



Natura 2000
seminar for the Atlantic region
Field visits

AGENCY
NATURE & FORESTS



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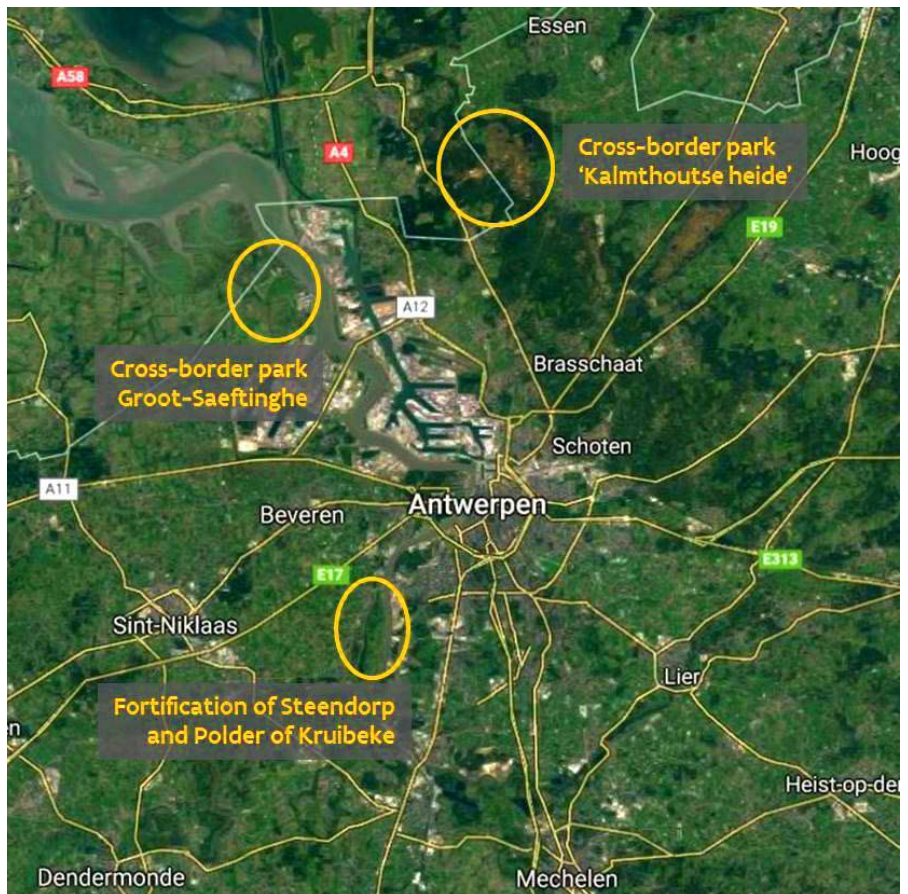
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Introduction

The Agency for Nature and Forests, the competent authority for nature conservation in Flanders, offers three different excursions for participants in the third Natura 2000 Seminar for the Atlantic Region, linked to three of the topics addressed in the programme:

1. Fort of Steendorp and Polder of Kruibeke, situated in the freshwater tidal zone of the River Scheldt;
2. Cross-border park Kalmthoutse Heide, situated on the higher sandy soils of the Campine;
3. Cross-border park Groot-Saeftinghe, situated in the brackish water tidal zone of the River Scheldt.





1. Fort of Steendorp and the Polder of Kruibeke

This excursion will take you into the past and into the future. It shows how even historical buildings can contribute to a favourable conservation status of species of Community interest, and how an integrated safety-led approach to flood protection can return wetlands to favourable condition.

A bus trip will take us to the fort of Steendorp, one of the 32 fortifications of the 95-kilometre outer line of defence around Antwerp. It was built in 1883 as a bridgehead for the River Scheldt, to defend the south-west side of Antwerp. Today, the inner part of the fortress lies in ruins, but it is still accessible. A part of the fortress is sealed off as a winter hibernaculum for bats (pond bat and Geoffroy's bat), managed through the LIFE project BatAction.

Just a stone's throw from Antwerp, in Kruikebe along the Scheldt, lies the largest flood control area in Flanders. Strolling through the picturesque villages of Kruikebe, Bazel and Rupelmonde, you'll find yourself surrounded by varied tidal habitats, open meadow bird areas and centuries old creeks surrounded by alder swamp forests.

This diverse 600-hectare nature reserve can store up to 36 million m³ of water, protecting the region from flooding. If a violent north-westerly storm coincides with spring tides, extra high water levels pose a risk of flooding from the Scheldt and its tributaries. The Polders of Kruikebe are perfectly situated to collect excess water, preventing flooding upstream. Additional flood control areas, further along the Scheldt and its tributaries, reinforce this effect. They are all part of the Sigma Plan.

The project in the Polders of Kruikebe is based on the three pillars of the Sigma Plan (<https://sigmaplan.be/en/>):

- safety;
- nature; and
- navigability of the Scheldt.

