



Everyday

Action

Guide

for Environmental
Sustainability



UNITED NATIONS
GENEVA



Foreword



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development lays out a shared plan for achieving lasting peace and prosperity for both people and the planet. Central to this vision are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as an urgent call for global action. These goals emphasize that eliminating poverty and other deprivations must be coupled with efforts to improve healthcare and education, reduce inequality, and drive economic growth, all while combating climate change and preserving our oceans and forests.

We must protect our planet because a healthy environment is the foundation required to protect human rights, maintain peace and security, and promote economic and social development.

Sustainability is at the heart of the United Nations in Geneva. We have implemented measures to be more sustainable, resilient, and cost-effective than ever before. Ensuring long-term sustainability of operations is also central to the Strategic Heritage Plan for the Palais des Nations.

Through innovation and cooperation, the United Nations in Geneva is committed to contributing to a greener United Nations, showing leadership in integrating the Sustainable Development Agenda in management planning and processes.

To this end, I have endorsed [UNOG's new Environmental Policy](#) and I encourage you to read the advice in this **Everyday Action Guide for Environmental Sustainability** to make your daily work a little greener.

Tatiana Valovaya

Under-Secretary-General

Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva

Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament

About this guide

The ***Everyday Action Guide for Environmental Sustainability*** provides practical environmental sustainability tips for personnel working within and beyond the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

This guide has been created in the spirit of [ActNow](#)—the United Nations campaign to inspire people to take action for the Sustainable Development Goals—and is designed to help UN personnel align their daily work with efforts to limit global warming and protect our planet. It was inspired by the [Staff Guide for a Green UNESCO \(UNESCO, 2021\)](#). We would also like to thank *Le Défi Carbone*, which provided valuable ideas relevant to the local context of Geneva.

Beyond the Palais des Nations and the UN system, this guide aims to inspire a broad audience to adopt and strengthen sustainable work habits. This guide aims to encourage individuals and organizations at all levels to take meaningful action within their own capacities to help curb global temperature rise and reduce environmental impact.

For additional inspiration, we strongly recommend consulting [170 Actions to Combat Climate Change](#) and [170 Actions to Embrace a Sustainable Lifestyle](#) by UNOG's Perception Change Project, as well as the [Greening the Blue Tutorial](#).

To prioritize environmental sustainability, this guide is available exclusively in digital format and has not been printed.

For questions, suggestions, or opportunities to get more actively involved in environmental management at the Palais des Nations, feel free to contact us at greening-unog@un.org.



Editable Powerpoint of this Guide

Click the icon on the left and repurpose tips for your organization.

Acknowledgements








Co-developed by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Sustainable UN facility, this Guide is prepared by Henrik Distel (UNOG), Nayoung Lee (UNEP), and Chloe Brown (UNOG).

Unless indicated otherwise, all photos are © UNOG

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Cover and layout design: Nayoung Lee

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The Eco-Palais Initiative



The United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) carries out the day-to-day work of the UN, as mandated by the General Assembly, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. To reduce its environmental footprint and integrate sustainability into its operations, UNOG is committed to establishing an Environmental Management System (EMS) in line with the [Strategy for sustainability management in the United Nations system, 2020-2030](#). The Eco-Palais initiative embodies this ongoing transformation, from green initiatives in Ariana Park to the procurement of electric vehicles—every action contributes to making our operations and facilities more sustainable!

However, for the Eco-Palais vision to become a reality, it requires all of us. By changing our habits and adopting more sustainable everyday actions, we can each play a part in bringing this vision to life. This Environmental Sustainability Guide offers practical tips to help you get started right away.

We hope you enjoy reading and find inspiration for an eco-friendly approach to your work!

Energy



DID YOU KNOW

Buildings generate over one-third of global energy-related emissions.

(Source: IEA – International Energy Agency)

For example, in Switzerland, the building sector consumes around 40%* and in Geneva, it contributes to 20% of greenhouse gas emissions**.

