



Nature

Maintaining diversity

The former switchyard was transformed by nature into a green oasis now characterized by unusual diversity. The thin grass of the meadows in particular offers many endangered plant and animal species a home. However, this natural abundance is threatened by the rapid afforestation of this decommissioned railroad facility, formerly completely bare of trees. In only ten years, the wooded share of the area has doubled in size. Birch trees, robinias, and aspens take root and undermine the herbaceous vegetation by sending out underground runners. Tall forbs take up more and more of the meadow land. In order to preserve what is left of the valuable dry meadows and their wide variety of species, the open spaces are mowed regularly and undergrowth is removed. No maintenance work is done in the existing forest area; there, priority is given to allowing the area to develop undisturbed.



The upland field grasshopper (*Chorthippus apricarius*) and the sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*) love sunny spots.



Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*)



Speckled bush-cricket (*Leptophyes punctatissima*)

A forest emerges

The natural forest that was able to develop here undisturbed holds a fascination of its own. The initially sparse stock of trees has become a densely wooded area with undergrowth, and climbing vines give it the character of a primeval forest. By now the forest covers two thirds of the terrain. Robinias, originally from North America, and native birch trees are the predominant species here. Both are tree pioneers, able to put down roots quickly in a new environment. Over time, enough nutrients have accumulated in the soil to enable lime trees, Norway maples, and common oaks to establish themselves in the undergrowth. This forest constitutes a unique example of how an urban ruderal forest emerges, and is the frequent subject of study by scientists. Many of the changes in vegetation are mirrored by corresponding changes in animal life as well. The number of woodland bird species, for instance, such as nightingales, robins, and blackcaps, continues to rise. As the forest ages and its stock of older trees and deadwood increases, it will continue to change. Ideal biotopes for specialized mushrooms and insects will emerge, making the forest even more diverse.



Natural forest



Traveler's joy (*Clematis vitalba*)



Grasshoppers and wild bees

Sun-loving wild bees, grasshoppers, and butterflies in particular benefit from the clearing. Thin grass and fields of herbaceous vegetation have created a paradise of blossoms attracting more than a hundred different species of highly specialized wild bees. One of these is *Colletes fodiens*. It feasts on yellow everlasting and tansy and builds its nest in sparsely planted spots in the sandy soil. The cuckoo bee *Epeolus variegatus* is dependent on *Colletes*. Just like its counterpart in the bird world, this brood parasite lays its eggs in the nests of others. When it hatches, the larva of the parasite kills the host's egg or larva and devours the nest's food supply. This example shows how interwoven some biotic communities are and how change can endanger the entire interrelationship of species. Abandoned railroad installations like the Schöneberger Südgelände provide a substitute habitat to many plants and animals that used to be widespread on dry heathland. The stripe-winged grasshopper *Sternobothrus lineatus*, previously threatened with extinction, and the endangered blue-winged grasshopper *Oedipoda caerulea*, for instance, have settled here. The chirping of the grasshoppers in the summer makes the open meadows an acoustic experience as well. The "song" of the upland field grasshopper *Chorthippus apricarius*, reminiscent of a slowly passing steam engine, is especially striking.



Cuckoo bee (*Epeolus variegatus*)



Bees like *Colletes fodiens* coat their brood cells with a cellophane-like, "silky" membrane

Enjoy nature's rich array of colors

No matter what the season, the Nature Park always has something to offer its visitors. From early summer to fall, the woods and meadows become a veritable kaleidoscope of color. The fruit trees along Tälchenweg start to blossom as early as April, and at the end of May, visitors to the park can experience the bloom of wild roses transforming the old switchyard into a pink fairy-tale landscape. The dry meadows blossom into full splendor in July with their many different varieties. This is when yellow everlasting and rare hawkweeds appear. A little later visitors can admire the large blossoms of evening primrose. One after another, violet knapweed and white wild carrots and sickleweed come into bloom. In September, bright red rose hips and the orange berries of sea buckthorn ripen in the sunlight. Here and there pretty red fly agaric appears. The forest, too, is always an inviting place for a stroll. The delicate yellow celandine blossoms are the first bright spots of color in the early spring, when the concert of birdsong is especially impressive in the morning and evening hours. As the days grow longer, the canopy of robinias fills in and the fragrance of their large white blossoms casts its spell on visitors. Crimson fireweed lines the forest edge. The white veil of traveler's joy descends on the undergrowth in July, and in the fall Virginia creeper wraps the undergrowth in red.



Evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis* agg.)



Rose (*Rosa glauca*)



Fly agaric (*Amanitamuscaria*)

Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)



It all started with a railroad installation

For more than 70 years, the Schöneberger Südgelände was a switchyard and home to a Reichsbahn railway workshop. The switchyard, completed in 1889, was one of Berlin's busiest railroad installations. As a consequence of Berlin's political situation after the Second World War, rail operations were gradually suspended and then shut down for good in 1952. The land lay fallow for decades. Nature took possession of the area and produced an abundance and variety that astonished even nature conservationists and scientists. In the early 1980s, however, plans were made to sacrifice the area to a new freight station and switchyard. Years of resistance mounted by citizens' groups, as well as expert appraisals attesting to the ecological value of the property, eventually won over political leaders and the administration, and the idea of a nature park was born. In 1995, Deutsche Bahn AG transferred ownership of 18 hectares of the area to the Berlin Senate. This land was intended as compensation for the negative impact on nature of transportation facility expansion in the city center. Plans for the Schöneberger Südgelände Nature Park finally became reality, and the land was designated a protected area. The state-owned Grün Berlin GmbH launched a project to develop the land in an environmentally compatible way. This project was generously funded by the Allianz Environmental Foundation, and the Nature Park was opened to the public in 2000.



