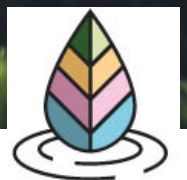


# Belgium for Biodiversity

Report KICK-OFF 11 October 2023

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Belgium for  
Biodiversity

The brand new LIFE Belgium for Biodiversity (B4B) project has started on 01/01/2023 and is one of the very first Strategic Nature Projects (SNaP) in the EU. This flagship project will facilitate various processes to halt biodiversity loss and restore vital ecosystems, contribute to the resilience and coherence of the Trans European Nature Network and lowering environmental pressures such as light pollution.

Over the course of 9 years this ambitious project will also contribute to a transformative change by providing state of the art capacity building and brand the Natura 2000 network, the biggest ecological network in the world. The LIFE Belgium for Biodiversity project will be carried out with 14 partners in the whole Belgian territory, including the Belgian part of the North Sea.



## Belgium for Biodiversity



Belgium for Biodiversity

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# Programme

When	Location	What
09:00 - 9.45	Binnentuin	Welcome and registration
<b>9:45 - 10:00</b>	<b>Auditorium - 00.11</b>	<b>Welcome by the vice CEO of ANB: Jos Rutten</b>
10.00 - 11.00	Auditorium - 00.11	Plenary session (English spoken, supported with both Dutch and French slides)
<b>11:00 - 12:30</b>		<b>Session 1</b>
	01.16	Eco and agro tourism in the Natura 2000 network
	00.07	Capacity building for N2000 and biodiversity: a mixed story of human and natural capital
	01.04	Perspectives on biodiversity and soft systems methodology
	01.05	Monitoring and mapping + Old forest mapping
	01.17	Conservation Objectives on Natura 2000 sites
<b>12:30 - 13:30</b>	<b>Binnentuin</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>13:30 - 15:30</b>		<b>Session 2</b>
	01.04	Nature-inclusive agriculture in a Belgian context
	00.07	Light pollution
	01.05	Species action plans
	01.16	National Parks in Belgium
	01.17	Financing biodiversity
15:30 - 15:45	Auditorium - 00.11	Interactive recap of the kick-off
15:45 - 16:00	Auditorium - 00.11	Closing by Cinea- Joseph Van der Stegen
16:00 - 17:00	Binnentuin	Closing drink



Belgium for  
Biodiversity

## Event summary



150  
participants



11 October 2023  
in Brussels



10 workshops and  
sessions about different  
themes



Different speakers in  
the plenary sessions



Getting to know the project, partners, learning  
from each other, finding common ground,  
networking

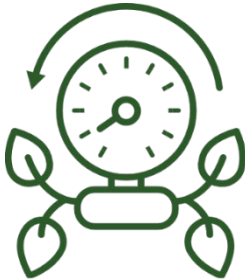
# LIFE Belgium for Biodiversity = 7 Themes



**NATURA 2000 BRANDING**



**CAPACITY BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE**



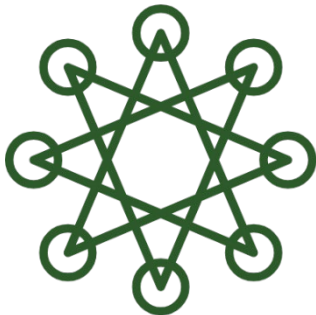
**REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES**



**MONITORING AND VALUATION**



**EU PROJECT OFFICE & FINANCING BIODIVERSITY**



**TRANS EUROPEAN NATURE NETWORK**




**RESTORING BIODIVERSITY**

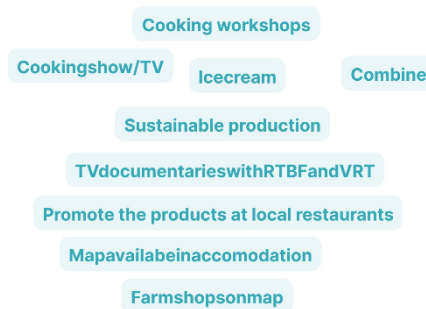
# Workshops and sessions

## Eco- and agro-tourism in the Natura 2000 network

The Eco- and agro-tourism workshop focused on task 6.5 of the Grand Agreement: “Eco and agro tourism around Walloon Natura 2000 sites” , led by Natagriwal and was in the form of a participatory presentation, using Slido platform. The participants were consulted on several determinant points, these interventions allowed the LIFE B4B team to validate certain proposals and provided new ideas for the progress of the task.

