

## After 400 years: first two wild Northern Bald Ibis chick hatched in Switzerland

The Swiss naturalist Conrad Gessner lived in a time when the Northern Bald Ibises were still present in Europe. He described them in detail before they were eradicated in Europe at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For the past 20 years, a reintroduction project has been underway as part of the European LIFE programme (LIFE20 NAT/AT/000049). In this project, zoo birds descended from now also extinct populations in Morocco are being reintroduced. Now there is a great, albeit surprising, success for the project. For the first time, a pair of Northern Bald Ibises has bred in Switzerland, on a building in Rümlang in the Canton of Zurich. Two chicks have hatched and are doing well.

A webcam was installed in cooperation with Zurich Zoo. The first Swiss breeding pair can now be watched [live](#) while rearing the two chicks.

The two parent birds, the female *Rupert* and the male *Enea*, are first breeders and were released as part of the Northern Bald Ibis colony in Überlingen on Lake Constance, Baden-Württemberg. They returned from their wintering grounds in Tuscany in spring. However, unlike six other pairs of this colony, they did not breed in their ancestral breeding area in Überlingen, but built their nest about 60 km away on the windowsill of a building in the municipality of Rümlang in the Canton of Zurich.

The segregation of the two birds was also surprising for the project team, as Northern Bald Ibises are very social birds. Johannes Fritz, project manager and head of the Waldrappteam Conservation and Research: *This year we are observing breeding attempts outside the breeding areas in Italy and Switzerland. This is similar to the behaviour of a breeding pair in the partner project in Andalusia. It has been breeding away from the colony in a tower for years and in the meantime, a small satellite colony has emerged. We also interpret the breeding in the canton of Zurich as an attempt to use new breeding areas.*

The pair in Rümlang has good prerequisites to be successful. A [study](#) recently published by the project team in the journal *Remote Sensing* proves that there are plenty of suitable habitats for Northern Bald Ibises in the northern Swiss Alpine foothills. Therefore, a longer-term goal of the project and the Swiss partners, in particular several Swiss zoos and the zoo association zooschweiz, is to establish a breeding colony in the vicinity of the Wildlife Park Goldau. Johannes Fritz: *If this pair successfully raises the two chicks, we will have to re-evaluate the further procedure in Switzerland together with our partners and the competent authorities.*



For the time being, the responsible Swiss authorities have placed the breeding pair under protection in accordance with the legal provisions and commissioned the project team with monitoring. The recently in cooperation with Zurich Zoo installed webcam enables the brood to be monitored continuously.

The nest is located at the building of the new Zurich Harley-Davidson branch. In the beginning, the unexpected and initially unknown guests were less than welcome, as they soiled the new façade. However, since the responsible construction company, in agreement with Waldrappteam, has provided free protection for the façade, Yannick Bardy, the Operations Manager of Bütikofer Harley Davidson Zurich, is pleased about the breeding success of the Rümlang Northern Bald Ibises: *They have become part of our team.*

400 years ago, hunting and gutting the nests was the biggest threat to the Swiss young birds. This threat no longer exists in Switzerland because the Northern Bald Ibises fall under hunting and wildlife protection laws and are strictly protected, the cantonal hunting authorities support the project team. Instead, however, the Northern Bald Ibises are threatened by unsecured electricity pylons, which they use as a resting and roosting place like many other bird species. Around 40% of the deaths of Northern Bald Ibises are caused by electrocution.

Johannes Fritz: *Death by electrocution on unsecured medium-voltage pylons is the greatest danger also for Northern Bald Ibises in Switzerland. We therefore very much regret that the obligation of electricity companies to re-secure electricity pylons, which was considered by the Federal Office, has been put on hold. This is a setback for species conservation, which affects the Northern Bald Ibises and many other species of large birds.*

**Information on the reintroduction project and the breeding in Rümlang:**

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