nazi Germany', Uekoetter explains, 'always looked far better on paper than in reality' (p. 161). Nature protection's institutional expansion ensured that conservation involved more paper pushing than ever before. To many nature protectors the increase in paperwork seemed an indication that their cause was thriving. In some respects it was. One area of conservation that undeniably flourished in the Third Reich was the designation of nature reserves. No other era in German history witnessed the creation of so many nature reserves in such a brief period. Although precise evidence is still sketchy, there can be no doubt that the national conservation law's new indemnity clause played an important role in this success.

A closer look at specific conservation conflicts reveals a bleaker picture. Uekoetter's investigation of four cases of conservation at work in the Nazi period shows that even when conservationists ultimately succeeded, their victory had less to do with the popularity of the cause of nature protection than the chaotic interplay of actors, institutions and interests that characterised National Socialist governance. Often the most decisive factor was support from high-ranking Nazi officials whose motives were highly dubious. Thanks to Hermann Göring's passion for hunting, the Schorfheide

north of Berlin was designated a national nature reserve in 1937. This title, however, did not prevent Göring from continually expanding his Carinhall mansion located on the premise, nor did it stop him from experimenting with the introduction of various types of game. Badenese conservationists managed to close a basalt mine on the Hohenstoffeln mountain in 1939, but only through the personal intervention of SS chief Heinrich Himmler. Himmler's involvement had little to do with his devotion to nature protection. Rather, the Reichsführer was acting out a medieval fantasy in protecting the ruins of an old Germanic castle located on the site. Several years later, Himmler refused to block the diversion of the Wutach river in Baden as part of a hydroelectric project on Lake Schluchsee. In 1943, when Badenese conservationists once again requested his aid, Himmler replied that he was too busy with other affairs. In the end, the demand for additional wartime energy trumped the conservation cause. Although nature protectors managed to delay the Schluchsee project for a year and reduce the amount of water diverted from the Wutach, the plan was ultimately approved. While conservationists clearly lost this battle, they fortuitously won the war. Authorisation came too late and the exigencies of war prevented construction from ever beginning. After the war, a citizens' initiative spared the Wutach. The Ems river in north-west Germany was less fortunate. Conservationists' inability to prevent its comprehensive regulation represented a total defeat for the nature protection cause. As soon as conservationists questioned the fundamental economic wisdom of river reclamation projects, the Nazi regime withdrew their protection. Thereafter, government authorities paid lip service to landscape preservation while proceeding with their original regulation plans.

Uekoetter acknowledges that conclusions about the success of conservation in Nazi Germany can hardly be based on four case studies. To complete his investigation of the efficacy of conservation, he assesses the broader 'changes in the land' that occurred in Nazi Germany.⁹ Here the analysis extends beyond the realm of nature protection to consider the record of environmental change in the Third Reich, patterns of land use and specifically National Socialist imprints on the landscape. This is no simple task, as Uekoetter is working without a map. German historiography has largely neglected the physical environment, and the empirical record for the Nazi period remains uncompiled. It is also problematic to accord proper significance to a twelve-year period in the framework of Germany's natural history. Despite these challenges, Uekoetter ventures that the Nazi era 'was a time of change, also from an environmental perspective, but it was not a crucial turning point' (p. 176). The increase in nature reserves was more than offset by the river reclamation projects of the Labour Service, to say nothing of the impact of other Nazi development policies. 'The Nazis' official commitment seems to have made something of a difference', Uekoetter maintains, 'if only to prevent a truly devastating environmental toll' (p. 176). This statement can hardly be viewed as an endorsement of National Socialism's green credentials.

⁹ This formulation comes from an influential work of US environmental history: William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1983).

Using different but complementary approaches to environmental history, *Turning to Nature* and the *Green and the Brown* further qualify the historiographical proximity of German conservation to National Socialism. Although travelling over different routes the authors arrive at similar conclusions. By focusing on naturists' reflections, Williams shows that the complexity of their thought defies simple linkages with National Socialist ideology. Looking at institutions and practices during the Third Reich, Uekoetter demonstrates that what conservationists actually did belies assertions of the Nazis' green bona fides. In some respects, the two interpretations clash. The authors particularly diverge on the question of whether something like a general conservationist ideology ever existed.¹⁰ Nevertheless, since both authors emphasise the contingency and complexity of twentieth-century German history, their varied approaches complement each another and further consolidates a growing consensus in the history of German conservation.

Throughout their studies, both authors also raise questions that point the way forward for future scholarship on the history of German conservation. First, historians of conservation must pay greater attention to real existing nature. As Uekoetter has established with his analysis of environmental change in the Nazi period, conservation history without the environmental context is incomplete. Particularly when studying a phenomenon such as conservation – which presupposes nature's dependence on humanity – historians must also remain open to the possibility of the environment as a distinct historical actor. Second, comparative conservation history promises equally great returns. Conservation movements were not a peculiarly German phenomenon. Similar organisations emerged at the same time throughout the industrialised West. These analogues represent ideal objects of comparative research. Only comparison can account for German peculiarities discerned by both authors, such as the unusually strong perception of crisis in German naturist thought, or the strong role played by the state in the development of German conservation. One particularly enticing comparison would be with Germany's Axis partner Italy. A recent study of Italian conservation concluded that, in contrast to Nazi Germany, nature protection showed few signs of vitality under the Fascist regime.¹¹ A comparison of conservation in Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany can provide new insights and inject new life into a much older debate concerning the historical relationship between Fascism and National Socialism. Most importantly, comparisons between Nazi Germany and its contemporaries will also shed light on how 'green' the National Socialist era was in its own historical context.

¹⁰ A point of contention between the authors concerns the shift in conservationist discourse towards the end of the Weimar period that Williams believes represents a partial convergence with National Socialist ideology (p. 319 n. 70).

¹¹ James Sievert, *The Origins of Nature Conservation in Italy* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000).