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BELGIAN BIODIVERSITY PLATFORM

Highlights Report

2017



FOREWORD

*Dr Hilde Eggermont,
Coordinator of the Belgian
Biodiversity Platform*

In 2017, a [study](#) published in PLoS ONE showed that three-quarters of flying insects in nature reserves across Germany have vanished in 25 years. It shocked many, as it appears more clearly than ever before that current global changes are making vast tracks of land inhospitable to most forms of life. To turn the tide, we need to be pro-active on different fronts, from more trans-disciplinary knowledge production, and more efficient science-policy interfacing, to popularising scientific research, increased awareness raising and more effective actions on the ground. We have to reach out to new actors who are, on the surface, very removed from biodiversity conservation, but whose actions in fact have an impact. We have to focus on solutions, inspire people with good practices, and provide options for better governance and management of natural resources. The challenge is huge in part because effects of biodiversity loss are very often not experienced directly by the public and they cannot be easily translated into economic terms often driving policy makers' decision. Difficult, but not impossible!

In Belgium, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform is one of the entities that aims to work on solutions for nature by building partnerships and creating opportunities for change. By being active in different fields and across a variety of sectors, our team intends to incubate knowledge across stakeholders that may not necessarily collaborate in their daily work. Our projects' activities intend to build common understanding and nurture trust among different communities that get to know each other's constraints, goals and challenges. They showcase that nature is key to life and sustainable development.

In 2017, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform further built up its work along three axes: knowledge brokerage, topical knowledge incubation, and open data, with ample cross-fertilisation. In this highlights report, you will learn how the Platform, in collaboration with its partners, is bridging between science and policy in order to make biodiversity research useful to policy makers. You will also find out how our action in European and global initiatives feeds back to Belgian actors, and how vice-versa, our activities in Belgium have had an impact at European and global levels. You will also discover our work on topical knowledge incubation, which is mostly done through our Communities of Practice and which allows for opening up people's thinking to new topics, methodologies and approaches. Finally, you will read about our activities related to open data, as we strongly believe that open and free access to biodiversity data is essential to solve societal issues.

Together, our results testify the credibility and relevance of the Platform as a science-policy interface for Belgium, and as an important catalyst and support for national, European and global biodiversity initiatives. On behalf of the team, I would like to express our gratitude to our funder, BELSPO, and to our partners, especially our host institutes: INBO, RBINS and DEMNA. We look very much forward to continuing this collaborative effort for a healthier, and more bio-diverse planet!

Wishing you a pleasant reading,

Dr Hilde Eggermont,
Coordinator of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform

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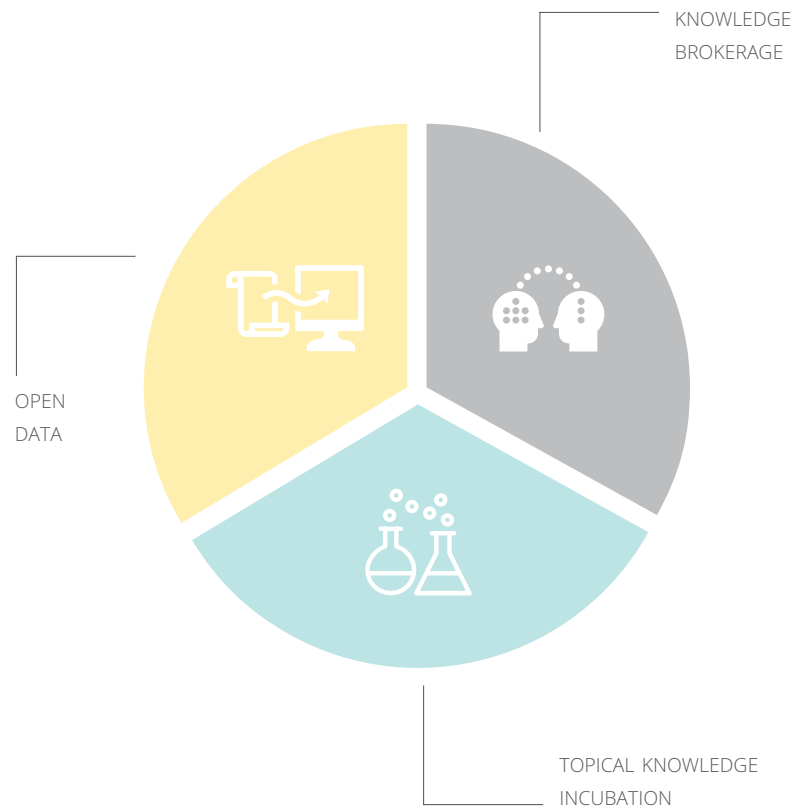
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INTRODUCTION

The [Belgian Biodiversity Platform](#) is a science-policy interface providing services to the Belgian scientific community engaged in biodiversity research, policy-makers and practitioners. Our activities are structured around three main axes:

- Knowledge Brokerage
- Topical Knowledge Incubation
- Open Data

THREE AXES



KNOWLEDGE BROKERAGE

In 2017, we acted as knowledge broker in several ways:

- Providing evidence-based knowledge for decision-making
- Participating in science programming and funding
- Responding to requests related to biodiversity from policy and society

In 2017, we also published a listing of recommendations for science and policy emanating from publications and events we recently participated in (available on our [online repository](#)). We also developed an online section with [tips and tools](#) for researchers and policy-makers.

