

Rangers cross borders ...

At least in a positive sense, this is what around 160 rangers did at the German-Swiss border.

As every year, the Bundesverband Naturwacht invited its members and interested parties to the annual conference in mid-March. This year, however, the conference was something very special.

On the one hand, it took place in Switzerland in Riehen (a district of Basel), and on the other hand, it was held together with the ranger colleagues from Switzerland (Swiss Rangers). From 14 to 17 March, many important topics of ranger work were discussed and presented.

The conference guests were honoured by greetings from representatives of the host communities, the Ministry for the Environment, Climate and Energy Management Baden-Württemberg, the President of Pro Natura Basel and the President of the two ranger associations.

Everyone was visibly moved to see each other again

After a long Corona pause, during which the meeting could only take place either online or with only a few people, everyone was visibly moved to see each other again. Many participants even hugged each other for a long time during the welcome. This was a sign that the rangers missed the exchange very much.

This exchange has been going on since 1995 and connects colleagues from East and West, from North to South. Just as the animal and plant species we protect do not respect borders, rangers do not think in terms of borders. In this respect, the motto of the conference was well chosen in many respects.

The technical presentations also followed this common thread. For example, the topic was how challenged many colleagues were during the pandemic. Visitor pressure of previously unimaginable proportions, suddenly completely new rules on how to deal with visitors to the protected areas, or new regulations that made it difficult to travel with children were a real test.

Many reached their personal limits in the past three years

Urs Reif (Head Ranger NLP Black Forest and ERF President) and Lukas Frei (Ranger Lombachalp) spoke about this major topic. In a dialogue with the participants, the two moderated out that many actually reached their personal limits in their working lives in the last three years.

Another lecture was about the rangers of Stadtnatur Berlin. The talk was about rangers and nature conservation in the big city. A project that certainly has future potential, especially because it showed how narrow the transitions between nature and urban nature can sometimes be.

Then it continued with a presentation on the partnership with rangers from El Salvador and Germany, run by rangers from the Bavarian Forest.

There were two other exciting presentations on the renaturation of the meadow, the host protected area and the Pheno-Rangers, a monitoring and awareness-raising project in Switzerland.

Between the presentations, the General Assembly of Swiss Rangers and the General Assembly of the Federal Nature Guards Association were held. Of course, the members of the other association were cordially invited to attend.

New chairmanship of Bundesnaturwacht with dual leadership

At the General Assembly of the German Federal Association of Nature Guards, elections to the Board of Directors were on the agenda. After long service on the board, several members stepped down from their posts. This included the chairman Carsten Wagner, who was able to hand over many of the things he had established and set in motion to the newly elected dual leadership. The new leadership consists of Milena Kreiling from the Lower Oder Valley National Park together with Robby Meißner from the Harz National Park. Jens Liß from the Black Forest National Park was elected vice-chairman. The co-chairs are Martha Koelbing (Landschaftspark Wiese), Carolin von Prodzinsky (Spreewald Biosphere Reserve), Nico Brunkow (Schlaubetal Nature Park) and Patric Heintz (Naturwacht Saarland).

In the last few years, the national association has gained a lot of support and has been able to make itself heard as the voice of rangers nationwide. The declared aim of the new board is to continue the success story of the association. Preserving good, existing ideas and establishing new ones" should be the motto so that the non-profit association can continue to achieve as much as possible for nature and its members in the future.

Valuable time for exchange and new contacts

At the end of the conference on Friday, the participants traditionally went out into the surrounding nature. The participants went on four different excursions, which (how could it be otherwise) took place across the borders of France, Switzerland and Germany.

In conclusion, it can only be said that all participants found the exchange among each other and the closeness of colleagues across all borders very valuable. Between the lectures, the time was used to make new contacts. In the foyer and in the corridors during the breaks, one could hear sentences like: "Say, you have had experience in wolf monitoring for a long time..." or "How do you actually monitor wolves? "How do you actually do it on your ranger tours...".

Questions that exchange knowledge and experience and connect people who are passionate about one thing above all: The preservation of rare nature and the communication of appreciation for this nature.

This is the spirit that was omnipresent at the conference, a cross-border experience for all who were there.

Text: Patric Heintz