

GETTING
BEHIND
NATURA 2000

LIFE BELGIAN NATURE INTEGRATED PROJECT





Layman's report

LIFE 14 IPE BE 002 BNIP

Abbreviation: LIFE BNIP

Reference: LIFE 14 IPE BE 002 BNIP

Coordinating beneficiary: Agency for Nature and Forests

Project partners: SPW Agriculture, Ressources naturelles et Environnement; Federal Public Service of Health, Food Chain Security and Environment; Natuurinvest; Natuurpunt Beheer; Natagora and Natagriwal

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1

INTRODUCTION

> The importance of Natura 2000

It will come as no surprise that our well-being is inextricably linked to the state of nature and our environment. Nature provides us, among other things, with healthy air, drinkable water and relaxation.

The landscape in Europe is a vast mosaic of greys, greens and blues. Nature there is truly unique: nowhere in the world will you find the same vivid puzzle of landscapes in such a small area and spread across so many different countries.

Natura 2000 gathers many of these unique natural areas to create the largest nature network in the world. Each member state is responsible for monitoring its green puzzle pieces. Together, they form the European Union's biodiversity. Maintaining this biodiversity is essential for current and future generations.



> BNIP in a nutshell

The LIFE Belgian Nature Integrated Project (LIFE BNIP) is a large-scale nature project that promoted Natura 2000 in Flanders, Wallonia and the Belgian part of the North Sea. The project was completed as of 31 March 2023. The following is an overview of what the project achieved.

The project optimised policies and developed tools and resources to put them into practice. In doing so, cooperation between project partners and local actors was also crucial.

LIFE AND NATURA 2000

What is LIFE?

The European LIFE programme provides financial support to projects committed to nature conservation, climate and the environment. The European Commission provides a budget in the form of LIFE projects to restore and develop Europe's Natura 2000 nature network.

What is Natura 2000?

Natura 2000 is a European nature network that aims to ensure the future of hundreds of endangered animals and plants. It is based on the European Birds and Habitats Directives and forms the largest network of protected (natural) areas in the world. Approximately 18% of Europe's total area and nearly 6% of the marine area form part of the Natura 2000 network. In these areas, European member states are taking action to protect and restore Europe's valuable nature.

More information:

- > cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en
- > natura2000.vlaanderen.be/
- > biodiversite.wallonie.be/fr/natura-2000.html?IDC=829
- > ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm



BNIP

19

million euros

European Commission

60%

regional and national financing

40%

90

people

collaborated on LIFE BNIP



duration
7.5 years

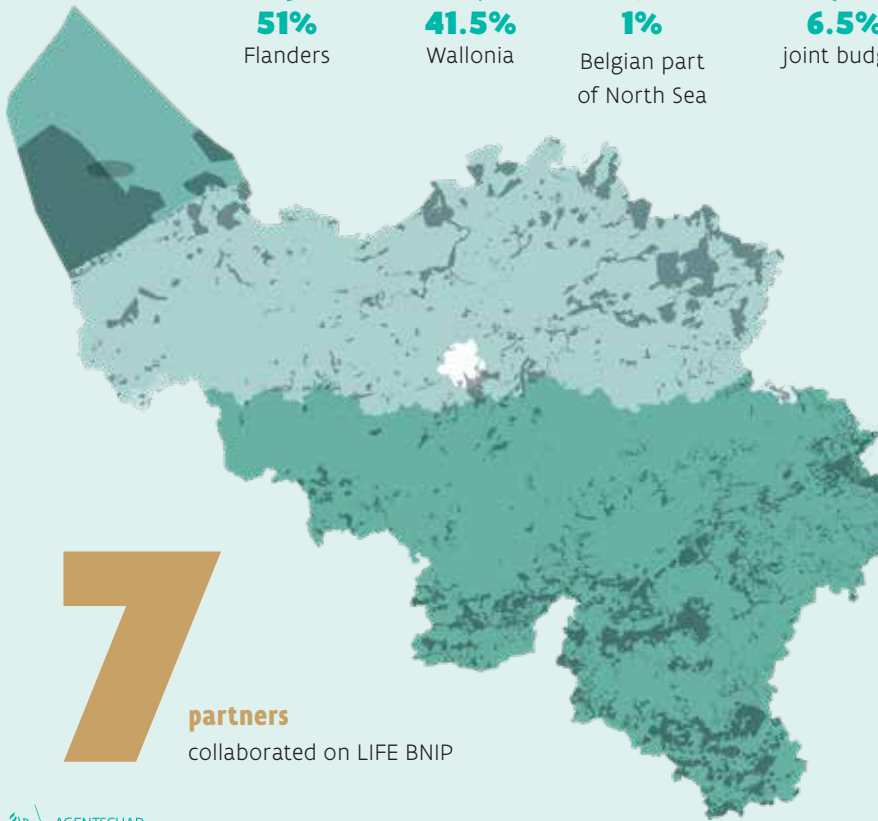
(88 months, from 1 December 2015 to 31 March 2023)

51%
Flanders

41.5%
Wallonia

1%
Belgian part
of North Sea

6.5%
joint budget



7

partners

collaborated on LIFE BNIP



Agency for Nature and Forests natuurenbos.be



Natuurinvest natuurinvest.be



Natuurpunt Beheer natuurpunt.be/afdelingen/natuurpunt-beheer



Natagora natagora.be



Natagriwal natagriwal.be



SPW Agriculture, Ressources naturelles et Environnement wallonie.be/fr/acteurs-et-institutions/wallonie/service-public-de-wallonie/spw-agriculture-ressources-naturelles-et-environnement



Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment health.belgium.be/nl

INTEGRATED PROJECTS

The **Integrated Projects (IP)** were introduced in 2014 as a new type of LIFE projects. They focus on the themes of nature, water, air, waste, climate and adaptation. These new project types operate on a broader scale than traditional LIFE projects. They earmark other budgets and involve additional actors. The LIFE BNIP was an Integrated Project focusing on Natura 2000.