TOPICAL KNOWLEDGE INCUBATION

In 2017, we acted as topical knowledge incubator by offering scientists, policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders, the opportunity to incubate and enrich their knowledge with other experts on the following topical issues:

- Invasive Alien Species
- Ecosystems & Society
- Biodiversity & Health
- Biodiversity Informatics
- Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and conservation

OPEN DATA

In 2017, we enhanced open access to biodiversity data. We actively mobilised data from Belgian scientists in a diversity of scientific institutes; we provided data cleaning services, tools and methodologies; and we also provided guidance on biodiversity informatics standards. We published biodiversity data online on a global data portal. And we also provided guidance on data usage. Furthermore, we also provided strategic input into global initiatives related to biodiversity data. Our activities regarding data can therefore be summarised along three lines:

- Data mobilisation & publication
- Data access & usage
- Strategic input on open data

1

KNOWLEDGE
BROKERAGE



EVIDENCE-BASED KNOWLEDGE FOR DECISION-MAKING

SCIENCE PROGRAMMING AND FUNDING

RESPONDING TO REQUESTS FROM POLICY AND SOCIETY

EVIDENCE-BASED KNOWLEDGE FOR DECISION-MAKING

*through the
Intergovernmental
Science-Policy Platform
on Biodiversity and
Ecosystem Services (IPBES)*



As a science-policy interface on biodiversity, our organisation conducts a myriad of activities to ensure that policy decisions are taken based on the best available knowledge. Since 2012, we play a pivotal role in this respect by acting as National Focal Point to the *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* ([IPBES](#)).

Established in 2012, IPBES is a global mechanism that facilitates the analysis and synthesis of existing scientific information on biodiversity and ecosystem services for decision-making purposes. Evidence-based knowledge endorsed by IPBES is recurrently used as the basis for legally binding decisions implemented through governing bodies of international conventions, and is often used by national governments to support their policy work.

IPBES IN BELGIUM

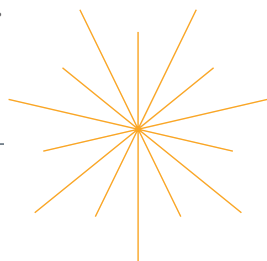
As [IPBES Belgian Focal Point](#), our organisation acted as Head of the Belgian delegation during the fifth Plenary Meeting of IPBES held from 7 to 10 March 2017 in Bonn, Germany. Prior to the Plenary meeting, we prepared Belgian positions in collaboration with relevant administrations and other stakeholders. Together with the European Union and its IPBES Members, we also provided input to the European positions and orientation lines.

Throughout the year, we involved Belgian experts and stakeholders in the implementation of the IPBES Work Programme by:

- Providing information on IPBES and on how to get involved in its activities through our IPBES stakeholders' mailing-list and IPBES National Focal Point [website](#).
- Mobilising and providing experts in the different ongoing assessments (e.g. *Regional Assessment for Europe and Central Asia*, *Regional Assessment for Africa*, and the *Land Degradation Assessment*), expert groups (e.g. *Valuation experts group*) and task forces (e.g. *Capacity building*).
- Organising a third national consultation with Belgian experts involved in IPBES assessments and other areas of work to share best practices.
- Contributing to the fourth *Pan-European Stakeholder Consultation* ([PESC](#)) and capacity building events.

ECA-NETWORK

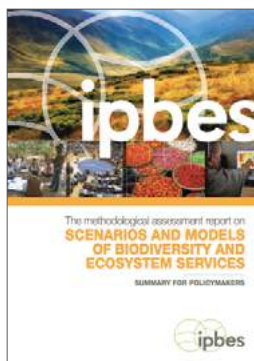
Our organisation also co-created and coordinates the *Europe & Central Asia Network of organisations engaging in IPBES* ([ECA-Network](#)). The goal of the ECA-Network is to support IPBES national platforms of Europe and Central Asia region, to merge their long-term experience in IPBES and related processes, provide a common space for sharing knowledge, best practices, resources, and lessons learned. In 2017, we shared information among ECA-Network members through our mailing list and published relevant publications on ECA-Network website. The network was also used to organise the fourth *Pan-European Stakeholder Consultation* ([PESC](#)) meeting held in Budapest, Hungary in June 2017.



IMPACT

Why is it important to be involved in IPBES?

By acting as IPBES National Focal Point, we promote policy making based on a solid knowledge base. Our activities through IPBES therefore help to support the integration of science into policy spheres at national and global level, eventually participating in the usage of science in society.



OUTPUTS



- Participation in the IPBES Assessments and support in selecting Belgian experts for the implementation of IPBES Work Programme
- National consultations with Belgian experts involved in IPBES to share best practices and transfer feedback to IPBES Secretariat
- Stakeholder engagement and capacity building events
- Policy support tools and methodologies

SCIENCE PROGRAMMING AND FUNDING

through BiodivERSA
Partnership



In terms of science programming and funding for biodiversity research, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform plays a pivotal role both at national and at European level through its multiple involvement in [BiodivERSA](#) project. *BiodivERSA* is a network of 35 agencies and ministries from 23 European countries programming and funding pan-European research on biodiversity and ecosystem services on a competitive basis. *BiodivERSA* also actively supports stakeholders engagement, and science-policy-society interfacing. Belgian members in the project include the *Belgian Science Policy Office* ([BEL-SPO](#)), the *Research Foundation - Flanders* ([FWO](#)), and since the end of 2017, the *Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS* ([E.R.S.-FNRS](#)).

FUNDING RESEARCH

In 2017, *BiodivERSA* launched a joint call on *Scenarios of biodiversity and ecosystem services* building on knowledge gaps and research needs identified in the IPBES Assessment on Scenarios and Models. The *Belmont Forum* and *BiodivERSA* partners together with the *European Commission* have provisionally reserved more than 25 million Euros for this call. Our organisation actively participated in the processes inherent to this new co-fund call together with other members of the Partnership.

PROGRAMMING RESEARCH

Acting as Vice-Chair to *BiodivERSA*, Dr Hilde Eggermont (coordinator of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform) was actively involved in coordination tasks aiming at ensuring the sustainability of the network. For instance, by participating in the establishment of '*BiodivERSA Partnership*' building on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the partners (process to be fully completed by mid-2018). The elaboration of the 2017-2021 *BiodivERSA Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda* ([SRIA](#)) was also key in this regard, as it frames the research domains and priorities to be jointly addressed by *BiodivERSA* members over the next few years.

KNOWLEDGE BROKERAGE

In addition, we implementing tasks for *BiodivERSA* on behalf of BELSPO:

- Science-policy / science-society interfacing

Elaboration of policy briefs, co-organisation of workshops.

