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Researcher Eva Knop and Dark-Sky activist Lukas Schuler observe an artificial light experiment in the star park. Photo: Marc Lettau

That is also necessary, says Eva Knop, a researcher at the University of Zurich and the Swiss Confederation's Centre of Excellence for agricultural research, Agroscope: "We still do not know enough about the ecological importance of the night." It is true that life as we know it couldn't even exist without the day-night cycles. However, we are only just starting to understand what happens when the night disappears. For example, Knop came to understand through her field research just how much artificial night light affects biodiversity. In the past, we did not see just how much occurs in the meadows at night, she says. A surprising number of insects pollinate flowers at night. "They do this a lot less when artificial light disturbs them," says Knop. Insects that are active during the day are not capable of compensating for the absence of nocturnal pollinators. If the subsequent experiments substantiate these initial findings, then this would unfortunately be a "new problem to address", says Knop.

Clarity instead of bravery

In light of the seriousness of the situation, Mayor Hanspeter Schneider was also praised for his bravery in unscrewing fuses and prescribing more darkness for his municipality. Schneider waves that aside: "Bravery changes nothing at all. But the power of persuasion may do." This can only happen when the people living here understand the importance of a star park. Thus, a great deal depends on the principle of hope and mutual encouragement. When asked whether the "dark heart" would one day see more circumspect handling of the night beyond its limited borders, Dahinden responds: "It is written in the stars."

Further information on the topic:
www.sternenpark-gantrisch.ch
www.ogy.de/nachtdunkelheit
www.darksky.org; www.darksky.ch

Switzerland in figures

About Emmas, lightning strikes and waste

30.7

Statistics back the claim that women are having children later in life. The average age of Swiss women on the birth of their first child is currently 30.7 years. In Europe, only Spain and Italy have a slightly higher average age.

504

A propos births: of the 42,838 girls born in Switzerland last year, 504 were called Emma and now there are more than 41,500 Emmas in Switzerland. The only name more popular is Maria (82,500). The most popular name for boys in 2018 was Liam. However, Liam is (still) a minority name: the Swiss prefer traditional names like Daniel (62,500), Peter (58,500) and Thomas (52,500).

85,270

There were 85,270 lightning strikes recorded in Switzerland during June, July and August this year. That is an unusually high number. By way of comparison, the electronic monitoring network recorded 53,430 strikes in summer 2018. Ticino was the main lightning hotspot.

24,849

How many kilometres do the Swiss cover in a year? On average 24,849 km. The most common mode of transport is the car (10,371 km), followed by the aeroplane (8,986 km) and the train (3,499 km). On foot the distance covered is 459 km, and by bike it is 301 km. It is interesting to note that holidays and leisure pursuits account for far more kilometres than commuting to work.

706

The Swiss recycle or compost more than half their waste every year. At the same time, the volume of their waste is on the rise, with 706 kg of municipal waste per person, per year. That is a lot higher than the European average of 486 kg.