*(*Source: Swiss Federal Office of Energy,*

***Source: Ville de Genève.)*

EVERYDAY ACTIONS

1 Leaving the Office? **Turn off & unplug!**

Whether it's for one night or a holiday: turn off your laptop (sleep mode doesn't count!), screens, and docking station. Unplug chargers when not in use and switch off lights—even when leaving a meeting room. Eliminating standby power use can save up to 10 % of electricity.

2 Take the **stairs** in your office

Lifts can account for up to 10% of buildings' energy. Climbing as few as 50 stairs per day can reduce the risk of a heart attack by up to 20%. Short on time? Getting your heart rate up can also boost your productivity! If you can, take the stairs—it's better for both your health and the planet!

3 **Natural light** is the way to go!

Making use of natural light can save up to 75% of the energy used for lighting buildings. When it's bright outside, don't shy away from turning off the lights. And why not try to adjust your screens so that screen brightness can be set to a minimum?

4 **Lower the Blinds** to Save Energy

When temperatures rise, make it a habit to lower the blinds. By doing so, you block out the sun's heat, preventing your workspace from becoming overly warm. This reduces the need for air conditioning, helping to conserve energy and lower your carbon footprint.

5 **Too cold or hot? Dress for the weather!**

Can you control the air conditioning or heating in your building? If so, use them less and dress for the season—warm in winter and cool in summer. It saves costs and helps create a greener work environment.

“Energy savings start with small actions—turning off lights, washing with cold water, lowering the thermostat, and using a lid while cooking!”

Watch video 



Energy

Working from home?

Switch to LED lights

Be sure to replace all your light bulbs with LED lights. They consume up to 90% less energy and last much longer.

Want to reduce your energy consumption at home?



[Check out the City of Geneva's tips](#)



“

Always turn off the lights after work—lights need a break too!”



Energy recovery system at the Palais des Nations



ECO-PALAIS

A Smarter Way to Stay Warm at the Palais des Nations

At the Palais des Nations, innovation drives sustainability. Our heating system will soon rely on water from Lake Geneva, but it already repurposes surplus heat from the cafeteria's refrigeration units and the data center. By recovering and reusing this energy, we significantly reduce our reliance on fossil fuels.

Thanks to these smart energy recovery systems, we cut emissions, save energy, and make a real impact. Every step toward efficiency brings us closer to a greener future!



Lake Geneva

Waste



DID YOU KNOW?

Globally, transition to a circular economy could cut global emissions by 39%.

By reducing & reusing—from stationery to ICT equipment—we save costs and minimize pollution.

(Source: [Goldman Sachs](#))



EVERYDAY ACTIONS

1 Purchase only **what is needed!**

Before buying new items, assess your needs carefully to avoid unnecessary costs and environmental impacts. Do you have unused but still functional items in your stocks? If so, why not transfer them to another entity or offer them for donation instead of sending it for destruction? Wasting functional equipment, even if its useful life has passed, is inefficient and poses a reputational risk to the Organization.

2 Maximize **equipment lifespan**

Did you know equipment can often be reused after its useful life? In line with the [Staff Regulations and Staff Rules](#), always handle UN property with care, especially electronics like laptops that require significant resources. Prioritizing resource efficiency supports sustainability but also helps the Organization save costs.

3 Proper disposal of **hazardous waste**

Do you have hazardous waste such as batteries or electronic appliances? Contact your IT focal point to find out how to dispose of your ICT equipment. If you brought them from home, return them to any store that sells them. Under no circumstance should they be thrown in the general waste or any other of the waste bins! They represent a significant fire hazard.

4 **Sort your waste properly!**

Municipal waste is a growing global issue, with cities like Geneva producing around 529 kg per person annually. Aluminium cans and glass bottles can be recycled endlessly without losing quality. Paper should go in a separate bin. If these materials end up in the wrong bin, valuable resources are lost, and recycling opportunities are missed.



