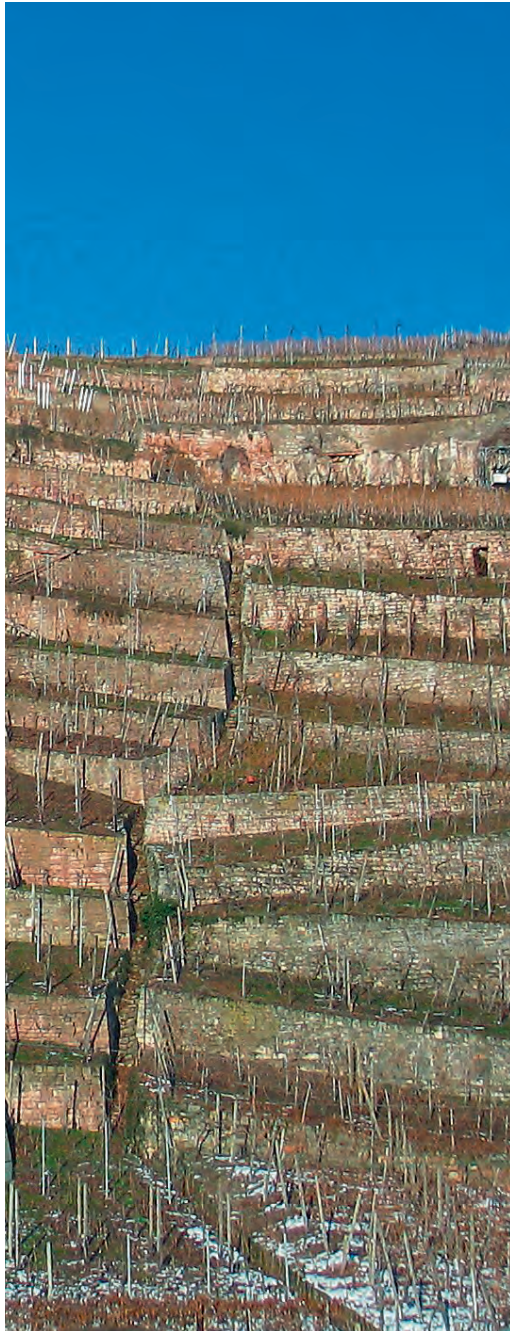


Esslinger Weinerlebnisweg

Station 16b

Habitat vineyard



Natural stone dry wall

For kilometers there are dry walls in the Neckar valley built without mechanical assistance. The walls in the hillside save the warmth of the sun and during the night they give it back to the environment. Dry walls are not only the „tiled stoves“ of the vineyards, but also evidence of ancient rural craftsmanship. The skill to put natural stones without mortar one on each other as well as working with wood are two of the oldest building techniques of the mankind. Just think of the well known building sites like the pyramids in Egypt, the rice-terraces in Thailand or the ruins of Machu Pichu. Nearly all steeper vineyards in Wuerttemberg were terraced with dry walls. Depending on the surrounding the dry walls were artfully erected with Muschelkalk stones (f.e. Stuttgart-Mühlhausen and Neckartal leading to Lauffen including the Enz valley) or sandstone (f.e. Stuttgart-Rotenberg and Stuttgart-Uhlbach, Esslingen am Neckar, Rems valley, Bottwarvalley). Today we hardly can imagine how the terraces and the necessary walls were created without elevators and other technical instruments. For the steep vineyards at the river Neckar a total surface area of up to 5000 square meters of dry walls per hectare were counted. With their many small structures they offer a habitat for an interesting, often Mediterranean-like lifeworld. This includes so called houseleek, rue, stonecrop, birthwort as well as common wall lizards, smooth snakes and Italian cricket.

The centuries old terraces have not been developed for ecological reasons. The inhabitants of the Neckar valley have erected them due to the necessity: Like in many places on earth they built terraces in order to make good use of the steep slopes. So the dry walls in the vineyards are cultural heritage and ecologically significant landscape element and a symbol of the survival for the survival of the people in the Neckar valley. If you take the normal costs which a landscape gardener nowadays needs to get the natural stone material and to erect a dry wall the dry walls along the Neckar make at least 14 billion euros, not taken into the account the aesthetic, ecological and the cultural value.

Text: NatureLife-International
Foto: Christine Keinath



Wall lizard

Among the animal inhabitants of the vineyard we can find some representatives who are great lovers of the sun. They prefer to stay there. The lizards belong to this group. You can discover the slim, brownish lizards at the warm stones of the dry walls in the Neckar valley and the side valleys. They are real climbing artists and adapted to the life in and around the walls. Their daily activity depends on the weather. In the morning they come out of the cracks and gaps in order to warm up. If it is too warm they hide, also in brushwood piles and in scrub area.

Sand lizard

From the name you can learn, that the sand lizard lives at a place, where different habitats adjoin. In the vineyards there are stone ridges, herbs, walls and adjoining hedges which give them the ideal living conditions.