2

PROTECTING EUROPE'S VALUABLE NATURE: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

Natura 2000 may seem like an abstract concept, but in reality it is about **beautiful, valuable European top-class nature in your own backyard**. LIFE BNIP optimised the policy, which was then implemented in the field with various actions and tools.

In the following chapters, you will discover what LIFE BNIP achieved, divided into three layers: policy, actions and tools, and terrain. Together, they formed the complex puzzle that the reading guide below clarifies. In each chapter, you will find examples of these achievements.



POLICY

Flanders

Natura 2000 programme

Wallonia

Streamlined Natura 2000 policy



ACTION

Flanders

Species Protection Programme (SBP)

Wallonia

habitats & species action plans

Management plans

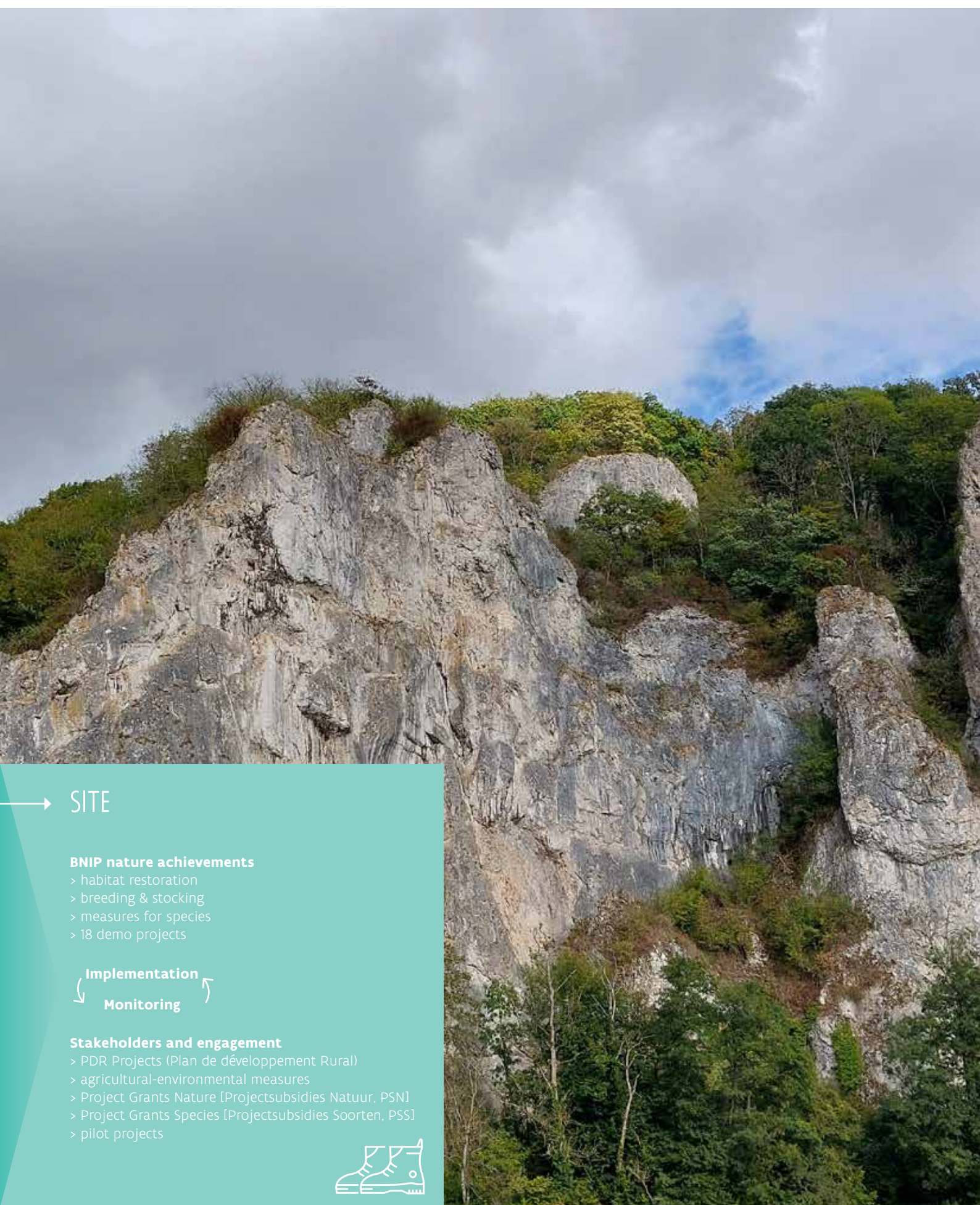
Communication

videos, brochures, Natura of ...

Education

training courses, Ecopedia





→ SITE

BNIP nature achievements

- > habitat restoration
- > breeding & stocking
- > measures for species
- > 18 demo projects



Stakeholders and engagement

- > PDR Projects (Plan de développement Rural)
- > agricultural-environmental measures
- > Project Grants Nature [Projectsubsidies Natuur, PSN]
- > Project Grants Species [Projectsubsidies Soorten, PSS]
- > pilot projects



> Reading guide

The Flemish **Natura 2000 programme (N2P)** gathers together all the policy efforts and area-specific actions that Flanders must implement to achieve European nature goals in steps.

A **streamlined Natura 2000 policy was established in Wallonia**. This policy lists, for example, what species and habitats we need to give extra protection.