• **Mapping activities**

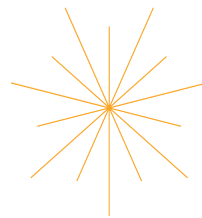
Update, management and analysis of the *BiodivERsA* database; identification of emerging issues; identification of research priorities; listing of *Belgian Research Infrastructures*; listing of *Belgian Knowledge & Technology Transfer Organisations* (KTTO).

• **Communication**

Giving more visibility to funded projects and to *BiodivERsA* itself; linking Belgian researchers with the *BiodivERsA* by communicating on annual calls, events and tools.

• **Interaction with other science-policy interfacing bodies**

We helped to create bridges between *BiodivERsA* and *IPBES* especially with regard to the regional assessments, and to work on models and scenarios; we also reinforced collaboration with *EKLIPSE*, for example through the co-organisation of a webinar on Nature-based Solutions.



IMPACT

Why is it important to be involved in BiodivERsA?

By being active in BiodivERsA, we participate in shaping the research agenda at European level, and we help raising the profile of 'biodiversity' as research priority in the political agenda. We also actively contribute to support Belgian researchers in getting funding for their work through our involvement in BiodivERsA calls.



OUTPUTS



- 25 m. Eur call for research on biodiversity scenarios
- 2017-2021 BiodivERsA Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda and its Implementation Plan
- Knowledge Transfer Technology Organisations (KTTO) listing
- BiodivERsA database featuring over 11.000 research projects on biodiversity across Europe

RESPONDING TO REQUESTS FROM POLICY & SOCIETY

through the European Knowledge and Learning Mechanism for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (EKLIPSE)



In order to further support demands for evidence-based knowledge on biodiversity, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform is co-running the Secretariat of the 'European Knowledge and Learning Mechanism for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services' ([EKLIPSE](#)). The latter is an EU-funded project that aims to create a long-lasting mechanism to answer questions affecting biodiversity so that any decision-maker, practitioner or other stakeholder (CSO, NGO...) can make evidence-based decisions. The European project uses two main options to respond to the requests they receive, using different tools and methodologies for each of them:

FORESIGHT ACTIVITIES

Consists in workshops or online consultations, which are put in place when the existing knowledge is limited and demands for a larger consultation with a community of stakeholders who are familiar with the addressed topic.

In 2017, our organisation supported foresight activities by co-organising a workshop on Horizon Scanning with the *Joint Research Centre (JRC)*. This workshop resulted in identifying the purpose, methodology, organisation, and communication of four different types of horizon scanning approaches. Participants also identified challenges and best practices in horizon scanning, and learned about the use of horizon scanning in decision-making processes.

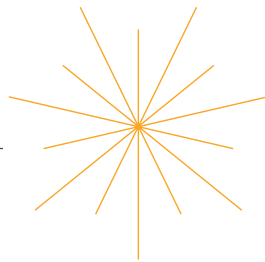
In 2017, we also co-organised a [webinar on Nature-based Solutions](#) with *BiodivERSA* in order to clarify the emerging concept of 'Nature-based Solutions' to stakeholders, and to further raise awareness on the results of the [Workshop on Social innovation and Nature-Based Solutions](#) held in December 2016. The webinar was attended by over 105 participants from science, policy and business spheres.

KNOWLEDGE SYNTHESIS

Consists in gathering multidisciplinary experts who will ensure that the best available knowledge on topical issues is synthesized for the requesters. Besides facilitating the process, our organisation was not involved in knowledge synthesis production, but other *EKLIPSE* partners produced a [knowledge synthesis on Nature-based Solutions](#) to promote climate resilience in urban areas.

STRATEGIC INPUT

In 2017, we were also involved in the coordination of the project and activities of the Secretariat of *EKLIPSE* mechanism. In this regard, we played an important role in safeguarding the long-term mission of *EKLIPSE*, ensuring this vision was at the core of all activities, and sharing it with partners and stakeholders. We also participated in different working groups and activities across the different core functions of *EKLIPSE*. Furthermore, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform was active in the communication activities of *EKLIPSE* and in representing the project in several networks and events.



IMPACT

Why is it important to be involved in EKLIPSE?

By being active in EKLIPSE, we participate in building a mechanism whereby stakeholders will be able to make decisions on biodiversity matters based on the best available knowledge. EKLIPSE responds to requests related to biodiversity in a transparent and credible process and based on EKLIPSE values (open access, scientific expertise, excellence, and inclusiveness of all relevant stakeholders) which are in line with our own values and core activities.



OUTPUTS



- Workshop on Horizon Scanning approaches
- Webinar on Nature-based Solutions
- Science policy brief based on the joint workshop on social innovation and NbS
- Knowledge synthesis on Nature-based Solutions to promote climate resilience in urban areas

2

TOPICAL KNOWLEDGE INCUBATION



INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

ECOSYSTEMS & SOCIETY

BIODIVERSITY & HEALTH

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS & CONSERVATION

BIODIVERSITY INFORMATICS

INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

*through the Belgian
Forum on Invasive Species*



ias.biodiversity.be

Since its inception in 2006, the *Belgian Forum on Invasive Species* ([BFIS](#)) initiated and facilitated by the Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been active in creating links between research, policy and practitioners. This informal network actively participates in consultation of experts on invasive species (IAS) and has, over the years, been involved in several types of activities such as:

- Developing risk assessment protocols
- Developing procedures to support decision-making
- Prioritising species for action
- Organising events whereby researchers, policy-makers and practitioners could meet.

For the past few years however, some experts of the BFIS have partly shifted their focus towards the implementation of the *EU Regulation on IAS* in Belgium. The Belgian Biodiversity Platform has therefore been particularly active in conceptualising and setting-up mechanisms to implement this regulation nationally.

THE EU REGULATION ON IAS

In order to establish rules to prevent, minimise and mitigate the adverse effects of invasive alien species (IAS), the [EU Regulation 1143/2014](#) entered into force on 1st January 2015. The actual implementation of the Regulation is performed through two main bodies at EU level:

- **The EU Scientific Forum on IAS**

made up of representatives of the scientific community appointed by the Member States, which provides advice on any scientific question related to the application of the Regulation, and in particular, on whether additional species for inclusion on the *list of EU concern* and their associated risk assessments are robust and fit for purpose.