During the day they are sunbathing at dry walls, vineyard stairs, rocks and stone ridges. Here they can hide, find places to hunt, frost-proof winter quarters and warm places for egg laying. The vineyards offer rich food to the fast screeching reptiles. They feed off insects, earthworms, spiders and snails. Every male has its own territory and so you can find one and the same lizard at the same place.



Dovetail

Piles of gathered stones as well as small dry walls are important to provide animals and plants a suitable habitat with lots of sun. Here umbelliferous plants grow which are a place to live for the doveswings, the most gorgeous domestic swallowtail. It is one of the biggest butterflies in our area and a representative for a kind of Knightsmoth, who usually can be found in the tropics. The tail extensions at the rear wings gave them the name. Doveswings love to orbit the hills and hilltops at warm summer days. They try to occupy a territory as high as possible. The females follow to get there. Butterfly specialists call this "Gipfelbalz" or English "hilltopping". This way, these scattered living animals find a partner. The females look for umbelliferous plants like dill, wild carrot, fennel, caraway or grape vine to lay their eggs. These plants grow well in the vineyards.



Redstart

It is one of the most colourful native songbirds. He loves low growing vegetation, open spots and flowery areas. In addition, the redstart requires individual trees and if natural caves are missing also nesting boxes. Like almost all native songbirds this kind of birds suffered from the loss of the biodiversity in the 20th century. There is a sharp decrease in the number of redstarts. It finds living and breeding space in parks and orchards. Also vineyards provide an ideal habitat, but only under the condition, that an ecological diversity is preserved or restored. This includes shrubs and woody plants, for example almond trees, vineyard peaches, dogroses and hawthorn, the elements typical for the vineyards such as piles of gathered stones, dry walls or water stairs as well as a flowering species - rich flora with herbs, flowers and grass. These are for example herb of grace, blueweed, sedum, dyers' chamomile, lemon-thyme or iris.



Kenilworth Ivy

In the steep, dry and sunny slopes there are so many survival specialists like the Kenilworth Ivy which adapted to such extreme environmental conditions like heat and drought. You can find it at vineyard walls or at piles of gathered stones. The plant with its small pale purple blossoms – they remind of violets – root up to two meters through the cracks in the walls into the soil behind and so they are fed with enough moisture even in dry days. This plant once came with the wine from the Mediterranean region and developed its own strategy for dissemination. When the small blossoms are fertilized they move away from the light and grow towards the wall columns where their seeds can germinate again, protected from dryness.

Text: NatureLife-International
Illustration: Sabine Zeller



Wineyard quince

Regardless whether wineyard quince, wineyard peach, almond, cherry, plum or mirabelle – mainly the heat-loving useful trees found early entrance into our landscape in connection with viniculture. At times that different fruit was not offered all the year round in supermarkets or delicatessen stores the winegrowers used their heat-exposed vineyards for all sorts of subsistence whereby the woody plants soon found appropriate distribution.

Quince originally came from the eastern Caucasus. You can assume that it has been cultivated there 4,000 years ago. In Middle Europe it has been cultivated since the 9th century. Maybe the monasteries and noble lords have introduced the quince with the viticulture.

Anyone who is on a cultural-ecological search for clues can discover quince trees and shrubs up to 150 years old in the terraces vineyards of the Neckar valley between Esslingen on the river Neckar and Heilbronn, but also at the lower inflows of the rivers Enz, Kocher and Jagst. After severe damage due to the grape vine louse and downey mildew (*Peronospora*) especially in the last quarter of the 19th century many areas less suitable for viniculture were changed into fruit land. But nevertheless, at some places there are remainings from the winegrowing time.

Anyone who has ever enjoyed a pure Quince destillate, does not want to miss the quince from which you can make tasty marmelade or delicious jelly. By the way, the name „Marmelade“ for the Swabian „Gsälz“ finally came to us via the quince. The Portuguese called quince jam „Marmelada“



Grape hyacinth blooms

They flourish from March until May and play an important role as early bloomers: they are first food source for wild bees, bumblebees and other insects. Together with tulips and daffodils they were introduced from Turkey and other regions of the Near East end of the 16th century. In the meantime the grape hyacinth is one of a garden refugees. A wild type can be seen in the vineyards. There are conditions similar to the dry Grasslands that were originally their home. Because of the rare occurrence they are considered to be endangered. It is quite popular to call them „Kaminfegerle“ – a person who sweeps the chimney, as the flowers remember of the tools to sweep a chimney.

Text: NatureLife-International
Illustration: Sabine Zeller



Iris

The German iris flowers from May until July in pale blue or white. In the vineyard it can be found in sunny places or on walls. In the Middle Ages irises were considered to be magic plants: They were planted on castle rocks as defense of enemies. Again and again the intruders dugged them out and took them away to their own castles. This way different kinds of irises were crossed and hybrids were formed. So the German Iris called Iris Germania was developped. Different to the name it originally comes from the Mediterranean. Together with roses and lilies is is one of the oldes garden plants. For centuries the iris belongs to the flora of the vineyards, where you can find them on sunny slopes and warm bricks.