

## Den Dréihälschen - the wryneck is the Bird of the Year 2016

*Ever seen a Wryneck? It's a little woodpecker, but quite unlike the other woodpeckers you may be familiar with. It is the natur&mwelt Bird of the Year 2016, which means it's the focal point of this year's 'School and nature' educational campaign.*

Birds



"Wryneck" is an appropriately descriptive name. Wrynecks can twist their necks through an impressive 180°. Sometimes they do so to imitate a snake, with a view to discouraging potential predators. Wrynecks are only a bit bigger than a House Sparrow. They are not common and are very well camouflaged, so they're one of our least conspicuous species.

There are no really reliable statistics on how many pairs of Wryneck we have in Luxembourg. Let's say somewhere between 50 and 100 breeding pairs, though the curve is almost certainly downward, so the Wryneck is on the Red List of endangered species in Luxembourg. Most of the remaining breeding habitats are in the east of the country.

The Wryneck is the only woodpecker in Luxembourg that migrates south – and not just a bit south either: Wrynecks spend the winter south of the Sahara, in central Africa. Once back here in the spring, our Wrynecks have to set about finding a suitable nesting cavity. As they don't come equipped with a typical woodpecker's chisel-like beak, they have to use existing cavities – either of other woodpeckers, or natural tree-holes, or nestboxes. Sometimes they even turf out the 'rightful' occupants, nest and all!

### Agenda

22.07

Bee in Solidarity with Pollinators

29.07

Escapardenne et réserves naturelles

05.08

Jardin méditerranéen à Schwebsange

14.08 - 15.08

Assomption

18.08

Visite guidée  
Schlammwiss by night

26.08

Porte ouverte à la Schlammwiss



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Unlike our other woodpeckers, which are woodland/forest birds, the Wryneck is a bird of fields-with-trees: orchards, parks, riverside trees etc. Wrynecks need short-cropped grassland, which is where they find their preferred food: ants. They break open ants' nests and extract the ants, their larvae and pupae by using their long, sticky tongues (which is, incidentally, the feeding strategy of Green Woodpeckers too). In other words, Wrynecks are essentially ground-feeders, not tree-dwellers. They are declining principally because the grass in orchards and parkland is no longer being tended properly.

Orchards under non-intensive management regimes are ideal habitats. There are plenty of ants, which is not the case in heavily fertilised grassland. So the best thing we can do to help Wrynecks survive and prosper is to leave out the pesticides and ant repellents (including in gardens) and put up nestboxes in orchards.

It is important to explain to young people in particular why these relatively simple methods are necessary and effective. The Wryneck is the focal point of this year's educational campaign run by natur&emwelt. An information pack is being sent to over 11 000 schoolchildren, comprising a booklet and a Wryneck poster. Teachers are being sent a full teaching dossier. The campaign has the backing and financial support of the environment and education ministries and of the Natural History Museum.

-> Download: Brochure Schoul an Natur

For those who would like to support natur&emwelt, you can purchase a sticker for 2€ at the Haus vun der Natur in Kockelscheuer.



<< back