

PRESS RELEASE
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Successful Breeding Season for the Waldrappteam: Rare Migratory Birds and Agriculture Benefit Alike

The 2026 breeding season is developing very positively for the European Northern Bald Ibis reintroduction project. While more pairs are breeding in the colonies than ever before, 31 juveniles are currently being raised by two human foster parents at the training camp at Binningen airfield in Baden-Württemberg, Germany. There, they are being prepared for their first migration. Scientific data indicate that the return of the Northern Bald Ibis can also provide benefits for agriculture.

With 29 breeding pairs currently nesting in colonies in Austria and Germany, the Northern Bald Ibis project has reached a new record level. A further 21 pairs are breeding in Italy and Switzerland. At the same time, 31 hand-raised juveniles are being prepared for their first migration at the training camp at Binningen airfield. Hand-raising remains a key component of the project, enabling the establishment of new migratory traditions and contributing to the long-term stabilization of the population.

“The successful breeding season and the positive development of our colonies show that the reintroduction of the Northern Bald Ibis is progressing very well. Every successful breeding attempt brings us closer to achieving a self-sustaining population of this bird species, which once became extinct in Europe,” says **Johannes Fritz**, Director of Waldrappteam Conservation & Research.

As the population continues to grow, questions regarding the birds’ impact on agricultural land are receiving increasing attention. Some concerns have been raised that Northern Bald Ibises could affect earthworm populations. However, scientific data clearly indicate otherwise. Several million earthworms live on a single hectare of grassland, with a biomass of up to 3.5 tonnes. Even larger groups of Northern Bald Ibises remove only a very small fraction of this resource, making any significant impact on earthworm populations highly unlikely.

Instead, observations suggest ecological benefits. During local outbreaks of agricultural pests such as crane fly larvae, Northern Bald Ibises concentrate their foraging activity on these prey species. Because the larvae occur close to the soil surface, they are easily accessible to the birds. As a result, Northern Bald Ibises may contribute to the natural regulation of pest populations.

“Northern Bald Ibises do not pose a threat to earthworm populations. On the contrary, agricultural land can benefit from the birds’ targeted use of plant pests, thereby supporting natural pest control,” explains **Johannes Fritz**.



Agricultural land management plays a key role in the success of the project. Northern Bald Ibises forage primarily on extensively managed meadows and pastures. Their feeding behaviour is highly selective and causes minimal disturbance: the birds extract prey items from the soil without causing significant damage to the turf.

“In our daily work, we repeatedly see how closely successful species conservation is linked to a diverse cultural landscape. Northern Bald Ibises depend on well-managed grasslands and can simultaneously contribute to natural pest control. Both the birds and agriculture benefit from this relationship,” says **Corinna Esterer**, Bird Manager at Waldrappteam.

These findings show that the return of the Northern Bald Ibis is not only a success for conservation efforts. They also highlight how nature conservation and agriculture can benefit one another. Species-rich agricultural landscapes provide the foundation for the long-term survival of the Northern Bald Ibis, while the birds themselves contribute to the ecological balance of these habitats.

Background

For more than two decades, the European Northern Bald Ibis reintroduction project has been working to establish a self-sustaining migratory population with breeding colonies north and south of the Alps. The hand-raising of juveniles and their guidance during their first migration to the wintering grounds enable the establishment of new migratory routes and create the conditions necessary for building a self-sustaining population.

Visitors are welcome to learn more about the project at the training camp at Binningen airfield (Baden-Württemberg, Germany) every Friday to Sunday between 3:00 pm and 5:00 pm.

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