The policy will be implemented in Flanders with **species protection programmes (SBP)** and nature management plans. In Wallonia, the policy

will be implemented with **action plans for species and habitats and management plans**. These documents provide a legal basis for taking concrete measures on the ground for animal and plant species. In doing so, we monitor the impact of the measures, and make adjustments where necessary.

We create greater acceptance through support resources like communication and education.

Financial support, through grants for example, activates stakeholders to contribute to the management and development of Natura 2000.

THE EUROPEAN FLAT OYSTER IS MAKING A COMEBACK

The **European flat oyster** (*Ostrea edulis*) is making a comeback. For years, it was unable to find a home in the North Sea: the gravel banks were regularly churned up by fishing gear and other oysters took its place. The policy incorporated the protected areas into the marine spatial plan and set targets for the restoration and conservation of the **gravel beds**. This makes dense reefs with oyster populations here in the North Sea possible again.

Together, oysters look rough and sharp, but they provide plenty of life around them. They are the breeding and nursery grounds for fish, creating a **hotspot of biodiversity**. To protect and restore oyster beds, LIFE helped BNIP draw up **management plans**. One of the priorities here was to delineate zones where fishing must no longer disturb the seabed, leaving the gravel intact. It is hoped that further research will reveal how to further restore the gravel banks.

LIFE BNIP took up the cause of the European flat oyster. **Communication** is essential to highlight the importance of nature in our North Sea, forge partnerships and build support. LIFE B4B will put all that further into practice, starting in 2023 with the **restoration of oyster beds**.



“

Communication is essential to highlight the importance of nature in our North Sea, forge partnerships and build support.





“

Thanks to LIFE BNIP, Natura 2000 policy was further optimised in Flanders, Wallonia and the Belgian part of the North Sea.

› Policy: development of policy instruments

In Belgium, Natura 2000 is implemented at **regional level**. Both Flanders and Wallonia are therefore outlining policies to protect and restore this valuable European nature to the best of their ability. The federal government is responsible for the Natura 2000 network in the Belgian part of the North Sea.

The LIFE BNIP was geared towards further optimising the Natura 2000 policy in Flanders, Wallonia and the Belgian part of the North Sea. The various authorities drew clear outlines for all actions on the ground.

In Flanders, the **Natura 2000 programme** was developed on this basis, forming the backbone of the policy and ensuring that targets were achieved, and measures implemented. In Wallonia, governance has been streamlined thanks to **LIFE BNIP**, which allowed the Walloon Natura 2000 network to be further rolled out on the ground. Management plans helped protect the Natura 2000 nature network in the Belgian part of the North Sea.



“

Nature in Flanders is very fragmented.

› Actions: tools that translate policy to the field

Tools were used to translate the Natura 2000 programme in Flanders and streamlined governance in Wallonia to the field. For example, we developed methods and tools for monitoring in both regions.

Nature in Flanders is very **fragmented**. Therefore, we worked out an agenda to **connect** the habitats of various species with each other. Green-blue networks ensure climate-robust and biodiverse nature. In addition, **species protection programmes** [in Dutch: soortenbeschermingsprogramma's, SBPs] in Flanders form the legal basis for taking concrete measures on the ground for valuable species.

In Wallonia, we devised **dynamic action plans** for species and habitats. These plans determined what restoration, management or legal **measures** we needed to take, on what scale and in what locations, how much it would cost and what the potential **socio-economic impact** would be. These steps required survey results and preparatory research for some habitats and species.

Not only animal species deserve attention, but also **areas as a whole**. Therefore, new **nature management plans** were drawn up in Flanders. We also screened existing plans to fill gaps where possible to meet conservation objectives. In Wallonia, the development of **management plans** for each Natura 2000 area was based on an approved model. These plans were aimed at gathering the necessary resources and information to initiate discussions on the future management of the sites. We also use them to suggest improvements to the existing situation. These management plans were designed as a **dynamic tool**: new insights are integrated into an update of the management plan.

Databases and IT tools keep all information as clear and complete as possible. A good example is the Flemish **Meetnetten app**, which focuses on monitoring species from the habitats and birds directives. Monitoring networks is a web tool for planning and monitoring fieldwork and inputting field data (meetnetten.be). That provides a wealth of information.



17 habitat action plans (Wallonia) **17** protected species (AP and SBPs)

1,039 new or restored ponds for amphibians

14,300 hectares screened in existing management plans (Flanders)

APPROXIMATELY
4,365

habitat restoration (ha) directly restored and managed through BNIP (demonstration + implementation of species and habitat action plans)

15,800 people attended training sessions

34 conferences and (networking) events

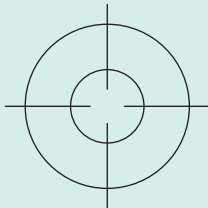


414 training sessions for staff and stakeholders

3,200 participants in conferences and (networking) events

3 databases and IT tools

16 guides on monitoring



635 newsletters

27 videos

34 guidelines

management plans developed and updated

240 in Wallonia

313 in Flanders



40

species and habitat action plans and species protection programmes (13 Flanders, 27 Wallonia)

2 plant species — Whiskered brome *Bromus grossus*
Floating water-plantain *Luronium natans*

3 mammal species — Hazel dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius*
Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra*
Western barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*

7 bird species — Red-backed shrike *Lanius collurio*
Western marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus*
Spotted crane *Porzana porzana*
Eurasian bittern* *Botaurus stellaris*
*Reed birds
Little bittern* *Ixobrychus minutus*
Great reed warbler* *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*
Savi's warbler* *Locustella luscinioides*