Geneva Tip: Follow the official [Waste Sorting Guidelines](#).

“

Think before buying extra—share office items!
And don't forget to sort waste properly.”



Waste

ECO-PALAIS

From E-Donations to Composting

Waste reduction and recycling remain key environmental priorities at the Palais des Nations. The transition from individual bins to central waste separation stations has significantly improved recycling rates.

Each year, around 1,500 electronic devices find a second life in schools and public institutions worldwide through the E-donation program. Additionally, all garden waste is composted on-site using an open-air composting system, enriching Ariana Park's soil!

At the Palais des Nations:

No cigarette butts
unless...

in designated smoking areas, like one in front of Building E!



Cigarette butts can harm animals and pose a fire risk if left in [Ariana Park](#), especially on hot days. Also on the terraces of Building H, smoking is prohibited.



Door 30: The hub for receiving and dispatching ICT equipment donations



Open-air compost at the Petit Bois

“

We recover secondhand stationery at Eco Points of the Palais des Nations.

No need for extra purchases!”



Towards Zero Waste:
Waste Hierarchy



Source: Green Economy Report (UNEP, 2011)

Drinks



DID YOU KNOW

Most plastic items **never fully disappear**; they break down into microplastics, which can enter the human body.

36% of all plastics are for packaging, including single-use beverage containers. 85% become unregulated waste.

(Source: [UNEP](#))

EVERYDAY ACTIONS

1 **BYOM: Bring your own coffee mug**

Single-use coffee cups pile up quickly, creating unnecessary waste. Bring a reusable mug for your coffee break. It reduces waste, keeps your drink warm longer, and adds a personal touch to your coffee break. Small habit, big impact—enjoy your coffee more sustainably!



Geneva tip: All coffee machines at the Palais recognize your cup! *Bar Serpent in Building E* welcomes them too!

[Watch video](#) 

2 **BYOB: Bring your own water bottle**

Are you buying water bottles? Plastic waste from single-use bottles adds up quickly. Bring your own bottle and refill it from dispensers or tap water (where safe). You'll reduce your CO₂ emissions, and also save some money!



Geneva tip: SIG, the water provider for Palais des Nations, filters water from Lake Geneva, conducting regular quality tests.

3 **Bought bottled drinks? Don't just toss them—return or recycle!**

Surprisingly, around 44% of glass waste in H building at the Palais des Nations in Geneva are reusable water bottles. If you really need bottled beverages, ensure the bottle is returnable and place it in designated collection areas.

4 **Empty bottles before disposal**

Emptying the bottles before their return or disposal reduces waste weight, cutting transport emissions and costs, as many waste contractors charge per kg for waste collections. This simple step helps recycling systems work more effectively and conserve resources.

“Bring your own water bottle. Stay hydrated and waste less!”



Food



DID YOU KNOW

The right diet can cut food-based **greenhouse gas emissions by 30%**, wildlife loss by **46%**, agricultural land use by **41%**, and premature deaths by **20%**.

Learn more and build your own diet [here](#) today!

(Source: [WWF](#))

EVERYDAY ACTIONS

1 Reduce your **meat consumption**

Have you thought about eating less meat? From an environmental perspective this makes lots of sense: a vegetarian dish has three times less climate impact than a meat-based dish. Animal agriculture affects ecosystems, biodiversity, water resources and soil conditions, accounting for 14.5–20% of global human-caused emissions*.

For better health and a healthier planet, 250–300 g of meat per person per week is recommended**. Looking for inspiration? There are countless food bloggers and influencers showcasing low carbon diets and alternatives to meat you can find online. Want to know more about the future of novel alternatives to meat? Read [this report](#) from UNEP.

(*Source: [UNEP](#), **Source: [City of Geneva](#))

2 Buy **local seasonal** fruits & vegetable

Local seasonal food is fresher, tastier, and more nutritious than food consumed out of season. Most importantly, seasonally sourced produce helps reduce unnecessary emissions from transportation and the energy used to heat greenhouses. Plus, you also support the local economy!



