





Ein Rehbock zieht sehr selbstbewusst durch eine nicht minder erhabene Gruppe von Großtrappen-Hähnen.

A roebuck moves very confidently through a no less lofty group of Great Bustard males.



Morgennebel in einer Talsenke im Ostbelgischen Wallonien.

Morning mist in a valley in Wallonia, East Belgium .



Die Sonnenstrahlen unterstreichen die wundervolle Färbung des Rotmilangefieders.

The sun rays underline the wonderful coloring of the Red Kite's plumage.





In der Hügellandschaft der Toskana fühlen sich die Rotmilane wohl.
The Red Kites feel at home in the hilly landscape of Tuscany.



Auch in dem Kiefernküstenwald am Meer bei Cecina (Italien) sind Rotmilane zu finden.

Red Kites can also be found in the pine forest by the sea near Cecina (Italy).



Das Rote Waldvöglein (*Cephalanthera rubra*) gehört zu der Familie der Orchideen und ist eine der auffälligsten Orchideen in unserer Region. Krabbenspinnen (*Thomisidae*) nutzen diese häufig als Jagdgebiet.

The Red Helleborine (Cephalanthera rubra) belongs to the orchid family and is one of the most striking orchids in our region. Crab spiders (Thomisidae) often use them as hunting grounds.



Die Bunte Schwertlilie (*Iris variegata*) ist in Österreich im pannonischen Gebiet verbreitet und bei lichten, trocken-warmen Wäldern, in Säumen und Halbtrockenrasen zu finden.

Iris variegata is common in the Pannonian region in Austria and can be found in light, dry and warm forests, in borders and semi-arid grasslands.





Die Verbreitung der Rotbauchunke (*Bombina orientalis*) konzentriert sich im östlichen und mittleren Europa. Hauptgefährdungen sind Lebensraumverlust infolge von z.B. Flussbegradigungen und Deichbau.

The distribution of the Fire-Bellied Toad (Bombina orientalis) is concentrated in Eastern and Central Europe. The main threats are habitat loss because of river straightening and dike construction.



Der Neuntöter (*Lanius collurio*) ist in Mitteleuropa die häufigste Würgerart. Er ist vor allem dadurch bekannt, dass er seine Beutetiere auf Dornen aufspießt.

The Red-Backed Shrike (Lanius collurio) is the most common type of shrike in Central Europe. It is best known for spiking its prey on thorns.

Die Östliche Smaragdeidechse (*Lacerta viridis*) zählt zu den stark gefährdeten Tierarten Österreichs. Hier ein Männchen im „Paarungskleid“.

The European Green Lizard (Lacerta viridis) is one of the most endangered animal species in Austria. Here a male in „mating dress“.



Die Ackergladiole (*Glaiolus italicus*) kommt vom südlichen Europa über den Nahen Osten bis nach Afrika und Madagaskar vor. Dieses Foto zeigt eine Ackergladiole in der Toskana.
Italian Gladiolus (Glaiolus italicus) is found from Southern Europe over the Middle East to Africa and Madagascar. This photo shows an Italian Gladiolus in Tuscany.





Typische Blüte einer Bertolini Ragwurz (*Ophrys bertolinii*) aufgenommen in der Toskana.

Typical blossom of a Ophrys Bertolinii photographed in Tuscany.

Die Sumpfohreule (*Asio flammeus*) kommt in offene, weitgehend baumlose Landschaften mit teilweise niedriger Vegetation und Deckungs- und Brutmöglichkeiten vor. Charakteristisch für die Art sind die schwarzumrandeten Augen mit der schwefelgelben Iris.

The Short-Eared Owl (Asio flammeus) is found in open, largely treeless landscapes with partially low vegetation and cover and breeding opportunities. The black-rimmed eyes with the sulfur-yellow iris are characteristic of the species.





Silberreiher (*Ardea alba*) beim Fischen. Anders als andere Reiherarten in der Gattung der Ardea, besitzt der Silberreiher keine Schmuckfedern am Hinterkopf.

Great Egret (Ardea alba) fishing. Unlike other heron species in the genus Ardea, the Great Egret has no decorative feathers on the back of the head.

Der Löffler (*Platalea leucorodia*) ernährt sich von Fischen, Fröschen und anderen Wassertieren. Hier ein Löffler mit Fisch als Beute.

The Eurasian Spoonbill (Platalea leucorodia) feeds on fish, frogs and other aquatic animals. Here a Eurasian Spoonbill with fish as prey.



Der Stelzenläufer (*Himantopus himantopus*) hat als auffälligste Merkmale seine langen, roten Beine und den nadelförmigen, schwarzen Schnabel.

The most striking features of the Black-winged Stilt (Himantopus himantopus) are its long, red legs and needle-shaped, black beak.





Eine Gruppe von Flusseeschwalben (*Sterna hirundo*) beim Überfliegen der Müritz. Als guter Stoßtaucher ernähren sich Flusseeschwalben hauptsächlich von kleinen Fischen.

A group of Common Terns (Sterna hirundo) flying over the Müritz. As good divers, Common Terns feed primarily on small fish.



