

Wolf

The European wolf is one of the biggest animals living in Germany. The wolf was more or less extinct in most parts of Western and Central Europe. People persecuted him because he tore sheep and other animals and many people were afraid of him. But since a few years, the wolf is back in Germany, mostly to northern and eastern areas. In 2018, there were 73 packs, 30 pairs and 3 single wolves in Germany.

At the moment, the wolf is a hot topic in Germany. Some people want the wolf to stay, but others are very afraid of him (even though there hasn't been any attack so far) and prefer the number of wolves to be regulated (which means some wolves would be killed). Some even want the wolf to be extinct again. It is a much discussed topic that is often found in the media.





Eurasian lynx

The Eurasian lynx is a medium-sized wild cat that lives in several parts of Europe. It's the third biggest predator in Europe (after the bear and the wolf). It's extremely shy, so people almost never see them in the wild. That's why people usually don't know much about it and don't have such a negative image about him as about the wolf. Still, the lynx was exterminated in Western Europe for many decades. The last lynx living in Germany was shot in 1850. Fortunately, the lynx was reintroduced to some Nature Reserves (such as the Harz Nature Park) in the 1990s; other areas were populated by lynx immigrating from neighboring countries. In 2002, the first birth of wild lynx on German territory was announced. Since then, the numbers of lynx is slowly growing, but it's still a highly endangered species in Germany.

Eurasian Otter

The Eurasian otter is the most widely distributed member of the otter family. Because it mostly eats fish, it is found in the waterways and coasts of Europe, many parts of Asia and parts of Northern Africa.

A long time ago, the Eurasian otter had a very bad reputation and hunting them was a popular hobby. That's why the number of otters became smaller and smaller. In 1968, when the otter was almost extinct in Germany, the hunt for him was prohibited by the government. Since then, the otter recovered a little bit, but it's still endangered. A problem is that there aren't many areas left in Germany where the otter can live undisturbed and according to his needs.

Fortunately, environmentalists are trying to help the otter to survive. His image also changed and there are many people who like the otter and want him to stay in Germany. And in April, an otter has even been seen in a lake in Walsrode!



Wildcat

Do not confuse the wildcat with a free-running domestic cat! The wildcat lives mostly in forests, is a little bit bigger than a normal cat and can be recognized by its long bushy tail.

The wildcat is a very shy animal. People don't see it very often and if they do, they often think that it's only a normal cat exploring the area. Unfortunately, the habitat of the wildcat has become quite limited. The biggest problem is that highways often make it impossible for wildcats to get from one forest to another. They are often like "prisoners on an island" and don't have any possibility to reach new forests with new partners. Environmentalists are trying to help the wildcat by building so-called green bridges over the highways. The bridges connect forests with each other and provide enough protection for the wildcat to travel from one place to another.



Harz National Park

Harz National Park is a nature reserve in the Harz, a mountain range in Northern Germany, around two hours from Walsrode. 95% of the area is covered with forests, mainly with spruce and beech woods, including several bogs, granite rocks and creeks. The highest peak of the Harz National Park (and of Northern Germany in general) is the Brocken with 1,141 metres. It hosts a historic botanical garden of about 1,600 alpine mountain plants.

The National Park was created in 2006. The region is characterized by a relatively undisturbed plant and animal environment, which is mainly due to its location immediately next to the old Inner German Border. At the time, the area was prohibited for people, so the nature remained unaffected.

Rare animals of the Harz National Park include the black stork, the European wildcat and especially the Eurasian lynx.



Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve

The Lüneburg Heath Nature Reserve is one of the oldest and largest nature reserves in Germany, and the oldest and largest in Lower Saxony (the German region where Walsrode can be found). It was created in 1921!

The nature reserve consists mostly of woods and of heath (the little purple-like plants you can see on the photo). You can find the largest remaining, contiguous, inland heath of its type in Europe in the Lüneburg Heath, that's where it got its name from. At the centre of the reserve is the Wilseder Berg, at 169.2 metres above NN the highest point on the north German plain.

The region is extremely important for the protection of biotopes and plant and animal species. For example, it is the only freely accessible part in Lower Saxony in which the Black Grouse (a bird that looks like a huge pigeon) may be found.