Example:

 Could you please give us more ideas to promote products from farms in the Natura 2000 network or committed to AECM?  
Wordcloud Poll 9 responses 8 participants



slido

## Nature-inclusive agriculture in a Belgian context

The “Nature inclusive agriculture” workshop was an opportunity to discuss the different existing tools and fundings in Flanders and Wallonia to integrate more environmentally friendly agricultural practices. Supervised by the LIFE B4B team of VLM, INBO and Natagriwal, the participants organized in round tables and questioned the opportunities and limits of nature inclusive agriculture and agroecology.

## Capacity building for N2000 and biodiversity: a mixed story of human and natural capital

Natuurinvest invests through its two brands Inverde and Ecopedia in knowledge of people, while Natuurpunt promotes Business conservation partnership as private funding for nature restoration as innovative tool. Two different but complementary stories of capacity building and transformative change, supporting the further implementation of the Natura2000 goals. The workshop was an interactive mix of presentation and dialogue with the different partners and stakeholders present.

The approach to learning in this project has multiple layers. A combination will be put in place to:

- Develop (new) training concepts,
- Actively increase learning transfer through impact assessments and development of a blended toolkit for trainers,
- Investing in easy accessible knowledge via Ecopedia and (new) learning networks, and
- Develop a (concept) of a virtual assistant in the field to increase performance of managers in the field

Valuable input on learning needs and challenges of staff and N2000 stakeholders has been gathered and good face to face contacts have been made to steer our capacity building plan in the right direction the coming project years.

Natuurpunt closed the session with elaborating on the why, how, challenges and results of business conservation partnerships. Followed by a brief discussion on how to implement this by B4B partner organizations.





## Perspectives on biodiversity and soft systems methodology

This interactive workshop, organized by INBO and VLM, aimed to create understanding about the different perspectives on biodiversity in agricultural landscapes, and to discuss the task 4.10, in which we study the possibilities for nature-inclusive agriculture in three pilot areas in Flanders.

We started by identifying all actors that have an influence on increasing biodiversity in an arable landscape. These included farmers, policy makers and nature organizations, but also horse owners, citizens, heritage organizations and so on. We asked the participants to order them from having a low influence to being highly influential. This was a good warm-up to show that in order to reach biodiversity goals, you need to collaborate with many different people. To experience what this feels like, the workshop participants became the local actors themselves - farmer, nature organization volunteer, spatial planner of the local city, hunter, advisor for VLM. In a "meeting" coordinated by the Regional Landscape, they were asked to come up with intervention actions to help attain the biodiversity goals. But - it was required that all actors at least accept the proposed intervention. The perspectives on biodiversity were very different - for the nature organization volunteer it's about protecting typical bird species. If we don't do anything, we will lose them. The local farmer cares more about biodiversity in the soil, while the spatial planner working in the local city focuses on diversifying to create resilient communities. The groups came up with many different sorts of interventions, and it was also mentioned that this exercise would be helpful to do with the actual actors in the study areas.



The last part of the workshop consisted of an explanation of Soft Systems Methodology. This proves to be a helpful method in this setting, where we're dealing with a complex problematical situation rather than a simple, fixable problem. There's a multitude of framings of the issue and conflicting interests, which is why we need a process approach rather than an expert approach. Bringing the relevant actors together and coming to a common understanding of the issue and supported solutions points is essential.

## Monitoring and mapping + Old forest mapping

In the session on monitoring and mapping, we had three presentations on recent developments in Flanders, with a short Q&A, followed by a general discussion.

- Biological Valuation Map Flanders (Toon Spanhove, INBO), with an introduction to the biological valuation map, the challenge to timely update the map, the role of the integration of external data, including remote sensing techniques and the contribution of the B4B project in field-mapping outside the Natura 2000 network.
- Nature management monitoring (Bart Roelandt, ANB), with an introduction of the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle, the principles of the monitoring in Flanders: (1) the monitoring is done by the nature manager, with direct feedback to the managers, (2) management efforts are registration, (3) indicator species are used to monitor biotic evolutions, (4) water levels are monitored wherever appropriate and (5) species inventories are monitored, but only in very specific cases.
- Remote sensing technology to monitor ecosystem restoration (case-study Zwarte Beek) (Dennis De Ryck, Natuurpunt), introducing Natuurpunt as NGO and manager of over 28.000 ha, the need to monitor processes at the landscape level. The peatland restoration in the Zwarte Beek was introduced as a case study, focusing on the role remote sensing can play in the monitoring. As an example, preliminary results of soil moisture detection from satellite imagery were shown.

After clarifying some details in the presentation, experiences from other regions on mapping and monitoring were exchanged. In the final discussion, the need for a better monitoring of abiotic parameters was put forward as a complementary monitoring need.