- **The EU Committee on IAS**

composed of representatives of all Member States, discusses the compliance of the proposed species with the criteria for listing. Any update of the *list of EU concern* (or *Union list*) is subject to the positive opinion of the *IAS Committee*.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EU REGULATION IN BELGIUM

In Belgium, the implementation of the Regulation involves the competences of the Federal State and the Regions. Therefore, in order to implement this Regulation in Belgium, a *Cooperation Agreement* has been established between the federated entities and three structures were created:

- **The (Belgian) Scientific Council on IAS**

composed of scientific experts providing advice to the *National Committee on IAS*.

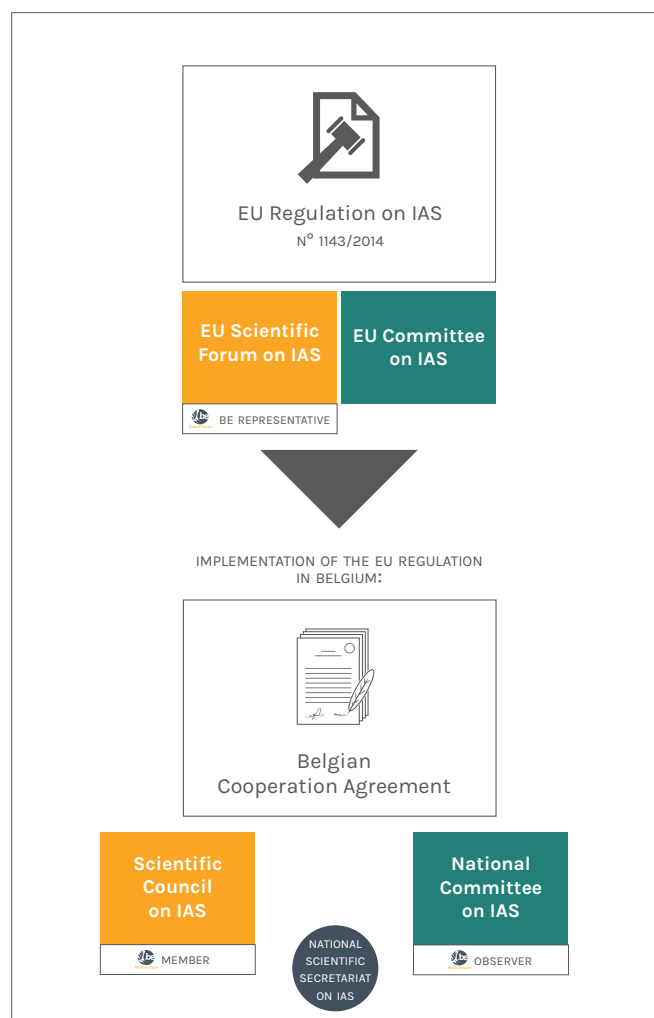
- **The National Committee on IAS**

composed of decision-makers who develop and adopt Belgium's position on the *Union List* and its update.

- **The National Scientific Secretariat on IAS**

supporting the *Scientific Council* in answering questions of the *National Committee on IAS*.

Dr Sonia Vanderhoeven (biodiversity expert of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform) was very active in the set-up of these different mechanisms in the previous years, and now acts as a member of the *EU Scientific Forum on IAS*, member of the *Belgian Scientific Council on IAS*, and observer in the *National Committee on IAS*. In 2017, we were particularly active in reviewing EU risk assessments submitted by Member States and in providing scientific advice on manageability of the species at the Belgian level.



INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

*through the Belgian
Forum on Invasive Species*



ias.biodiversity.be

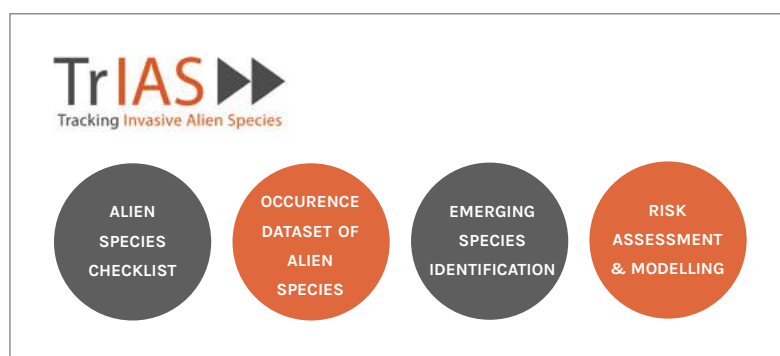
SUPPORT TO THE BELGIAN IAS RESEARCH COMMUNITY

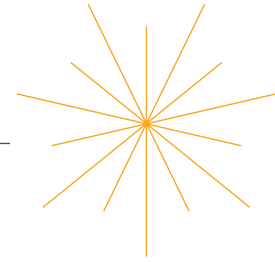
Throughout 2017, our expert on invasive species, Dr Sonia Vanderhoeven, contributed to the following publications:

- [Seven Recommendations](#) to Make Your Invasive Alien-Species Data More Useful (April 2017)
- [Beyond protocols](#): improving the reliability of expert-based risk analysis underpinning invasive species policies (April 2017)
- [Assessing the assessments](#): evaluation of four impact assessment protocols for invasive alien species (January 2017).

We also jointly initiated the set-up of [TrIAS](#), a Bels-po-funded project (2017-2020) focusing on building an open data-driven framework to support policy on invasive species. TrIAS activities will lead to:

- the establishment of an alien species checklist for Belgium
- the establishment of an occurrence dataset of alien species in Belgium
- the development of indicators to identify emerging species
- risk assessments and modelling.





IMPACT

Why is it important to be involved in the topical issue of IAS?

By competing with native species for resources such as food, water or habitat, invasive species often cause declines in the health or population numbers of native species. This can lead to a loss of species diversity. Invasive species also have a negative impact on our economy (for instance, when invasives are pests of agriculturally important plants or animals) and on human health (since some invasive species carry or transmit pathogens to humans). It is therefore crucial to address this issue based on the best available knowledge.