True wilderness...

is found only rarely these days. No one expects to discover it in the heart of a large city, least of all at a former railway switchyard, a place where modern technology has left its mark. And yet – here of all places – a small green oasis has evolved naturally and on its own in Berlin. Wild bees, grasshoppers, and bumblebees keep company in meadows alive with color, while the song of the nightingale rings out in an unspoiled forest. Traces of the original railroad facility, modern art, and nature growing wild unite here to form a miniature world of their own.



Dry meadow



Main entrance: Priesterweg S-Bahn station (southern entrance/exit).
Opening hours: from 9 a.m. until nightfall.
Admission fee: 1 euro per person (14 years of age and older).
Guided tours / Events: current information on the Internet (in German): www.gruen-berlin.de/parks-gaerten/natur-park-suedgelaende/
The Nature Park is a place for rest and regeneration. Hans Baluschek Park across the S-Bahn tracks and the nearby Insulaner are available for those seeking more active recreation.

Find more information about nature protection on the Internet (in German): www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/natur_gruen/ or in our publication "natürlich Berlin! Naturschutz- und NATURA 2000-Gebiete in Berlin", available in bookshops.

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A wilderness in the heart of the city

The Schöneberger Südgelände Nature Park was once part of the Tempelhof switchyard. In less than 50 years, a unique natural oasis has evolved here in the heart of the city on the grounds of this former railway facility. A modern-day Noah's Ark, these 18 hectares are home to a wide variety of rare and endangered species of plants and animals. In order to preserve and promote this unusual diversity over the long term, this land was designated a nature and landscape conservation area in 1999.



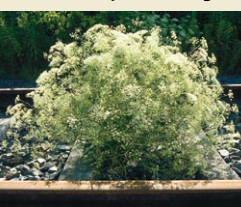
Turntable

Relics of the former switchyard

Although no trains have traveled over the Südgelände for many years now, the sight of an old steam locomotive brings the railroad era back to life. The water needed for its operation came from a 50-meter-high water tower that is now the area's landmark. The many water cranes, lampposts, and sections of track provide a nostalgic touch in today's Nature Park, while other artifacts of the past include the "Brückenmeisterei" (an administrative building) and the locomotive hall. One rarity is the turntable, one of the oldest in Germany. You can see the turntable in action on a tour.

Nature returns

Back when the switchyard was still in operation, the site was a typical maze of railroad tracks and installations. Tracks and gravel dominated the spartan landscape, and there was almost no trace of vegetation. The division of Berlin led to the facilities being gradually shut down and closed for good in 1952 after 70 years of use. This gave plants and animals a second chance. Little by little, nature took over. Over time, valuable dry meadows, tall forb communities, and a natural forest emerged without human intervention. The name "Nature Park" is intended to underscore this quality.



Sickleweed (*Falcaria vulgaris*)

Fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*)



Blue-winged grasshopper (*Oedipoda caerulea*)

The Nature Park now offers an impressive variety of species: 30 species of breeding birds, 57 spider species, 95 wild bee species, 15 grasshopper species, and more than 350 plant species and 49 species of mushroom inhabit the grounds of the park. Railway operations fostered the abundance here, since many plants and insects from the surrounding countryside followed the green corridors created by the railroad lines. Moreover, all sorts of seeds and smaller animal life arrived as "stowaways" on trains coming from other regions.

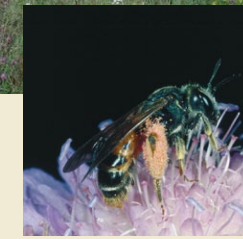
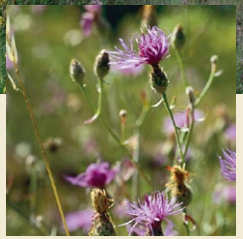


Please help to preserve the Nature Park by observing the following rules:

- Do not leave the path in the nature conservation area.
- Please try to stay on the path in the landscape conservation area as well. This helps to safeguard both the vegetation and birds nesting on the ground.
- Barbecuing or starting any kind of fire is not permitted.
- Do not disturb animals and insects and do not remove or damage plants and vegetation.
- Picking mushrooms or fruit is not permitted.
- Dogs may not be brought into the Nature Park.
- Cycling is forbidden.



Knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*)



Mining bee (*Andrena hattorfiana*)



Art object: "Acceleration tube"

From railroad tracks to walkways

The Südgelände Nature Park is characterized by an intriguing combination of nature, railway artifacts, and art. Visitors are led along walkways and paths that follow the course of the former tracks. The plans were developed by the ÖkoCon/planland working group, while the artists' group ODIIOUS was responsible for the creative construction of the walkway. Art objects place special accents and enhance the grounds.



Lawn area near forest pathway



Graffiti along Tälchenweg

There are two circular pathways accessible to people with disabilities. The water tower and the turntable can be seen along the shorter route, around 1 km long. The longer route runs 2.7 km and leads visitors through the nature conservation area. It links the dry meadows of the main clearing with the forest of robinias and Tälchenweg, and includes the lawn along the ruins of the signal tower. Benches and a swing invite visitors to spend a few minutes here. Other benches can be found elsewhere on the grounds. The Tälchenweg path brings visitors back to the entrance to the park. It follows an old railroad route and lies below the level of the rest of the park, making this a shady walkway.