## Conservation Objectives on Natura 2000 sites

### Conservation objectives in Wallonia

Setting conservation objectives for habitats and species is not the most complicated step. The problem is to define how to monitor. There is no precise value of the existing situation, so rather than measure field state, SPW proposes to assess the evolution and see if it is on the good way. So one can adopt the most appropriate conservation measure and appropriately assess the impacts of plans and projects at the site level. A tool dedicated to monitoring will be developed to assess globally the pressures on the environment.



## Setting conservation objectives in Flanders

First step is to define regional objectives. Then develop site specific objectives. And then work at local scale.

From regional to local:

- Quantify and quality objectives, describing favorable conservation status
- Need for a balanced, objective and transparent distribution
- Define the approach (maximize ecologic quality, socio economic optimization)

Some practical examples are shown.

- ⇒ Discussion on several practical points, mainly the importance of assessing management measures adequacy in which expert judgment and a bottom up approach should be included into the context of a good methodology.

Info : *Les Cahiers d'Habitats* written by SPW : updated version accessible on the website of SPW (a reference also used in Flanders)

## Light pollution

More and more studies are showing that excessive use of artificial light is harmful to all living beings. A number of presentations at the workshop highlighted the impact on both biodiversity and human health. It is no longer enough to "light better, consume less"; we now need to "light less, consume less". All "users" need to be taken into account: humans, fauna and flora, in particular by defining the "black grid", in consultation with experts and through work in the field.

The country's 3 regions have already taken steps to reduce light pollution by working on public lighting:

- Eliminating light points
- Dimming lights during certain periods
- Changing the height and orientation of light points
- Less intense lighting in Natura 2000 areas
- Changing the colour temperatures of light points
- Introduction of mapping tools

Nevertheless, the workshop concluded that not enough has been done to reduce the current impact of light pollution. More ambitious action plans are needed. To achieve this, it is recommended that the populations concerned be informed as early as possible and that participatory workshops have to be organized to identify the demands and habits of the local populations. Field inventories are also needed to identify the needs and habits of the local population.



## Species action plans

The **policy framework for choosing species for species action plans** is different in Flanders and Wallonia:

- In Flanders, species were selected from the annex 1 species of the N2000 legislation and all birds and species of annex 2 of the Bern Convention. A multi criteria analysis was done following 5 clusters: red list status, legislation, N200 policy, Flemish policy and importance N2000 sites. The result is multi-year program until 2024.
- In Wallonia, a method was defined to prioritize species of different groups. The method had to:
  - Be applicable to different groups of species
  - Be built with the knowledge of what was done in other countries
  - Take into account the lack of knowledge on some species
  - Not be rigid and integrate a step of specialists advices
  - Should be applied by other specialists and lead to similar conclusions

Each species was assigned to a type of approach (1. Species requiring a specific Action plan, 2. Species that may be integrate in a multispecific Action plan, 3. Species for which a “practical catalogue of favourable actions” is sufficient and 4. Species requiring no urgent action) and the combination of the results obtained through 6 criteria lead to select species for each kind of approach. Selected species for approaches 1 and 2 were candidate for the B4B Action Plan Species.

- The question was raised whether both approaches would result in a similar species list.

**We learned from several concrete cases of species action plans:**

### **Conservation translocations for two amphibians**

- The species action plans for **common spadefoot (*Pelobates fuscus*) (two small populations left in Flanders)** and **midwife toad (*Alytes obstetricans*)** (only 4 spots in Flanders situated near Wallonia’s border) contain breeding programmes. The examples showed that translocation is not a standalone solution. Further work involve policy, habitat restoration and long-term management.
- The species protection plan for **meadowbirds (with focus on Focus on Black-tailed godwit and Eurasian curlew)** contains description of the status, actions needed, instrumentarium for implementation, monitoring.
- The species action plan for **great crested newt** in Wallonia included an ambitious program of ponds creation or restoration. To focus actions, a large-scale eDNA inventory was carried out.
- There are 3 relict populations left in Flanders for **European weatherfish**. The species action plan focuses on 2 areas where the following actions are achieved: strengthening of populations, prioritizing habitats with high potential, eDNA survey and genetic analysis, reintroductions from the Netherlands. It would be very interesting to know more about the situation of European weatherfish in Wallonia.



## National Parks in Belgium

In Belgium, there are 2 types of National Parks, the Walloon ones and the Flemish ones. During creation of the parks, there has been some exchange of knowledge. Now, in the implementing phase we are excited to get to know each other better through sharing information and through field visits on themes such as monitoring and evaluation of the parks, economic models, working with stakeholders, branding, light pollution, rewilding, water management, agriculture, recreation management. A membership at Europarc is interesting for international knowledge sharing.