By mobilising experts on IAS at national level since 2006, we have been able to raise awareness on the importance of IAS in the scientific, policy and practitioners spheres and concretely support decision making; we have been able to generate more funding for research on IAS; we had a say in the elaboration of the EU Regulation on IAS; and we now play a crucial role in its implementation in Belgium.



OUTPUTS

- Active participation in the implementation of the EU Regulation on IAS in Belgium
- TriAS project, result of a collaboration with key Belgian experts on IAS.

ECOSYSTEM & SOCIETY

through the Belgian Ecosystems and Society Community of Practice (BEES)



Facilitated by the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, the *Belgian Ecosystems and Society Community of Practice (BEES)* is an informal network of Belgian ecosystem services and socio-ecological systems experts. It contributes to improve *ecosystem-society* interactions by facilitating collaboration, coordination and communication among and between scientists, administrators, policy-makers and practitioners in Belgium.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

In 2017, the BEES Community decided to broaden the scope of its activities, shifting from an 'Ecosystem Services' to an 'Ecosystem & Society' perspective¹. This strategic novelty aligns with a general trend observed at both local and global level to increasingly emphasise the valuation of nature for itself, combined with its values and contributions to good quality of life, rather than for its utilitarian value². In the future, the BEES Community will therefore widen the range of topics it tackles: from conservation issues to the intrinsic value of nature, from governance to relational values between human beings and nature (e.g. livelihood, security, quality of life...), etc.

BUILDING MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

In 2017, BEES organised two major events:

- **The BEES Young Scientist Day**

The *Young Scientist Day (YSD)* is an informal, interactive afternoon focusing on developing interdisciplinary cooperation and exploring transdisciplinary opportunities. The participants shared experiences with short inspiring presentations of their projects on ecosystems and society (bioengineering, forestry, policy...), and had an interactive session of discussions. The event also included a speed dating round: questions, debates and exchanges on the impact of their research on policy and practice. This session aimed at finding new collaborations, joint research topics and linkages to policy and practice between disciplines and regional contexts. In 2017, the Young Scientist Day took place in Ghent on 27 October and was attended by 17 participants from 11 university and research institutes from Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels.

¹ BEES was renamed the 'Belgian Ecosystems and Society community' by the end of 2017 and also revised its vision and mission statement.

² Even though the BEES Community has always interpreted the concept of Ecosystem Services as not restricted to the instrumental value of nature, it does however take into account the fact that a large and growing number of instances perceive it that way. Furthermore, the BEES Community agreed that the concept of 'Ecosystem & Society' better reflects the BEES Community's understanding of socio-ecological systems and all they encompass.

- **The BEES X-mas Market**

On 12 December 2017 in Namur, the BEES Xmas-Market brought together people from academia, public administration and civil society, from Belgium



and abroad, with one common interest: ecosystem services. Participants could attend workshops, exchange ideas at each other's stands, learn from other experiences and discover how ecosystem services are transformed into real products or daily life applications.

INPUT TO INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

In 2017, BEES was active in contributing to European and international initiatives. BEES is able to mobilise Belgian experts in global initiatives through its extensive network spanning across different disciplines and backgrounds (from researchers to administrations in local projects, from IPBES stakeholders to policy-makers, from local academia to local authorities...). This is a Belgian specificity since most countries do not have the equivalent of BEES nationally and therefore do not have the ability to rely on a structure with such an extensive network of experts on the topic of ecosystem services. In 2017, European and international initiatives we contributed to include:

- **Mapping and assessment of ecosystems and their services (MAES)**

The [MAES Working Group](#) is organised by the *European Commission (DG Environment and DG Research & Innovation)* together with Member States to map and assess work produced at the Member State level on ecosystem services. BEES represents Belgium in MAES and therefore reported on activities related to ecosystem services taking place at the Belgian level.

- **ESMERALDA**

BEES also participated in [ESMERALDA](#), a project funded by *DG Research and Innovation of the European Commission (EC)* and focusing on developing an assessment of Ecosystem Services in Member States. For *ESMERALDA*, BEES shared the regional assessment of ecosystem services in Flanders; provided local knowledge as well as input as to how to produce relevant policy work from the Belgian point of

ECOSYSTEM & SOCIETY

*through the Belgian
Ecosystems and Society
Community of Practice
(BEES)*



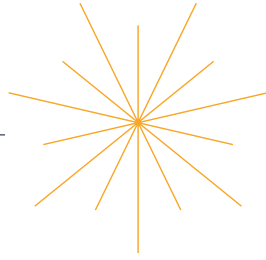
view. BEES also provided feedback on the development of new products that would be relevant for stakeholders involved in *ESMERALDA*. The datasets provided to *ESMERALDA* are then used by the *EC Joint Research Center (JRC)*.

• Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP)

The *Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP)* is a global network aiming at improving the exchange of knowledge on ecosystem services between researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. Dr Sander Jacobs, coordinator of BEES, co-chairs the Steering Committee of ESP and represents Belgium in the network. In 2017, BEES was active in mobilising Belgian experts for ESP activities. Furthermore, by being active in ESP, BEES gets an overview of the global trends in research on ecosystem services and shares its knowledge with the Belgian community so that Belgian experts working on ecosystem services can connect with other projects that are policy relevant.

• IPBES

This year, BEES was also active in the *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)*. Dr Sander Jacobs, coordinator of BEES, participated in the *Regional Europe-Central Asia Assessment* as lead author for the first chapter. In 2017, Dr Jacobs also organised a workshop aiming at screening through each chapter of the *Europe-Central Asia Assessment* in order to identify the diversity of values encompassed in each paragraph of the report. Words such as 'species richness', 'biodiversity', 'ecosystem services'... were identified as being used interchangeably and without integrating the different valuations included under each concept. Based on this workshop, a review table was produced in order to support authors of IPBES Assessments so that such broad concepts could be used depending on the type of valuation authors want to highlight. These valuation review suggestions were taken into account in the *Europe-Central Asia Assessment*.



IMPACT

Why is it important to be involved in the topical issue of Ecosystems & Society?