7 amphibian species — European tree frog *Hyla arborea*
Northern crested newt *Triturus cristatus*
Pool frog *Rana lessonae*
Moor frog *Rana arvalis*
Natterjack toad *Bufo calamita*
Yellow-bellied toad *Bombina variegata*
Common midwife toad *Alytes obstetricans*

1 fish species — Weatherfish *Misgurnus fossilis*

1 insect species — European stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*

1 mollusc species — Thick shelled river mussel *Unio crassus*

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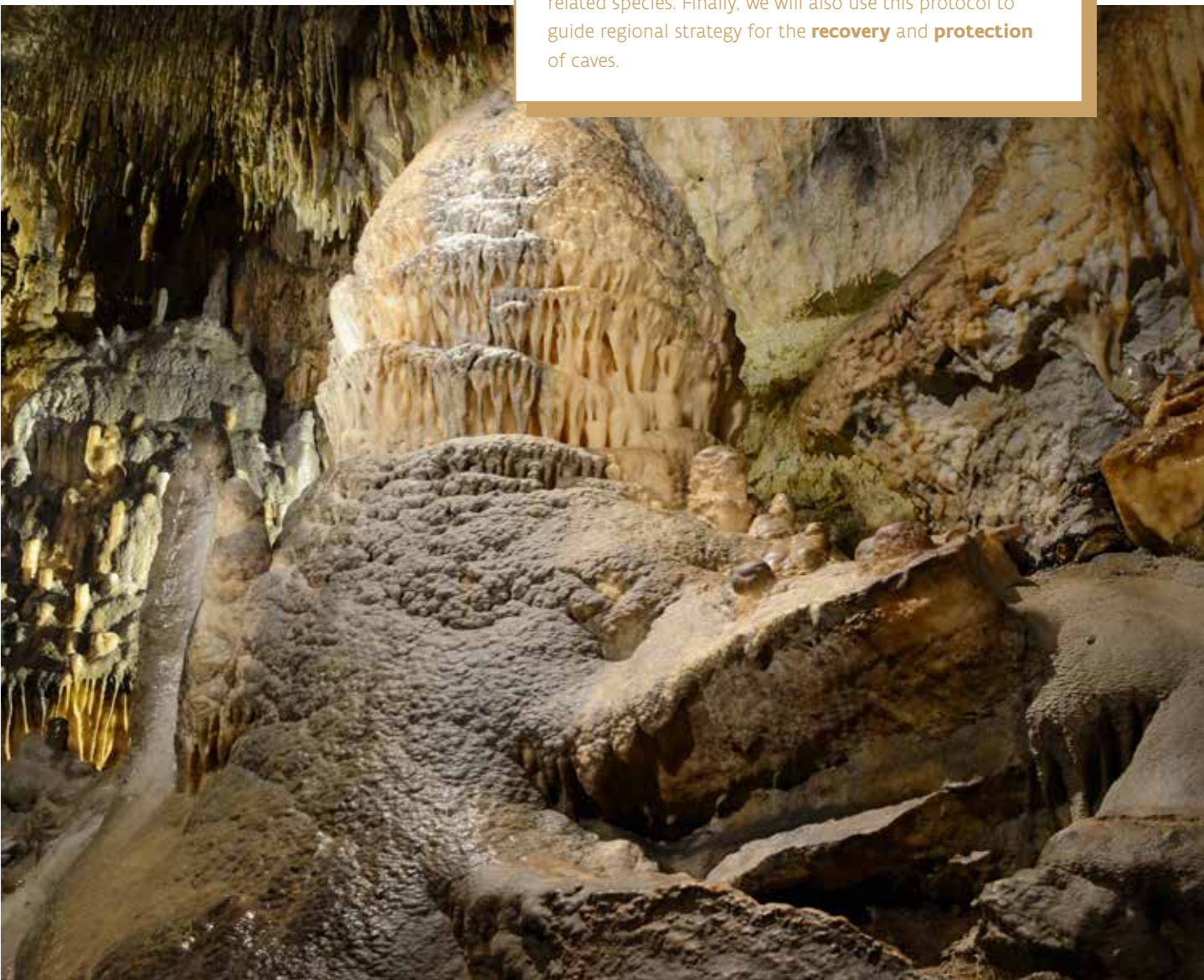
Caves have no vegetation. Therefore, the indicator species here consist of animal rather than plant species.

MONITORING CAVES

A remarkable habitat in Wallonia was given extra focus in the LIFE BNIP: habitat type 8310, better known as the 'caves not open to the public'. These caves are so specific that the Service Publique de Wallonie developed the monitoring guideline to be able to monitor them scientifically.

At the same time, they wanted to use this to evaluate the biological condition of the species. Several parameters were defined for this purpose, taking the hydrogeological context into account. Caves have no vegetation, which means the indicator species here are animal species.

This is in contrast to terrestrial habitats, where plants are very important. The protocol will be applied in Wallonia to evaluate the extent to which we succeed in conserving this unique habitat. In addition, we will use this protocol to significantly improve **knowledge** about this habitat and related species. Finally, we will also use this protocol to guide regional strategy for the **recovery** and **protection** of caves.



Implementation in the field

LIFE BNIP was also active in the field. The following are some noteworthy achievements.

› The nearly extinct Western barbastelle is thriving once again

The **Western barbastelle** (*Barbastella barbastellus*) is a very rare forest bat that lives in old deciduous forests with scrub. From spring to autumn, you will find it mostly in old or dead trees, under bark or in crevices, with a preference for oak trees. In winter, it likes to hibernate in underground cavities, but also behind loose bark. This highly specialised species feeds almost exclusively on small moths. Its hunting territory consists of forests and hedgerows.

