

“Drôles d’oiseaux! A project bringing the generations together to preserve biodiversity”

Interview with Aurélie Delaval,

Deputy director of the French League for the Protection of Birds (LPO) Hauts-de-France, Jihan Hafa, Environmental education project lead at LPO France.

La Santé en action: How did the Drôles d’oiseaux! project come about?

Aurélie Delaval: The work of the organisers and volunteers at the French League for the Protection of Birds (LPO) is generally aimed at young people and families. Together with an activist from the association, who is a medical coordinator at a nursing home in the Pas-de-Calais region, we wanted to do more work with a somewhat overlooked group, the elderly. Many elderly people had a more rural lifestyle and are familiar with birds, including those that are seen less and less in the wild. We thought it would be interesting to build a bridge between them and the children, who are not at all alarmed about the lack of swallows perched on power lines. That’s how this educational project came about in 2018. *Drôles d’oiseaux !* brings the generations together to preserve local biodiversity. It places great emphasis on knowledge transfer, particularly concerning the local natural heritage that older people were able to observe in their youth.

S.A.: How does it work?

Jihane Hafa: The project is based on fostering a partnership between a primary school and a care home in the same area, with the aim of creating an LPO “refuge”, which means protecting a green space in accordance with a charter drawn up by the association. After the first six trial projects carried out in the Pas-de-Calais region in 2018 and 2019, LPO decided to roll out this initiative across mainland France, following the positive feedback from teachers and care home teams. The national network of environmental education coordinators and the LPO’s Board of Directors also considered the project to be of educational value. Teaching aids have been created to help future participants adopt the project. Either we approach the facilities or they come to us because they’ve heard about this

initiative. Four support sessions are planned with a nature coordinator who is employed by the association and volunteers from the local LPO branch: the first session takes place in the classroom to introduce pupils aged 7–11 to the world of birds; session two takes place in the care home to create a link with the residents and revive their knowledge of the different species that inhabit parks and gardens; session three brings the pupils and elderly people together for workshops (building nesting boxes and feeders, making anti-collision stickers, etc.), games and songs; the final session invites everyone on an outing to the care home’s garden to observe the birds and install the equipment they have made. Based on the experience gained, we feel that this period of support forges sufficiently strong links between the two facilities for them to continue managing the refuge together without further interventions.

S.A.: What are the benefits for children and the elderly?

A.D.: The primary aim of the programme is to promote biodiversity but feedback shows that it has other benefits, particularly social ones. For pupils, it encourages openness towards others, acceptance of difference and learning to live together, as well as teamwork. These sessions are also an opportunity for children to explore and develop their sense of observation. For residents of care homes, *Drôles d’oiseaux !* is a welcome break from their daily routine. Making nesting boxes and other objects is a great way to work on their motor skills and concentration. Interacting with the children and recalling memories keeps this skill in use. Going outside also provides extra physical activity. A psychologist at one care home told us that this type of activity makes it easier to break the isolation of some elderly people. Each generation enjoys helping the other to achieve the common goal of protecting nature, with one bringing their experience and the other their enthusiasm. And this work to raise awareness of biodiversity is also catching on among the families of both the children and the elderly people.

KEY POINTS

■ **The French League for the Protection of Birds (LPO) launched Drôles d’oiseaux! (Funny Birds) in 2018. With the support of a nature coordinator and volunteers, the residents of a care home for elderly people and pupils from a nearby school are learning more about birds and creating an appropriate environment for them to survive and thrive. This ecological programme also has social benefits for young and old alike.**

S.A.: What difficulties have you encountered?

J.H.: The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the national roll-out of the project, which was planned for 2020. In the first half of 2024, we counted 35 pairs of participating schools and care homes, supervising a total of 45 LPO bird refuges. Funding for the four-session module, which costs around €4,000, has not been a major obstacle: the regional, departmental and/or local authority, or even local businesses, can make a contribution; care homes can use part of their activities budget and some insurance companies also contribute. However, for *Drôles d’oiseaux !* to work, there needs to be committed representatives within the schools and care homes, as well as volunteers from the association. For a class of twenty-five pupils to turn up in a home for the elderly, who are often dependent or disabled, highly structured support is required. And commitment is the key to ensuring that the project lasts beyond the four “springboard” sessions. ■

Interview by Nathalie Quéruel, Editor-in-Chief.

For more information

Website for the *Drôles d’oiseaux !* programme : <https://www.lpo.fr/pages-annexes/contenus-silpo/footer/lpo-in-english>