The links between nature and society are a topic of growing debate. The benefits from nature to people, the potential harmful effects of nature, the use of natural resources -in sustainable or detrimental ways-, and the way decisions are taken regarding the inter- and intra-generational distribution of these benefits are issues at the core of every conservation, environmental justice, and climate debate. Building knowledge and capacity to realise advances in science and practice on a regional, national and international scale is essential, as biodiversity and ecosystem conditions are degrading and unfair decisions on natural resources are turning into conflicts.

By mobilising experts, building mutual understanding, addressing research gaps and being active in science-policy interfaces, the BEES Community plays a key role at both Belgian and global level in raising awareness on ecosystem-society interlinkages and takes concrete steps towards solving socio-ecological issues.



OUTPUTS

- BEES X-Mas Market
- BEES Young Scientist Day
- Contribution to IPBES Assessment as lead author and initiated the review of valuation terms
- Input in European and global initiatives

BIODIVERSITY & HEALTH

through the Belgian
Forum on Invasive Species



Facilitated by the Belgian Biodiversity Platform since 2011, the *Belgian Community of Practice on Biodiversity & Health* (COPBH) works on three main areas:

- Assess, improve and mainstream the current state of knowledge.
- Contribute to integrated knowledge.
- Contribute to integrated policy and practice actions.

In order to tackle these different elements, we collaborate with a diversity of policy institutions (e.g. *The Province of Antwerp, the Flemish Agency for Nature and Forest*), research institutions (e.g. *Antwerp University, Scientific Institute for Public Health, UCL, RBINS, KULeuven, the Belgian Superior Health Council, the National Botanical Garden*), NGOs (e.g. *Natuurpunt, BOS+*) and many more organisations and individuals.

IMPROVEMENT OF CURRENT KNOWLEDGE

Our activities focus on assessing the current state of knowledge on biodiversity and health in Belgium and beyond by producing information documents and by organising events and other activities to stimulate the creation and sharing of knowledge among experts across disciplines and practices. We also take stock of the current gaps of knowledge in order to assess which research priorities should be targeted. In 2017, Dr Hans Keune (biodiversity expert of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform) collaborated closely with the *Belgian Superior Health Council* in preparing a review process on Nature & Health for Belgium.

CONTRIBUTION TO INTEGRATED KNOWLEDGE

OneHealth is one of the approaches that aims to bridge human health and the health of other species or ecosystems to address complex challenges faced by the global health and environmental communities. Our Community of Practice is therefore particularly active in ensuring that more interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research is being undertaken to better assess the links between biodiversity and health, and more generally in raising awareness on the concept of *OneHealth* in Belgium. In 2017, we participated in this effort by taking stock of the outcomes of the 2016 *European OneHealth/EcoHealth workshop* that we organised in Brussels in 2016 by finalising the [report](#) of the workshops sessions and published a scientific paper reflecting on the results of the event.

CONTRIBUTION TO INTEGRATED POLICY ACTIONS

The understanding of the interlinkages between biodiversity and health has gained momentum over the years, yet it remains a challenge to ensure decision-makers in policy and practice fully grasp the concept and its multiple facets. In 2017, our efforts in this regard focused on collaborating with the *Province of Antwerp* and the *University of Antwerp* who are working on the integration of knowledge on nature & health in health care practice. This includes awareness raising and networking meetings, as well as investigating opportunities and challenges. In 2017 the COPBH was invited as expert speaker in several meetings, including for a hearing on nature & health linkages in the *Flemish Parliament*.

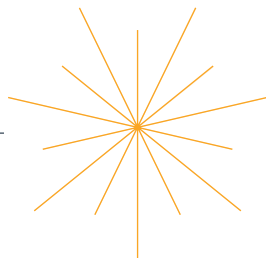
INPUT TO INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

At the intergovernmental level, we contributed on health issues in the context of IPBES and SBSTTA. In 2017, the COPBH was involved with lead authorship in the *IPBES Regional Assessment Europe & Central Asia*, coordinating the parts on nature & health linkages. The COPBH also advised on the topic of biodiversity & health during the December meeting of the *Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA)* of the *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*.

IMPACT

Why is it important to be involved in the topical issue of Biodiversity & Health?

Internationally, the interest for this topical area is increasing rather fast over the past years and it is important to follow these developments for Belgian stakeholders in science, policy and practice. By our diversity of activities, we incubate this topic through several initiatives and across disciplines, therefore acting as a catalyser for this topic to further emerge in the concerned spheres in Belgium and globally.



OUTPUTS

- Contributions on the topic of biodiversity and health to Belgian delegations within international biodiversity related processes such as CBD, SBSTTA and IPBES
- Expert contributions to expert assessments, reviews, panels and/or workshop, e.g. for IPBES, BiodivERSA, EKLIPSE, and the Belgian Superior Health Council
- Awareness raising, building bridges among communities, and capacity building.



NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS & CONSERVATION

through the National Focal Point of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)



Nature-based Solutions (NbS) refer to the sustainable management and use of nature for tackling societal challenges such as climate change, water security, food security, human health, and disaster risk management.

PROMOTION OF THE NBS CONCEPT

In 2017, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform was active in promoting and clarifying this concept. A key achievement of this year was the co-organisation of a [webinar on Nature-based Solutions](#) in order to clarify the concept to stakeholders, and to further raise awareness on the results of the *Workshop on Social innovation and Nature-Based Solutions* organised by EKLIPSE in December 2016. This webinar was organised in collaboration with BiodivERsA and EKLIPSE projects and with input from the *European Commission* and the *International Union for the Conservation of Nature -IUCN*. We also co-drafted the *BiodivERsA Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA)* that has Nbs as one of its core research themes.

CONTRIBUTION TO CONSERVATION EFFORTS

The Belgian Biodiversity Platform is the *National Focal Point* for the *International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)*, the world's oldest and largest global environmental organisation. As Belgian [IUCN Focal Point](#), we work on strengthening conservation-related actions in Belgium and we promote success stories of Belgian IUCN members. We also provide the opportunity for IUCN members in Belgium and actors in the field of nature conservation to meet and discuss conservation issues, exchange best practices and information, and influence national policies related to the conservation of nature. Most of these activities are highly interlinked with our Communities of Practice.