In 2012, the Western barbastelle was considered **nearly extinct** in Belgium. To investigate whether that was really the case, **Natagora** headed into the forest. Between 2016 and 2018, this association conducted acoustic inventories with automatic recorders and with telemetry of the captured specimens. This enabled her to redefine the Western barbastelle's range in the western part of the central Ardennes and in the Lorraine region of Belgium. This study provided a fairly complete picture of the location of the main population centres and their hunting areas in Wallonia.

This information helped determine where protective measures were most relevant. An action plan translated the Walloon biodiversity strategy into regional projects. The plan focuses on legislation, habitat restoration and awareness, and who should help protect the species.



“

Natagora, Natagriwal, farmers in the area, and owners and managers of private and public forests worked together to protect the Western barbastelle from extinction.

Natagriwal

Natagriwal **planted hedgerows and deciduous forests** to further develop the Western barbastelle's habitat: hedgerows form the streets and road signs to move around, in deciduous forests it can take shelter. In addition, Natagriwal was also responsible for communicating the action plan through an **accessible brochure** with essential information about the species. This brochure was distributed to forest managers during events.

Farmers in the region

Everyone made their contribution. Planting hedges was extensively promoted in local magazines in the Western barbastelle's habitat. The dedicated Natagriwal advisor approached **farmers in the region**. Those who wanted to plant hedges were also offered technical and administrative support.

Owners and managers of private and public forests

In addition, several deciduous forests were restored on plots belonging to owners and managers of private and public forests. These plots initially consisted of spruce stands, or the trees there were recently cut down. Deciduous forests provide a network of sheltering trees and increase the number of dead trees.

Many hands make light work. Around 100 people attended the symposium on 8 September 2022 on bats and the action plans in Wallonia, Flemish and Brussels Region: representatives of the Department of Nature and Forests, experts, scientists and field managers.

All these efforts led to a nice result: the Western barbastelle is now doing **notably better in Wallonia**. Further efforts to protect this species remain important and are a priority in Wallonia and in Europe.





“

The rare Eurasian bittern, bluethroat, spined loach, bullhead and chub feel right at home again in the Krabbels nature area.

› The bittern is thriving again (ANB)

The **bittern** is a **typical marsh bird** that is perfectly camouflaged in the reed bed. There it breeds among the perennial reeds. In the breeding season, it makes a unique 'hoomp' sound. Unfortunately, the bittern did not do very well in Flanders.

For the restoration of bittern habitat, the Scheldt Valley and its tributaries was one of the most important areas. In the early 2000s, only **two pairs lived in the entire valley**, and just a few years later it was down to one pair. This was an alarming evolution, since the bittern is an **indicator of wetland health**. Therefore, the Flemish government launched a recovery plan that was part of BNIP, together with partners like Natuurpunt and vzw Durme and with private partners like the Port of Antwerp-Bruges and the Scheldt Left Bank Corporation [in Dutch: Maatschappij Linkerscheldeover, MLSO].

In the core area of the remaining pair (150 ha), **new water management** was introduced. By raising the water level in spring (pumping additional water in winter, hydrographic adjustments, etc.), it was possible to maintain an optimal water level even in the driest months, stopping the colonisation of the reed beds by willow trees. Large-scale felling of trees from overgrown reed beds and from the surrounding landscape was carried out, and new reed was planted on about 30 ha. Where grazing (especially by geese) threatened the young reeds, fences were erected, and exotic geese were captured. Critical breeding areas were given electric fencing as protection from foxes. Finally, nine ponds were restocked with fish for three years.

A **new habitat was also created outside the core area with the construction of eight ponds** (also stocked with fish), with optimal water management and the planting of reeds. At several points, fish migration from the river to the watercourses in the valley was restored, and water levels were raised over more than 1,500 ha.

As a result of this management, the number of Eurasian bittern territories grew to four. The number of little bitterns also increased from two to ten.

Private owners also help protect the bittern. Krabbels in Zandhoven, Belgium, is a **pristine nature reserve**, inaccessible to the public, and owned by the Van de Werve family. Thanks to a successful collaboration, the **bittern** feels even more at home there, as do the bluethroat, spined loach, bullhead and chub. Private owners, the province of Antwerp, Regionaal Landschap de Voorkempen, Natuurpunt and the Agency for Nature and Forests joined forces for this purpose. Together, the **partners worked out an overall vision** to optimally restore the area and align all nature goals with their complex water needs. The Agency for Nature and Forests made this wonderful restoration project possible thanks to Project Grants Nature.



› **Rare marsh fish gets new home in Rode Del (Natuurpunt)**

The Rode Del in Arendonk has a new inhabitant: the **rare weatherfish**. Thanks to habitat expansion and the reintroduction of the species by Natuurpunt, this remarkable fish is finding a home there again.

Previously, the weatherfish was only found in nature areas Het Goorcken and De Hooyput, but both populations were **small and genetically impoverished**. Under BNIP, the former peat bog was restored: we removed afforestation and restored the dykes. This keeps the area wet during dry periods. A lot of groundwater also rises to the surface, which can keep it wet all year. In this way, so-called **“kraggen”** can be created: floating pondweed mats that provide ideal habitat for the larvae of the weatherfish. This is because kraggen warm up quickly and contain plenty of food, such as mosquito larvae. The **wetland** is also difficult to access for predatory fish such as pike and perch, allowing the larvae to grow safely.

Because the weatherfish was not yet found in the Rode Del, **200 large young specimens were released** in the restored marsh in autumn 2022. They have Arendonk and Dutch roots and were bred by the Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO). We will monitor the Arendonk populations in the coming years. This will enable us to assess how effective all the efforts have been.

“

‘Kraggen’ are floating wetland vegetation mats. They provide the ideal habitat for weatherfish larvae.