Die Kleine Königslibelle (*Anax parthenope*) gehört mit zu den größten Libellenarten Mitteleuropas.

The Lesser Emperor (Anax parthenope) is one of the largest dragonfly species in Central Europe.



Spektakel am Himmel. Eine Versammlung von Rotmilanen sorgt in der Luft für Tumult.
Spectacle in the sky. A gathering of Red Kites causes tumult in the air.



Der Wiedehopf (*Upupa epops*) ist durch sein Federkleid unverkennbar und weit bekannt. Zu seiner Nahrung gehören Egerlinge, Raupen und Käfer.

The Hoopoe (Upupa epops) is unmistakable and widely known for its plumage. Larvae, caterpillars and beetles belong to its diet.

Das Taubenschwänzchen (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) gehört zu den Nachtfaltern. Wegen seines Schwirrfluges, der dem eines Kolibris ähnelt, wird es auch Kolibrischwärmer genannt. *The Hummingbird Hawk-Moth (Macroglossum stellatarum) belongs to the moths. It is also called a Hummingbird Hawk-Moth because of its whirring flight, which is similar to that of a hummingbird.*



Auch Bläulinge (*Lycaenidae*) lassen sich oftmals in artenreichen Wiesen finden. *Lycaenidae can also often be found in species-rich meadows.*







Blick von der Milseburg gegen Westen, Rhön, Deutschland.
View from Milseburg towards west, Rhön, Germany.



Das Basaltgestein der Abtsrodaer Kuppe zeugt von vulkanischem Ursprung.

The basalt rock of the Abtsrodaer Kuppe is evidence of volcanic origin.



Weideviehhaltung und Rotmilanbestand gehen Hand in Hand.

Grazing livestock and the Red Kite population go hand in hand.

Die Bestände der Europäischen Wildkatze (*Felis silvestris*) konnten sich in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten etwas erholen. Wildkatzen leben vorwiegend in Wäldern und sind sehr scheu, weswegen Sichtungen ohne technische Hilfsmittel kaum gemacht werden.

The populations of the European Wildcat (Felis silvestris) have recovered somewhat in the past few decades. Wildcats mainly live in forests and are very shy, which is why sightings are rarely made without technical tools.



Lebensraum des Rotmilans in der Rhön
(Deutschland).

*Habitat of the Red Kite
in the Rhoen (Germany).*





Der Eisvogel (*Alcedo atthis*) ist die einzige in Mitteleuropa vorkommende Art aus der Familie der Eisvögel. Das Foto zeigt zwei männliche Eisvögel mit ihrem typischen Federkleid.
The Common Kingfisher (Alcedo atthis) is the only species from the kingfisher family that is found in Central Europe. The photo shows two male Kingfishers with their typical plumage.





Nach einem warmen Frühlingsgewitter sorgen Wolken, Nebel und untergehende Sonne für stimmungsvolle Momente.

After a warm spring thunderstorm, clouds, fog and the sunset create a atmospheric moment.

Summary: The biology of the Red Kite

The Red Kite is considered to be one of our most beautiful and elegant birds. The contrasting and conspicuous rust-brown plumage allows an easy species determination, especially since the species is often not shy when it glides slowly around the houses in villages in search of compost or kitchen waste. This bird of prey is very popular among citizens. For many nature lovers, a single encounter is enough to succumb to the charm of this bird species.

The Red Kite is a medium-sized bird of prey with a wingspan of 145 to 165 cm. The females are in general larger and heavier (920 to 1,400 g) than the males (840 to 1,200 g). The wing beats are slow and elegant. The tail is narrow at the base, but broadly fanned towards the end. The outer tail feathers are much longer than the inner ones, which gives the typical forked tail appearance.

The Red Kite can often be seen in deciduous forests, mixed with arable and pastureland and on heaths. It has a wide range of food but feeds primarily on carrion and small to medium-sized mammals and birds. Reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates are less important prey.

The European breeding population is estimated at 32,500 to 38,300 breeding pairs. The European breeding population in the EU28 is estimated at 29,700 to 34,800 breeding pairs in 17 countries. A new global estimate of the Red Kite population shows a population of 33,500 to 39,000 breeding pairs, of which only zero to five breeding pairs are not in Europe but in Morocco (Africa) (Aebischer & Scherler 2021). The majority of their population is in Germany (14,000 to 16,000), Spain (2,300 to 2,500), and France (3,000 to 3,900). The worldwide population is thus estimated at 60,000 to 70,000 mature individuals (BirdLife International 2021).

The Red Kite is endemic to the western Palearctic, with the European population encompassing 95% of its global breeding range. One very well known behavior of the Red Kite is akinesia. The Red Kite uses akinesia when danger is imminent, remaining completely rigid and motionless. By imitating to be dead, the Red Kite tries to keep enemies away. However, this has often been fatal for the Red Kite due to the inexperience of people. They treat the Red Kite as an emergency with antibiotics, red light, painkillers or even antidotes (atropine) in veterinary practices, because there is a suspicion of a serious illness. This inexperience, that the Red Kite is only in akinesia, can unfortunately lead to death.