In 2017, we contributed to the *Working group of National Committee Development in Europe, North & Central Asia* by attending meetings and exchanging best practices amongst national committees and focal points. The Working Group also invested substantial time in preparing for the establishment of a possible *Interregional Committee for West Europe, East Europe, North & Central Asia*. In 2017, Dr Hilde Eggermont, coordinator of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, also contributed to the *IUCN European Policy Advisory*

Group (EUPAG). Established in 2014, this group advises the *European Regional Office* in Brussels on EU level policy issues.

We also coordinated the input for the IUCN report on existing national policies tackling the issue of marine plastic waste in EU Member States.

Finally, as *IUCN Concillor for West Europe*, Dr Hilde Eggermont also engaged in setting strategic direction and policy guidance for the work of the Union, and in providing oversight and guidance on the performance of the components of the Union.

Through our activities of biodiversity data mobilisation and publication, we encourage researchers to make use of Biodiversity Informatics tools and standards. In 2017, we started an [online forum](#) which can be joined to discuss biodiversity informatics. Biodiversity informatics tools and standards are crucial for scientists wishing to share their data and ensure others can make use of this data for better research and policy.

BIODIVERSITY INFORMATICS

*through the
Communication Hub
on Biodiversity &
Informatics*



3

OPEN DATA



DATA MOBILISATION & PUBLICATION

DATA ACCESS & USAGE

STRATEGIC INPUT ON OPEN DATA

DATA MOBILISATION & PUBLICATION

*through the Global
Biodiversity Information
Facility (GBIF)*



OPEN DATA

In 1992, the Rio Conference called for a global biodiversity data portal. Few years later, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility ([GBIF](#)) project was launched, and the Belgian Biodiversity Platform was a member of GBIF since its inception. At the beginning, our organisation was mainly active in raising awareness about the concept of sharing data within the Belgian scientific community. At that time, many scientists were reluctant to publish their data in an open manner. It is partly through our efforts along the years in promoting the idea of open data that the concept emerged in Belgium and slowly took roots in the scientific community.

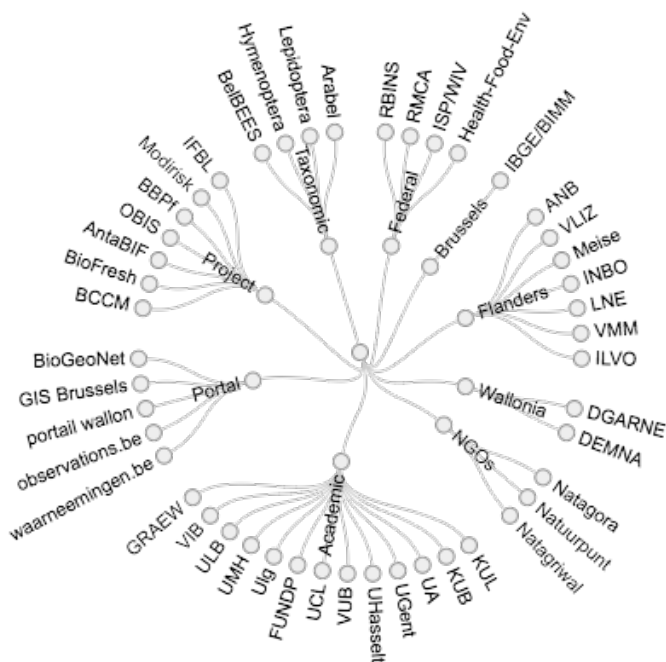
At first, our activities mainly consisted in aggregating data in order to get an overview of the available datasets, we then moved towards data standardisation in order to be able to compare the available data. And nowadays, we go way beyond it, with active mobilisation, publication and access, using a wide variety of biodiversity informatics tools and standards.

All our activities are conducted under the belief that open and free access to data and projects related to biodiversity is key to solve societal issues, since this knowledge can be accessed and used by decision-makers. Open access ensures that scientists' work is recognised and accessible to all so that it can be used efficiently. It guarantees transparency and allows the re-use of data which is important from an economic perspective, but also from a more general view: by getting access to data, administrations can make better informed decisions. With open access, we can now monitor, study and protect biodiversity and its trends at all spatial scales. Furthermore, researchers, practitioners and other stakeholders can make use of published data for their work. Also, when Belgian researchers publish data gathered in foreign countries (e.g. data collected in Africa and gathered at the *Royal Museum for Central Africa*), publishing it on GBIF data portal allows for the preservation of this data, and the sharing with local scientists who can make use of this data for their research. Last but not least, this data can be used today, but also in the future, by next generations.

DATA MOBILISATION

In 2017, our organisation was actively mobilising data from Belgian data publishers through the work of our Data Acquisition Managers: Dimitri Brosens and Maxime Coupremagne. Data mobilisation includes a wide range of activities, such as meeting with potential data publishers and raising awareness on the importance of data sharing; providing technical support to data providers, by fixing issues from the source database, clean contents, spot different types of technical problems, etc. and prepare for the extraction of the database and finally, publish it into GBIF data portal with the support of the IT team, composed of Ir André Heughebaert, IT Team Coordinator; Julien Cigar, System Administrator; and Nicolas Noé, IT Expert.

When requested, our Data Acquisition Managers also provide support in the development of 'open data policy' (for institutions wishing to have internal guidelines on open data) and 'data management plans' (for scientists requested to plan the kind of data they will generate, in which format, and where they will store it).



Circular dendrogram of Belgian Data owners grouped by type.