In addition to their water storage function, the Polders are an important nature reserve, managed with European funding support (Life+ Scalluvia, LIFE SPARC 'Space for Adapting the River Scheldt to Climate Change').



Connection with themes

This excursion demonstrates links with:

- **theme 1:** protection and conservation of meadow birds;
- **theme 3:** improving the conservation of Natura 2000 sites through integrated management; and
- **theme 4:** communication and stakeholder engagement in Natura 2000.

Natura 2000 sites visited

Habitats Directive Sites

- Historische fortengordels van Antwerpen als vleermuizenhabitat (BE2100045)
- Schelde- en Durmeëstuarium van de Nederlandse grens tot Gent (BE2300006)

Bird Directive Site

- Durme en Middenloop van de Schelde (BE2301235)

Habitats

Estuaries (1130), hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels (6430), alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) (91E0)...

Birds

Marsh Harrier - *Circus aeruginosus*, bittern - *Botaurus stellaris*, bluethroat - *Luscinia svecica*, and spotted crane - *Porzana porzana*...



Fish

European bitterling – *Rhodeus sericeus amarus*, amprey - *Lampetra fluviatilis*, spined loach - *Cobitis taenia*, Shad - *Alosa fallax*

Mammals

European beaver - *Castor fiber*, pond bat - *Myotis dasycneme*

Practical

If you like some action, this is the excursion for you. We will visit the polder by bike, and we will return to Antwerp by the River Scheldt on the 'waterbus'.

Info

<https://sigmaplan.be/en/>

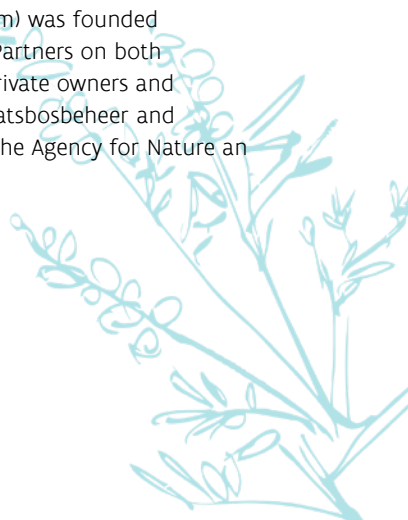
<https://www.natuurenbos.be/fort-steendorp>

<https://www.natuurenbos.be/polders-van-kruibeke>



2. Cross-border park 'Kalmthoutse Heide'

The cross-border park in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) was founded in 2001 with the support of the Benelux and covers 6.000 ha. Partners on both sides of the border include municipalities, water companies, private owners and nature conservation organisations, both public and NGO's (Staatsbosbeheer and Natuurmonumenten in the Netherlands and Natuurpunt and the Agency for Nature and Forest in Flanders).





The LIFE HELVEX and HELA projects focus on restoring inland dunes in De Nelse Duinen, pools in Stappersven, Grootte Meer and Kleine Meer, and dry and wet heath in the area around Mont Noir, which have been degraded by nitrogen deposition and water extraction. A wetland area, connecting Steertse Heide in Flanders and Grootte Meer in the Netherlands, will be created to ensure that species can cross the border again.

The cross-border park attracts a lot of visitors from Antwerp and the surrounding towns. Developing visitor facilities and communicating them is an important part of the work of the cross-park.



Connection with themes

This excursion demonstrates links with:

- **theme 2:** reducing the impacts of nitrogen deposition on the conservation status of species and habitats at a site level;
- **theme 3:** improving the conservation of Natura 2000 sites through integrated management; and
- **theme 4:** communication and stakeholder engagement in Natura 2000.