› Owners in Wallonia happily commit to Natura 2000

Wallonia wants to go even further than the legal obligations with its **dynamic management plans**. The challenge here is to find volunteers willing to implement these actions and measures. To get the owners and operators in the regions on board, a consultancy firm also comprising **field workers** was appointed. That firm assists owners from A to Z, helping them formulate concrete proposals for measures, assisting them in searching for additional subsidies and supporting them in applying for the necessary permits. The consultant **advises the landowner**, supervises the work site and ensures that the job is done correctly. The consultants are **local actors**, which ensures **greater support**. In that way, you get a positive story, with local owners happily achieving more than legally required.

“

Consultants who are also field workers motivated the owners and operators of the Walloon sites to cooperate voluntarily.



3

TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE MORE

Nature in Flanders and Wallonia is fragmented, as is its management. Some nature reserves are managed by a government, others by a nature organisation and still others by private owners. Only when **different partners join hands** do you achieve the best results. LIFE BNIP therefore placed a strong emphasis on cooperation among project partners, but also with local and international partners. The project supported actors with various tools.



For the stakeholders

LIFE BNIP supports stakeholders not only in their communication, but also in the implementation of their work. It does so in the form of outreach projects and useful tools, among other things.



› **The Naturavan brought people together on the ground**

How do you bring the story of Natura 2000 to the stakeholders on the ground in an **attractive and accessible way**? Natuurpunt found an answer in the Naturavan, a used caravan converted into a **mobile and innovative promotional tool**. The caravan was decorated with lovely stickers with Belgian natural images, solar panels and a screen for films or presentations. It was used during training sessions, site visits, festivals and promotional campaigns like 'De natuur is jarig' ('Nature's Birthday'). It even went on an actual **tour of Flanders**. The Naturavan brought people together in an easy way. This enabled them to learn in an accessible way about the importance of Natura 2000 in Flanders and what they themselves can do for nature.

“

How do you bring the story of Natura 2000 to the field in an attractive and accessible way?

► Ecopedia: plant species under the microscope (Natuurinvest)

Natuurinvest built the website Ecopedia (ecopedia.be) into **the prime knowledge platform for nature knowledge and nature management in Flanders**. Here you can learn about valuable European plant species and vegetation in an interactive and fun way. Ecopedia describes in detail both the habitat types and species and their management. To do this, several partners joined forces, such as INBO and Natuurpunt.

The site did not become an impenetrable jungle of texts, but an **interactive tool with engaging videos, quizzes and razor-sharp imagery** to clearly convey field knowledge. During the project, the site expanded to more than 1,000 pages. As a result, the number of page views increased significantly: from 35,000 to more than 200,000 a month since LIFE BNIP started. Ecopedia therefore grew to become the reference for accurate, practice-oriented and scientifically based nature (management) knowledge in Flanders.

Besides Ecopedia, Natuurinvest created the weekly **newsletter 'Soorten onder de loep'** ('Species under the microscope'), with nearly 2,000 followers. Each of the 142 editions highlighted one plant species important to wildlife managers of European habitat types. The newsletter discussed the appearance and flowering period for each species, and the habitat and condition for which the plant is an indicator. To maximise the learning effect, each issue focused on a species in bloom at the time. Afterwards, readers could take their own online knowledge test on the species in question.



ecopedia.be



“

Not an impenetrable jungle of texts, but an interactive tool with engaging videos, quizzes and razor-sharp visuals.

› Guide to assessing the socio-economic impact of a nature project

What impact does a nature project have on society, the economy and ecosystem services? And how can you measure them? This is a complex question that every nature project faces sooner or later.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ecosystem services are all the goods and services provided by ecosystems to society, such as providing food, natural flood protection and insect pollination.

Project leaders can carry out a socio-economic impact analysis (SEI) when developing a project. We developed a **manual** that guides them through this from A to Z and offers a better understanding of the **key concepts and goals of an SEI evaluation**. In this way, project leaders can easily draw up an action plan and get access to useful tools, templates and methodologies. It also makes it easier for them to draw up specifications and carry out impact assessments efficiently. Finally, this guide also provides **tools** for people who write and assess project applications.

In developing the manual, we used five case studies as tests. Those studies ranged from small, delineated nature reserves to complex species protection scattered across the Flemish and Walloon regions. In this way, we made the manual **usable in a variety of situations**.

You can access the manual online at: seia.vito.be/nl.



With the stakeholders

Protecting and restoring nature is not something you do alone. LIFE BNIP strongly believed in the importance of (local) actors, associations, partners, etc. When various players get behind Natura 2000, you get a **ripple effect**: more and more people then look after valuable European nature, communicate about it in their own network and thus create greater support. For that reason, LIFE BNIP collaborated with **local stakeholders** through various initiatives.

► Whiskered brome: appeal to farmers to save this heritage species

The *Bromus grossus* or **whiskered brome** is a Natura 2000 plant species found mainly in spelt beds. This annual grass species has been in sharp decline since 1940 due to mechanisation of agriculture. In the early 2000s, the plants still grew in only one place in Belgium (in the south). However, they are very valuable because, for example, they indirectly help pollinate cultivated plants and control crop pests, and because they are a source of food and a habitat for birds. They therefore contribute greatly to the functioning of agricultural systems and ecosystems.

Unlike other crops, such as the poppy, the *Bromus grossus* cannot reseed itself each year, because it is harvested at the same time as the spelt. To ensure its survival, farmers need to reseed *Bromus grossus* when they also spread spelt. For this reason, the plant's survival is **fully dependent on agricultural practices**.

“

In the early 2000s, the *Bromus grossus* only grew in one location in Belgium.