## Financing biodiversity

There is clear financial gap between what funding is needed and how much funding is available. Most conservation measures are financed with public money and only a very small % financed with private money. During this session the different existing funding mechanisms have been explored: EU funds like LIFE and Interreg, regional funds like Natuurinrichting, Project subsidie natuur en soorten, Beheerovereenkomsten, MAEC, Plan Development Rural, Yes we plant, etc. In addition a short discussion was done how private funding could be involved. In Belgium already some first examples exist, governed by Natuurpunt and Natagora. However, also public bodies could play a role. One of the key aspects is that receiving private funding should be linked to an ethical code of conduct to prevent greenwashing practices. The audience agreed that there is a huge potential for private investors. In the frame of LIFE B4B, this aspect will be further explored, being assisted by the green assist of the European Commission.

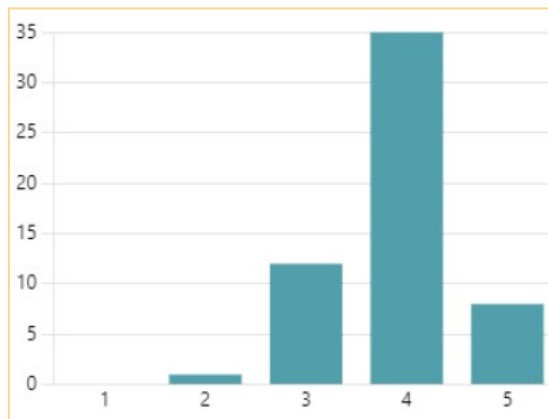


# Feedback of the participants

At the end of the Kick-off event, we asked a few questions at the participants to gain insight into their experience of the event. This allows us to take strong points of the event and possible areas for improvement into the future.

It also allows us to gain more insight into expectations for upcoming events.

1. How many stars would you give this event?



2. What single word do you think of when you hear 'LIFE Belgium for Biodiversity'?



3. Suggestions to improve the catering can be noted below.



4. If you have suggestions for themes of future events, workshops, ateliers, info sessions, field visits,... you can enter them below.

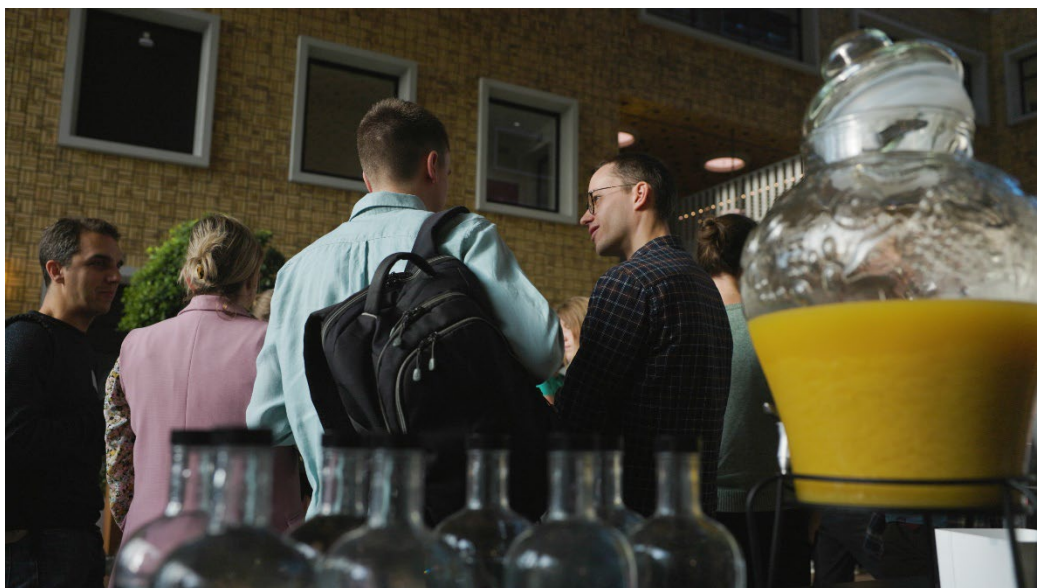
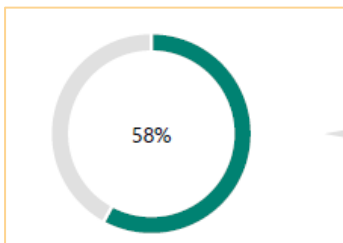


5. What comes to mind when you hear 'Natura 2000'?



6. I will be actively involved in the project, working on one or more tasks.

58% answered Yes



# Links to the presentations and other relevant info

[www.lifeb4b.be](http://www.lifeb4b.be)



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