Where you can find the Red Kite, you can often observe other species of birds of prey. A typical companion is the Black Kite (Milvus migrans),





which is often confused with the Red Kite. Black Kites differ from Red Kites in their slightly smaller size, less forked tail (visible in flight) and generally darker plumage.

Other species which are common in the same habitat as the Red Kite are for example the Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*), the White-Tailed Eagle, the Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), the Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), the Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), the Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) and the Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*).

In general, crossbreeds between different species of birds of prey are very rare. However, hybrids between Red Kites and Black Kites can be found frequently. Since the two species are genetically very closely related, hybrid reproductions can also occur. In 1960 the first mixed brood was observed in Germany (Saxony) (Wobus & Creutz 1970). Hybrids between Red Kites and Black Kites often show behavioral and plumage characteristics of both species. Often the characteristics are very different and not always immediately recognizable, which makes the determination in the field quite difficult.

Leucism can also occur in Red Kites. Leucism is a harmless defect mutation and must be distinguished from albinism. In cases of leucism, the skin does not contain any pigment-producing cells (melanocytes), whereas these are present in albinism but cannot produce the pigment melanin. Even if the feather pigments are (partly) missing in Red Kites with leucism, the beak has a normal color, such as yellow or orange, and the eyes are normally dark, because they have at least a certain number of pigment-forming cells. Leucism can be different and generally has no health consequences for the animal. Basically, Red Kites with leucism are very rare. There is evidence that one individual was in southern France and two more in Wales at the Gigrin Farm feeding station.

The Red Kite courtship usually begins in March, rarely in February. Through courtship, the partners strengthen their bond with each other and stimulate each other. In addition to calling, feeding the female by the male, building nests together and copulation, courtship also includes the characteristic flying games. First, a Red Kite (or a couple together) gains altitude in a spiral flight and then dives into the depths in winding

loops. Occasionally the Red Kite will drop prey or nesting material in the air, chase after it and catch it again. Sometimes the two partners carry out a horizontal synchronous flight over short distances with far-reaching wing beats. There are several copulations per day. Just before the eggs are laid, the copulation can take place every two hours. Before the females lay the eggs, the males feed them, but during this time they try to keep their foraging for food to a minimum. Territory owners with many neighbours stay away for shorter periods of time and copulate more often with their females than territory owners with few neighbours. A couple usually stays together for at least one breeding season. Very often, however, the pairing lasts for years, even if the two partners separate in winter. The loyalty to the territory is very pronounced in both partners. Some nests are used over and over again for many years.

Most Red Kites breed for the first time by the age of three years. In areas where resources seem to be in abundance, some Red Kites start breeding by the age of two years. In exceptional cases, one-year-old Red Kites can also successfully raise young. Some individuals do not breed

until they are four or five years old. Red Kites build their nests near the trunk or in strong forks of branches. The nest hollow is often lined with clods of earth, old dung and often with scraps of cloth, pieces of plastic, paper and string.

In most areas, eggs are laid between March 25th and April 20th. A cool March can delay the start of breeding. Red Kites usually lay two to three eggs, sometimes only one egg and sometimes four eggs. The eggs are short-oval, dull, dirty white in color and have many small dark spots. The size corresponds roughly to that of a chicken egg. The clutch is incubated for 31 to 34 days. The age difference between the oldest and youngest nestling can be several days. The female takes over most of the incubation and is fed by the male during this time. In cold and humid weather, the female may stag on the clutch for up to 36 hours.

In the first days after hatching, the father alone provides food. During this time, the female rarely leaves the nest because the young birds are not yet able to maintain their own body temperature. For the first three or four weeks, the female feeds the young straight into the beak. After that, just like the male, she only brings the

prey to the nest and the young themselves begin to tear out small pieces or to swallow small prey as a whole. Even before Red Kites can fly, they occasionally leave the nest from the age of six weeks and climb around a little. When they are seven to eight weeks old, they make their first attempts to fly. Young Red Kites are looked after by their parents for another three to four weeks after they have left the nest. During this time, they only spend a short time in flight and usually stay within a radius of about 500 m around the nest. The first gliding flights can be observed about ten to 20 days after leaving the nest. Only when the youngsters have mastered this type of flight, they can go hunting themselves. But even in the following days they are occasionally fed by their parents.

The migrations towards the wintering areas take place between September and October. Spain and Southern France are the most important wintering areas for the Red Kite population.

As soon as the sun goes down, Red Kites gather in so-called „roosting sites“ in winter. These roosting sites can be single trees, groups of trees and forest edges. The number of Red Kites varies greatly at the roosting sites and differs

regionally. At the border of Austria and Slovakia, 110 Red Kites were observed during the LIFE EUROKITE winter census in 2021. The number of Red Kites in Spain, on the other hand, can be significantly higher. In 2021, 697 Red Kites were counted at a single roosting site in Spain (LIFE EUROKITE 2021).

In the breeding area and thus during the breeding season, such gatherings at roosting places are rather rare, as the Red Kite has a quite pronounced territorial behavior during this time. However, smaller gatherings can occur in the vicinity of abundant food sources. When the breeding season is over, the young and adult birds gather again at roosts.