Geneva tip: To learn about seasonal food in Switzerland, check out the [Bio Suisse Seasonal Calendar for vegetables, fruits and meat](#)

3 **Avoid food waste** at all costs!

Food waste accounts for 8–10 % of global greenhouse gas emissions. In Switzerland alone, the food waste from farm to fork is around 300 kg per person annually. At the cafeteria, ask for smaller portions if they are too large,—no one will object. At the buffet, take only what you can eat, and if you can't finish, pack the leftovers in a reusable container, share with colleagues, or take them home for later.



Geneva tip: Be part of [the local reusable food container project](#).



“ We eat healthy and waste nothing—thanks to reusable containers!”

Watch video



Drinks & Food



Are you in Geneva?



No-Waste Groceries

In Geneva, 80% of food waste is avoidable. How?

- **Do bulk purchases:** Consume less packaging and save 15% of your cost. [Check out the stores!](#)
- **Free-Go:** [join the network](#) of self-service fridges to drop off excess food or pick up what's needed.
- **Zero-waste stores, restaurants, second-hand and farm shops:** [Switzerland](#) / [France](#)
- There are apps available that help you find restaurants & stores selling leftover food at lower prices, or put you in touch with neighbours giving away unwanted food.

“ You don't need to create waste to enjoy coffee. Just use your own mug! ”

Watch video



ECO-PALAIS

Palais Embraces Reusables

The Palais des Nations is taking a step towards zero waste. In the cafeteria, a ReBox, a reusable food container, will be offered upon request for a CHF 10 deposit. Made in Switzerland, ReBox provides a simple and sustainable way to enjoy meals while reducing waste.



© Eldora SA



How to use a ReBox

- 1 Request a ReBox at any checkout.
- 2 Take it home, wash and reuse it as many times as needed.
- 3 Return it—either at the cafeteria or at [any ReCircle partner location](#) in Switzerland and beyond!

Glass containers are given a second life

On a normal day, around half of the waste from the Palais des Nations is glass. To reduce this, our catering partner is collecting glass containers. These are sent back to the supplier, where they are washed and reused, supporting a more sustainable system.

- Check [this list](#) of containers that should be returned.
- Reusable bottles shall be placed on the designated shelf.

For example, return them to the shelf next to the microwave (Grab'n'Go).



[Learn more about container return locations.](#)

Mobility



DID YOU KNOW


Globally, transportation accounts for about **23% of energy-related CO₂ emissions***. Passenger transport is projected to rise by **79% by 2050****.

(*Source: [UNECE](#), **Source: [OECD](#))



EVERYDAY ACTIONS

- 1 Use virtual tools and minimize travel!**
 Assess if travelling is necessary—many meetings can go virtual with tools like MS Teams. Interactive tools like Miro (Digital Whiteboard for mind mapping), Kahoot! (game-based learning platform) or Mentimeter (polls, quizzes, and interactive slides) make online meetings more engaging! If travel is essential, reduce participants and suggest a hybrid meeting!
- 2 For missions, choose trains or buses**
 Travel is sometimes essential to fulfill our mandate. Consider taking the train or bus. Even with a longer journey, you'll gain productive, comfortable work time and avoid airport delays. Plus, the climate impact of flying can be over 80 times worse than taking the train*—so why not choose the greener option?
 If flying is necessary, consider using public transportation to and from the airport whenever possible. Be sure to check the safety level beforehand in the [UNDSS Safety Advisory](#).
 (*Source: [Greenpeace](#))
- 3 If you must fly, book economy!**
 Business class produces much more CO₂ emissions per passenger than economy, as it takes up a larger floor space. A round-trip from Geneva to New York emits an average of 8.9 tonnes of CO₂e in business class, compared to 2.2 in economy.
 (Source: [World Bank Group](#))
- 4 Pack smart to reduce waste**
 Before you travel, why not prepare some provisions to avoid waste from packaged items that you may buy on your journey? Most airports have water fountains—so bring a reusable bottle! Going digital also minimizes paper waste and lightens your luggage, which in turn lowers fuel consumption and emissions.