Natura 2000 sites visited

Habitats Directive Site

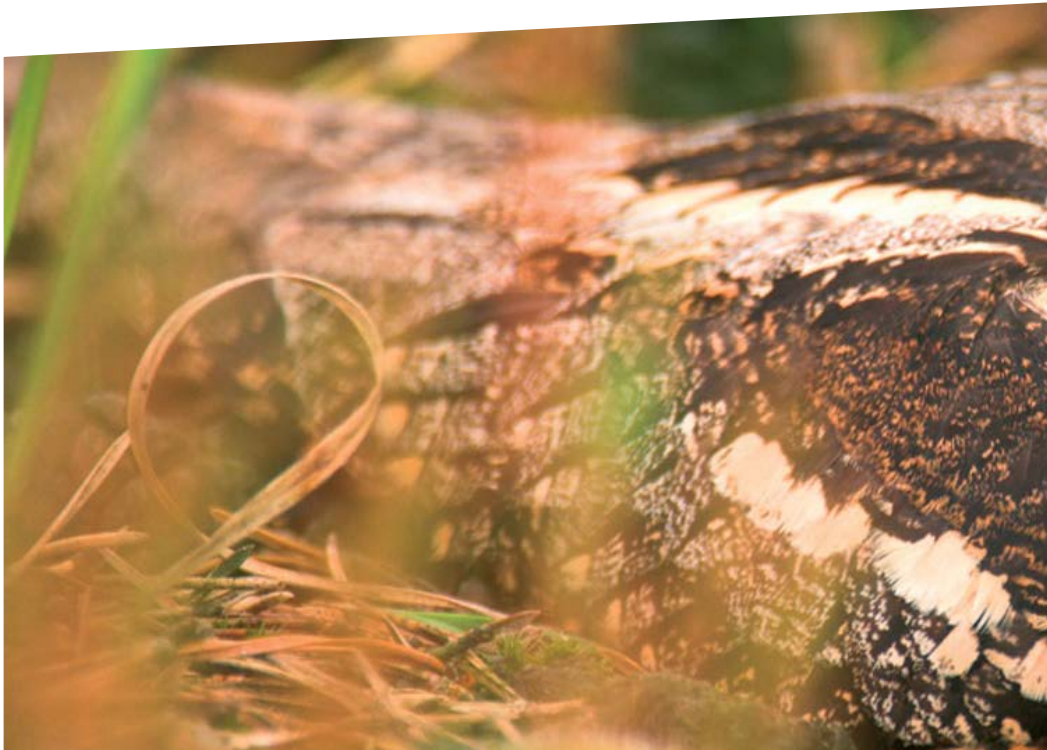
- Brabantse Wal (NL9801055), Kalmthoutse Heide (BE2100015)

Bird Directive Site

- Brabantse Wal (NL3009003), Kalmthoutse Heide (BE2100323)

Habitats

Dry sand heaths with *Calluna* and *Genista* (2310), inland dunes with open *Corynephorus* and *Agrostis* grasslands (2330), oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the Littorelletea uniflorae and/or the Isoeto-Nanojuncetea (3130), natural dystrophic lakes and ponds (3160) Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* (4010), European dry heaths (4030)...



Birds

Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*), little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*), nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*)...

Fish: -

Mammals: -

Practical

We will visit the cross-border park by bus and take different walks in the park. So, put on your walking shoes to see the actions and results of the European LIFE projects HELA and HELVEX and the Interreg project CANAPE ('Creating A New Approach to Peatland Ecosystems').

Info

<http://www.grenspark.be>





3. Cross-border park 'Groot Saeftinghe'

Situated in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium), this cross-border park is currently being developed through funding from an Interreg project. It is situated in and around the Verdrongen Land van Saeftinghe, one of the largest brackish water tidal areas in Western Europe, covering a surface area of 3,600 hectares.

The Hedwige and Prosper Polders, on both sides of the border between Belgium and the Netherlands, will be depoldered and given back to the Scheldt. A new sub-tidal area will be developed next to the Verdrongen Land van Saeftinghe. Over time, an irregular pattern of brackish marshes, shoals and mud flats will develop here; the central part of Doel Polder will transform into a system of channels and creeks, and a high mud flat will develop in the northern part of Doel Polder, currently a habitat for meadow birds.



The depoldering also increases safety against flooding, reducing pressure in case of a storm surge. The tide will become less powerful, causing less damage upstream. These depoldering projects are part of the Sigma plan, just like the Polder of Kruike and mentioned under excursion 1.

The cross-border park aims at connecting the Natura 2000 areas in and around the port of Antwerp with these tidal zones and optimizing the cross-border management. Partners on both sides of the border include provinces, nature conservation organisations, both public and NGO's (Het Zeeuwsch Landschap in the Netherlands and Natuurpunt and the Agency for Nature and Forest in Flanders), the Port of Antwerp and the Flemish government.

Connection with themes

This excursion demonstrates links with:

- **theme 1:** protection and conservation of meadow birds
- **theme 3:** improving the conservation of Natura 2000 sites through integrated management; and
- **theme 4:** communication and stakeholder engagement in Natura 2000.

Natura 2000 sites visited

Habitats Directive Sites

- Schelde- en Durmeestuaria van de Nederlandse grens tot Gent (BE2300006)
- Westerschelde & Saeftinghe (NL9803061)

Bird Directive Site

- Schorren en Polders van de Beneden-Schelde (BE2301336), Westerschelde & Saeftinghe (NL9802026)

Habitats

Estuaries (1130), Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima*) (1330), hard oligomesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of *Chara* spp (3140)...

Birds

Avocet - *Recurvirostra avosetta*, golden plover - *Pluvialis apricaria*, ruff - *Philomachus pugnax*, spoonbill - *Platalea leucorodia*, wigeon - *Anas Penelope*, shoveler - *Anas clypeata*, marsh harrier - *Circus aeruginosus*, Bluethroat - *Luscinia svecica*...

Fish

Shad (*Alosa fallax*), lamprey (*Lampetra fluviatilis*), spined loach (*Cobitis taenia*)...

Mammals : -

Practical

We will visit the area by bus, with the opportunity to take different short walks.

Info

<https://www.grensregio.eu/projecten/grenspark-groot-saeftinghe>

<https://sigmaplan.be/en/>