By means of a conservation programme, LIFE BNIP made it possible to redevelop this species. A package of agricultural and environmental measures (MAEC) specially adapted to the whiskered brome enables farmers to **reintroduce and sustain the species**. This also entitles them to **subsidies**. Articles about this new package appeared in the agricultural press, and advisers from Natagriwal also provided direct promotion to farmers. Today, around 20 farmers maintain *Bromus grossus* in their spelt crops in strips or managed plots. This experience was used within LIFE BNIP for **further research into an extinct species**: the *Bromus bromoideus* or Ardennes brome.

BNIP PILOT PROJECTS

BNIP PILOT PROJECTS: LOCAL INNOVATIVE PROJECTS BY STAKEHOLDERS

Thanks to a one-off subsidy of €100,000 within LIFE BNIP, eight different stakeholders were able to develop their own **local and innovative project** around Natura 2000. This is how the pilot projects within LIFE BNIP were born.

What was unique about this project call was that it was **accessible to various project types**: projects focused on communication, education, collaboration, the development of a tool or restoration on the ground. However, in each case, there needed to be a clear focus on Natura 2000. Anyone could submit an application, from private owners to larger stakeholders.

‘LIFE Animated’

by Regionaal Landschap Meetjesland
(budget: €15,000)

The pilot project ‘LIFE Animated’ was run by Regionaal Landschap Meetjesland. That wanted to **inform** children, young people and families in a fun way and get them **moving** in the beautiful nature of the Meetjesland. To do so, LIFE Animated developed short **animated films** and **animal-like mascots** that introduce the general public to the typical nature and animal species of the Natura 2000 sites in the region. **Digital game tours** were also developed, where children explore the area while walking with a tablet or smartphone in hand.

More about this project:
life-bnip.be/nl/life-animated

“

Anyone could submit an application, from private owners to larger stakeholders.

‘Wildlife in Belgium and Europe: their routes unravelled’

by Natuurhulpcentrum Opglabbeek
(budget: €6,440)

The pilot project ‘Wildlife in Belgium and Europe: their routes unravelled’ by Natuurhulpcentrum Opglabbeek highlighted the importance of Natura 2000 sites during the **migration routes of (predatory) birds**. A GPS tracker tracked a Western marsh harrier and a Eurasian spoonbill. The results were astonishing: dozens of Natura 2000 sites across Europe served as natural stops on a migration route towards Africa or as wintering sites in France.

More about this project:
life-bnip.be/nl/wildlife-in-belgie-en-europa

‘Fly along with the Western marsh harrier’

by Regionaal Landschap Zuid-Hageland
(budget: €10,075)

The pilot project ‘Fly along with the Western marsh harrier’ was implemented by Regionaal Landschap Zuid-Hageland and created **greater support for this beautiful bird**. The project brought the **Western marsh harrier** to the attention of farmers but also conservationists, hunters and (local) authorities. For example, Regionaal Landschap Zuid-Hageland committed more farmers to take species protection measures on their farms.

In addition, the project aimed to create interest among local residents and municipal authorities about the Western marsh harrier as an **umbrella species for endangered farmland birds**.

To achieve that, a brilliant **awareness-raising film** was developed. This film highlights the relevance of area-based measures.

Finally, a GPS tracker was used to map the behaviour and territorial use of a Western marsh harrier. In this way, the area could be further improved not only for the Western marsh harrier, but also for other bird species that enjoy temporary strips that are not mowed and other temporary situations in arable areas.

More about this project:

life-bnip.be/nl/fly-along-with-the-harrier



‘Looking out over the Ballewijers’

by Limburgs Landschap vzw
(budget: €15,000)

The pilot project ‘Looking out over the Ballewijers’ by Limburgs Landschap vzw put a **hidden natural gem** in the spotlight. The Ballewijers is a **nature reserve of high natural value** that in its early days struggled with numerous problems, such as disturbance and fly-tipping. To restore the view over the Ballewijers, Limburgs Landschap installed a viewing platform that is also accessible to wheelchair users. In this way, the organisation contributes to **accessible nature experiences** in its own region. The project increased residents’ awareness of living near rare nature. This created a sense of **ownership**.

More about this project:

life-bnip.be/nl/ballewijers



‘Short films on natural values and nature protection in the Belgian part of the North Sea’

by WWF Belgium
(budget: €8,500)

The pilot project ‘Short videos on natural values and nature protection in the Belgian part of the North Sea’ by WWF Belgium put our **beautiful maritime nature** in the spotlight. With these five **short videos**, WWF wanted to sensitise, inspire and engage the Belgian population. It did so with objective information about Belgium’s largest nature reserve.

View the five short videos:
life-bnip.be/nl/5-kortfilms-over-de-noordzee



‘Wet meadows to enjoy at Bertrix and Herbeumont’

By Stéphane Delogne
(budget: €15,000)

‘Wet meadows to enjoy at Bertrix and Herbeumont’ by private owner Stéphane Delogne combined **nature restoration**, extensive **agriculture** and **nature education** in one inspiring pilot project. Together with a herd of Scottish highlanders, a group of motivated schoolchildren and local residents, Stéphane restored a wet meadow complex. This reinforced the importance of Natura 2000 at local level, with a **private owner** also getting involved in managing and spreading a positive message.

More about this project:
life-bnip.be/nl/waardevolle-graslanden-prive-eigenaar

‘Interregional cycle route in the Mark Valley’

by CR Dendre and partners
(budget: €15,000)

In the pilot project ‘Interregional cycle route in the Mark Valley’, several municipalities, provinces and nature organisations such as Contrat Rivière Dendre joined forces. Together, they developed a **65 km Natura 2000 cycling route**, that crosses both Flanders and Wallonia in the Mark Valley. They linked information about Natura 2000 and the region to a sporting activity and the existing junction network. In this way, they reached a **wide audience**. In addition, this pilot project created **enhanced cooperation** between all partners involved, who now have an attractive tourism asset.