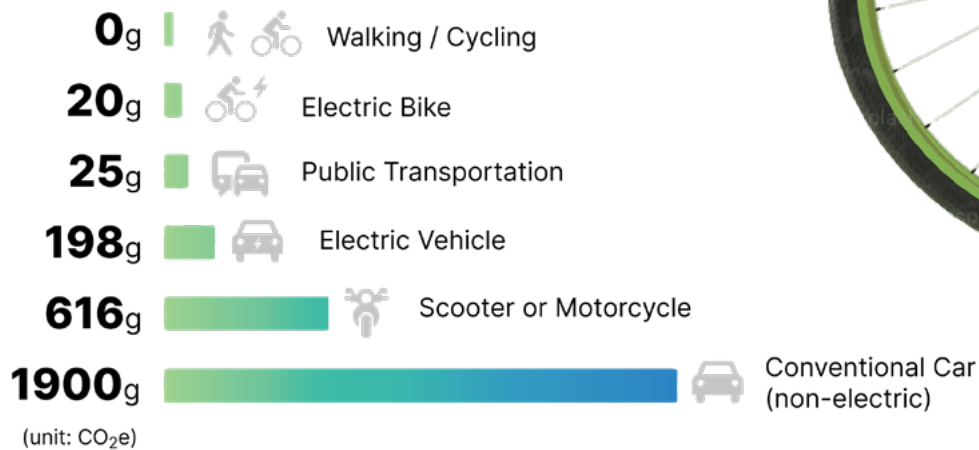
 **Geneva Tip:** [Geneva airport](#) has four water fountains: two near the A8 gate / two on the mezzanine next to the infirmary.
- 5 Green commute: walk, bike, take public transport, or carpool**
 When commuting, prioritize walking or biking. For longer distances, opt for public transport instead of taxis. Carpooling is also a great way to cut both your carbon footprint and costs. If you're considering a new car, why not opt for an electric or hybrid model? Additionally, adopt eco-driving habits: turn off your engine, maintain a steady and moderate speed, limit air conditioning use, and regularly check tire pressure.

Green Wheels for Your Commute

Switching from a car to a bicycle saves 150 g of CO₂ per kilometre. Each 7 km by bicycle will save an emission of 1 kilogram of CO₂ as compared to the same distance covered by car. (Source: UNEP)

Travelling 10 km!

How big will your footprint be?


[READ MORE](#)

Cycling, the better mode of transport



“

Is it a nice sunny day?
Make your commute
healthier for you and
the planet by bike!”

*UN colleagues commuting by
bike to the Palais des Nations*





The electric vehicle and bicycle fleet of Security and Safety Services at the Palais des Nations

ECO-PALAIS

Green Wheels Slash Fuel Use

Since 2018, petrol consumption at the Palais des Nations has dropped by 34%, while diesel consumption dropped by 62%.

This is due to both a reduction in the total number of vehicles, and efforts to look for electric or hybrid alternatives when vehicles reach the end of their life. Security personnel now primarily walk or bike, and onsite charging stations, partly funded by Switzerland and Moldova, use renewable energy to power the fleet.

In addition, for both employees and visitors, the Palais des Nations offers multiple bicycle lanes, ensuring a safe and convenient ride across the premises. Dedicated bicycle sheds are available for parking, though some areas may require a short walk between the parking spots and office spaces.

 [Bicycle parking map](#)

“

Our security cars are now electric, helping us reduce emissions.

Are you in Geneva?



