



FrontiersEcoPics

Zurich's urban beavers are crowd-pleasers

Although hunted to extinction in Switzerland in the 19th century, the Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*) was successfully reintroduced during the 1950s and is now very common across the country's lowlands. Even in Zurich, Switzerland's largest city, a beaver family currently occupies a small stream located immediately in front of the national broadcast station. Over the past few years, these beavers have felled many existing nearby trees and built a series of dams. Due to the site's central location within the city, the beavers have become a major neighborhood attraction. After more than two years of COVID-related travel restrictions, nature-deprived locals flock to the site to take photos of the beavers feeding on grass and herbs. Meanwhile, the beavers seem completely unfazed by the constant stream of picture-taking spectators.

The experience of observing wildlife in one's neighborhood may reconcile urban dwellers with the natural world and make them more supportive of biodiversity conservation, including potentially controversial efforts such as rewilding in the urban sphere. However, the construction activities of beavers can lead to flooding, which may damage built infrastructure and adjacent areas. Consequently, there continue to be discussions in Switzerland about whether hunting should be facilitated in an effort to manage individual animals (including beavers and wolves) when they are deemed "problematic". So far, the notion has been rejected by parliament and public vote. Although people in cities tend to be more conservation oriented than their rural counterparts, it remains unclear if and to what extent direct experience with beavers and other wildlife in urban settings influences public opinion on rewilding.

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