More about this project:
life-bnip.be/nl/fietsroute

‘Les aventures de Asty’

by Empreintes vzw
(budget: €15,000)

The pilot project ‘Les aventures de Asty’ by Empreintes vzw puts the spotlight on the Natura 2000 industrial site of the Asty-Moulin quarries with an **interactive app**. Local residents and young people from various social backgrounds were all involved in the development of this walking and gaming app. **Involvement** is increasing both the sustainability and the impact of the project. This is because the project creates **support** for the conservation of the area.

More about this project:
life-bnip.be/nl/asty-empreintes

> With the regions

Thanks to LIFE BNIP, **cooperation** and **knowledge exchange** between all project partners has been greatly strengthened. During workshops and site visits, we shared knowledge and practical experience. This enabled the project partners to learn from each other. Moreover, **interregional partnerships** were set up, for example, for the protection of the Montagu's harrier and the breeding programme of the natterjack toad. Together, we organised several events, from international conferences to a national communication campaign to raise awareness for Natura 2000.

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We let the general public enjoy our unique Natura 2000 sites in Belgium.

DE NATUUR IS JARIG [‘IT’S NATURE’S BIRTHDAY’]: CAMPAIGN TO HIGHLIGHT NATURA 2000 IN BELGIUM

Natura 2000 is an abstract concept for the average Belgian, although there are some wonderful and valuable European nature reserves near many people. That is why all LIFE BNIP partners organise the campaign ‘De natuur is jarig’ each year around 21 May, the European-recognised Natura 2000 day. Together, they highlight **Natura 2000 in Belgium** with low-threshold activities.

We then draw attention to numerous **walking routes** via the hiking platform RouteYou, where hikers can discover our beautiful nature themselves. We also organise many **guided walks**. These events give participants a unique look behind the scenes. There are various **themes**: activities aimed at foodies, sports enthusiasts, nature lovers and families with children.

All these activities share a common goal: to allow the general public to enjoy the **unique Natura 2000 sites in Belgium**. With a national webpage offering an overview of all activities in Belgium and with a promotional campaign through numerous channels, we provide an accessible and attractive overall package.

> Leverage effect

Over the past seven years, LIFE BNIP has invested in the preparation of management plans, species and habitat action plans and species protection programmes. These plans enabled project partners as well as stakeholders and actors to take targeted site actions to achieve Natura 2000 goals. Using various funding instruments, we turn plans into site actions. To support site managers in this regard, the necessary communication and training was also provided. This package of policies, accompanying measures and financing instruments created leverage for a considerable number of site realisations.

The LIFE BNIP directly facilitated the implementation of several species and habitat action plans. site actions led to many **nature realisations** on approximately 4,500 ha. A good example is the Walloon plan for the **Northern crested newt**. Based on an inventory, targeted pools were restored and created. In this way, we improved the habitats of this species and connected existing populations. In total, approximately **1,017 pools were restored in this way** using complementary resources, both in nature reserves and on private land.

Project Grants Nature [Projectsubsidies Natuur, PSN] (Flanders)



Project Grants Species [Projectsubsidies Soorten, PSS] (Flanders)



Project grants countryside [subventions projets ruraux] (Wallonia)



PDR - Rural development (Wallonia)



Natural design (Flanders)



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GETTING STARTED YOURSELF

Would you like to take action for an animal or plant species on your property? Or would you like to know more about Natura 2000? You can find more information below.



Flanders

Project Grants Nature

natura2000.vlaanderen.be/projectsubsidies-natuur

Project Grants Species

natuurenbos.vlaanderen.be/subsidies/subsidies-inrichting-van-natuur/projectoproep-soorten

SBPs

natuurenbos.vlaanderen.be/dieren-en-planten/soortenbescherming/lijst-van-alle-sbps

Nature management plans

natuurenbos.vlaanderen.be/natuurbeheerplannen

Grants for nest protection for protected birds

natuurenbos.vlaanderen.be/subsidies/overige-subsidies/bescherming-nesten-en-jongen-broedvogels

Ecopedia

ecopedia.be

Wallonia

Species and habitat action plans

biodiversite.wallonie.be/fr/plans-d-action.html?IDC=6176

Management plans

biodiversite.wallonie.be/fr/plans-de-gestion.html?IDC=6177



Useful websites

Natura 2000 Vlaanderen

natura2000.vlaanderen.be

e-loket Natuur en Bos

natuurenbos.vlaanderen.be/e-loketten

Natura 2000 Wallonië

biodiversite.wallonie.be/fr/natura-2000.html?IDC=829

LIFE

cinea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/life_en



> A look ahead: LIFE B4B

LIFE BNIP launched several processes to translate the policy into site actions. The project is now coming to an end. **LIFE B4B** (Belgium For Biodiversity) will continue on that path starting 1 January 2023.

- > It expands the network of protected areas.
- > It connects protected areas through defragmentation measures.
- > It draws up and implements management plans.
- > It maintains the momentum.
- > It sets up projects to restore ecosystems.
- > It drafts and implements species- and habitat-specific measures.
- > It reduces light pollution.
- > It further unlocks knowledge about conservation measures.
- > It improves cooperation with actors and stakeholders.
- > It ensures targeted communication.
- > ...

Want to know more about LIFE B4B? www.LIFEB4B.be

Management plans, species protection programmes and species and habitat action plans will continue to form the basis for achieving **Natura 2000 targets** in the coming years. The various authorities and project partners therefore continue to build on the tools developed.