Low-impact Travel Ideas

- **VéloPartage:** [a bike-sharing system in Geneva](#). e-bikes are also available, 24/7 year-round.
- **Carpooling and car sharing in Geneva:** Numerous websites offer free platforms to put people in touch with others who share the same journey, whether regularly, for example to work, or occasionally, for example on a ski trip. [Click here to learn more!](#)



UNOG Electric Security Vehicle

Digital activity



DID YOU? KNOW

Every online action contributes to CO₂ emissions. The ICT sector contributes **1.5–4% of global GHG emissions.**

Digital tech and AI can boost climate action, but curbing the sector's emissions is key.

“Order your emails/files by size and delete the biggest as a priority.”



Microsoft Outlook



This will be permanently deleted.

Continue?

Yes

No

EVERYDAY ACTIONS*

1 Clear space, use **cloud platforms!**

Every file, app, or program stored consumes energy. The more data you store, the more energy is required to open, maintain, and sync it regularly. To avoid unnecessary emissions, delete duplicates/unused files. For efficient file management, use SharePoint, allowing team members access to up-to-date documents without the need for duplicates.



[LEARN MORE](#)

How to share SharePoint files or folders

2 Reduce your **email's carbon footprint**

Sending a short email emits around 4 g of CO₂e. A typical business user generates about 135 kg CO₂e from emails each year, equivalent to driving 320 km in an average car. The longer the email and the larger the attachment, the bigger the carbon footprint. Attach a link to your SharePoint file instead of the file itself, compress large files, unsubscribe from irrelevant newsletters, and regularly delete old emails.



[LEARN MORE](#)

Five tips for reducing your digital footprint

3 Minimize your **AI footprint**

While some estimates predict AI may reduce GHG emissions, a single query from AI platforms such as MS Copilot produces more emissions than a traditional search engine. To minimize your AI-related footprint, use AI wisely. Instead of relying solely on AI or digital solutions, consider leveraging the power of your community and exploring alternative, more sustainable options.



[LEARN MORE](#)

AI has an environmental problem

4 **Power down** and optimize your screen!

Shut down your computer at the end of the day, and unplug chargers and unused devices to avoid phantom energy use—the power consumed by devices even when turned off but still plugged in. Lower your screen brightness and switch to dark mode on OLED screens to save up to 47% of energy. Note that LCD screens, like those issued by UNOG, don't benefit from dark mode in the same way.

*

It is important that all actions remain fully aligned with the regulatory frameworks and policies of the United Nations and relevant entities.

Meetings & Events



DID YOU KNOW

Events impact the environment. Making them sustainable is a key goal of the [Strategy for sustainability management in the UN system 2020–2030](#) and [UN Secretariat Climate Action Plan 2020–2023](#).

Early planning decisions can significantly reduce their footprint! Some useful tools:

- [Green Events Tool \(GET\)](#)
- (UN-specific) [UN Secretariat Sustainable Event Checklist](#)
- (UN-specific) [Top 10 tips for having a sustainable UN event](#)

EVERYDAY ACTIONS

- 1 Consider online or hybrid options!**
 Fully online events have the lowest environmental impact. Evaluate whether a physical event is essential and explore hybrid solutions. If in-person is preferred, carefully assess the number of participants to minimize the environmental footprint.
- 2 Make your catering eco-friendly!**
 Reduce food waste by avoiding buffets and preordering meals based on participants' needs. Buffets often lead to overestimation, resulting in excess food. Meat consumption also has a high environmental impact, contributing to deforestation, emissions, and biodiversity loss. Include vegetarian options to make your event greener!
- 3 Avoid printing whenever possible!**
 Minimize resource depletion by prioritizing digital documents over prints and always printing double-sided. If printing is necessary, use sustainable materials like FSC-certified paper. To reduce waste, avoid printing dates on banners, signage, and lanyards for future reuse! Also, optimize your printing settings: prioritize black-and-white and a resolution of 100–150 PPI for most files, with a maximum of 300 PPI for high-quality prints.


[LEARN MORE](#) How to reduce the file size of [MS Word](#) / [Excel](#)
- 4 Reusable cups & bottles for the win!**
 Providing reusable cups and bottles—or encouraging participants to bring one along—can significantly reduce your event's waste footprint. If you eliminate single-use cups, inform participants in advance, encourage them to bring their own, and highlight other sustainability measures at the event.
- 5 Book eco-friendly hotels!**
 Whether you are organizing or participating in an event, check eco-friendly hotel options in the area! Many hotels now offer sustainability certifications, so look for recognized eco-labels that indicate they meet certain environmental standards.

“Think about online and hybrid options to keep the impact low.”



ECO-PALAIS

Have you been to Ariana Park?

Wildflower meadows

Covering over 22% of the park, these meadows are home to around 35 butterfly species and several beetles, including the threatened European stag beetle and great capricorn beetle. They also attract birds and bats that use the grasslands as hunting grounds.

To help preserve this rich biodiversity, please avoid stepping on the wildflower meadows!

Top right (Beetle): © Atelier Nature et Paysage



Spot beautiful orchids

Wild orchids provide food and shelter for various insects, playing a key role in the park's ecosystem. Many species are endangered due to habitat loss, climate change, and illegal collection. Picking them threatens their small populations. Leave them in their natural habitat to help these stunning flowers thrive for generations.

DID YOU KNOW

Ariana Park, part of the Palais des Nations, covers 42.6 hectares—about 105 football fields. Home to 1,305 trees and hundreds of animal species, it provides crucial shelter.

Why is this important? Around 35% of species in Switzerland are threatened*, many of which find refuge in Ariana Park.

(*Source: [Swiss Federal Office for the Environment](#))



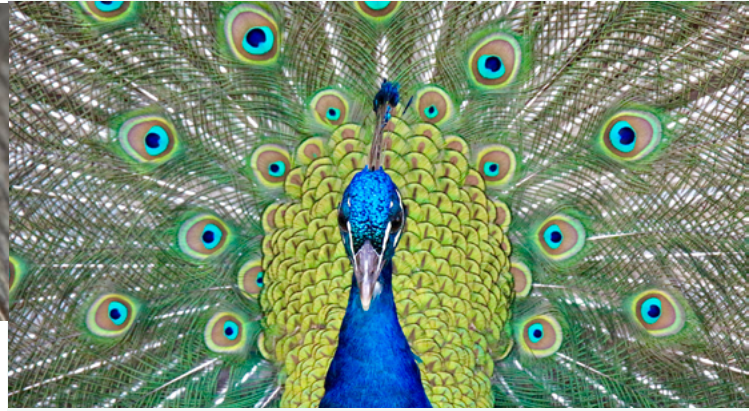
Rare birds await you

Top right (Heron): © Angela Sochirca
Left & bottom right: © Angelique Steinmetz

The 2023 flora and fauna inventory by Atelier Nature et Paysage uncovered rare and threatened bird species, like the Zizi Sparrow, which successfully bred in Geneva for the first time in Ariana Park.

Look up to spot a Eurasian Hobby (small falcon) or a Middle Spotted Woodpecker, making a comeback in the area after disappearing at the turn of the century. Keep your eyes peeled!





© Angelique Steinmetz

Magnificent Mammals

Ariana Park is home to a variety of fascinating mammals. Recent sightings of a red fox on the H building terrace have intrigued many! A pine marten is also known to roam the "Petit Bois" near the Chemin de Fer entrance.

Did you know that 7 bat species hunt in the park? Keep an eye out for them in the evening on your way home!



© Angelique Steinmetz

Join the Gardening Club!

Want to get hands-on? Grow your own vegetables with the UNOG Gardening Club! Contact Club president Pablo Senís Fernández (senis@un.org) to join.

A great way to see Ariana Park from a new perspective!

“ By only planting local and seasonal plants, we support biodiversity and reduce water usage.”



Recently, Gardening Club members installed an insect hotel.



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<https://www.ungeneva.org/en/about/palais-des-nations/environment>