DATA MOBILISATION & PUBLICATION

*through the Global
Biodiversity Information
Facility (GBIF)*



DATA PUBLICATION

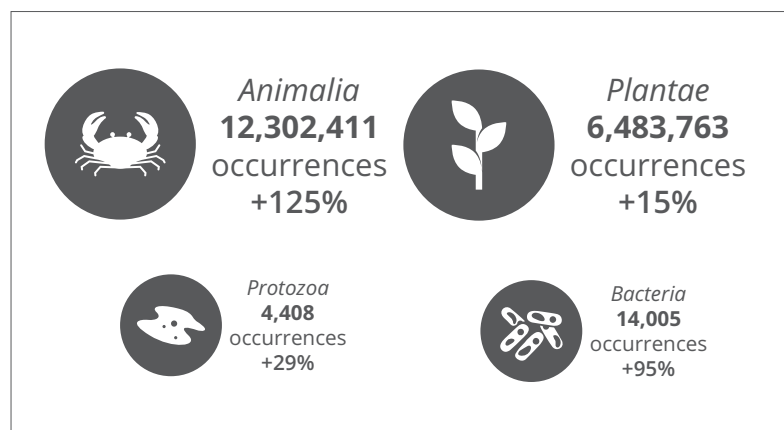
The Belgian Biodiversity Platform is the Belgian node to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). As such, we support Belgian individuals and institutions wishing to publish or make use of biodiversity data on GBIF network.

After having worked on data mobilisation, the next step consists in data publication, which involves the use of biodiversity data informatics tools and standards, publishing tools, open softwares, etc.

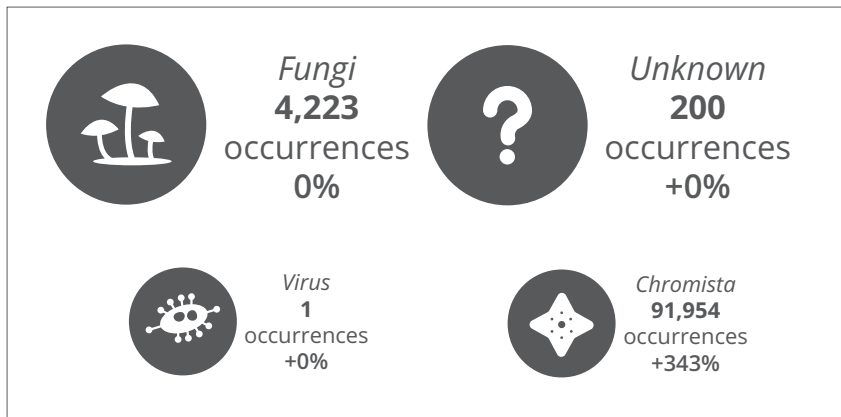
In 2017, there were 19 data publishers from Belgium that published data on GBIF, and we reached a total of over 20 millions published occurrences, 114 published datasets, and 232 countries, territories and islands covered by data from Belgium.



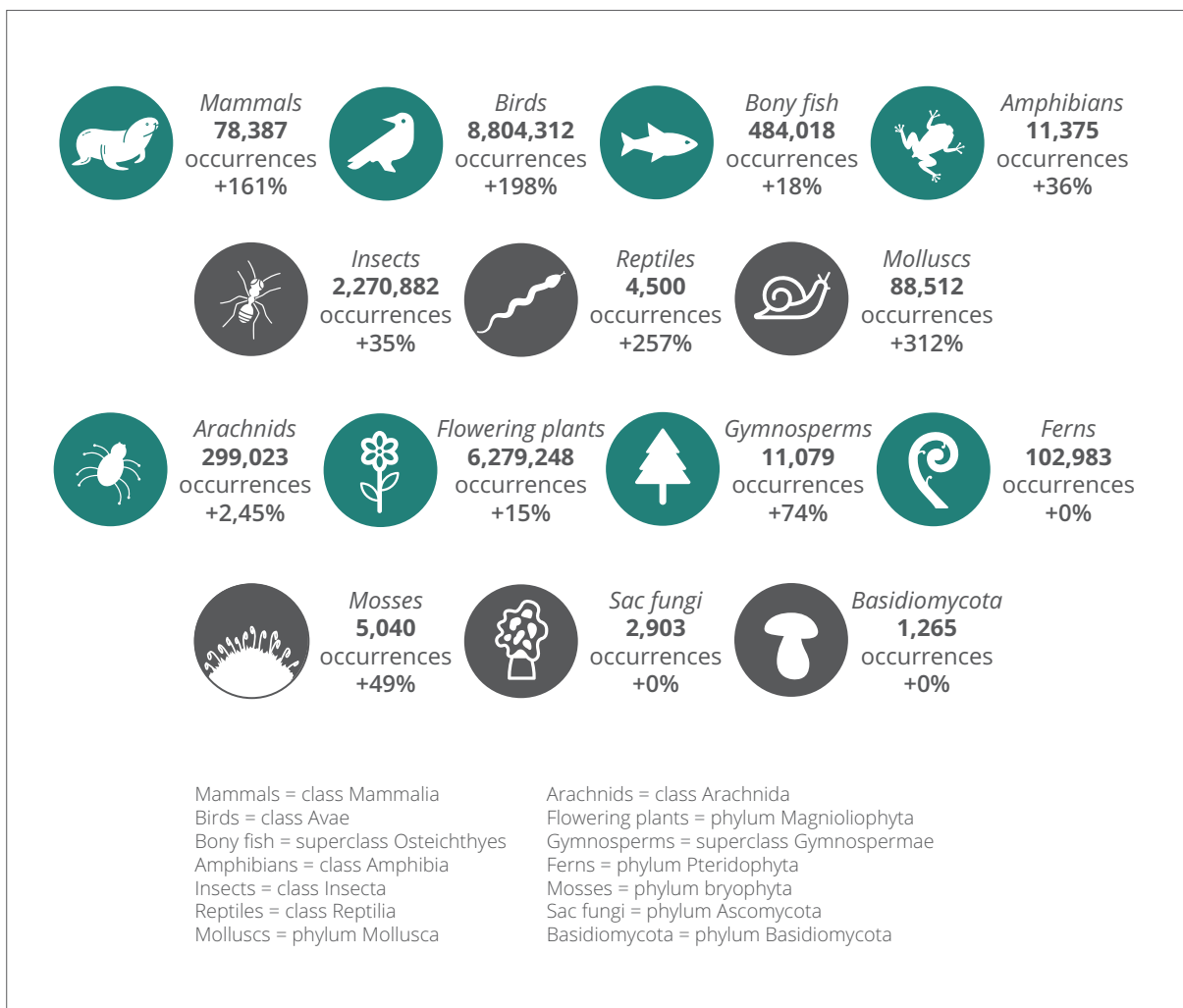
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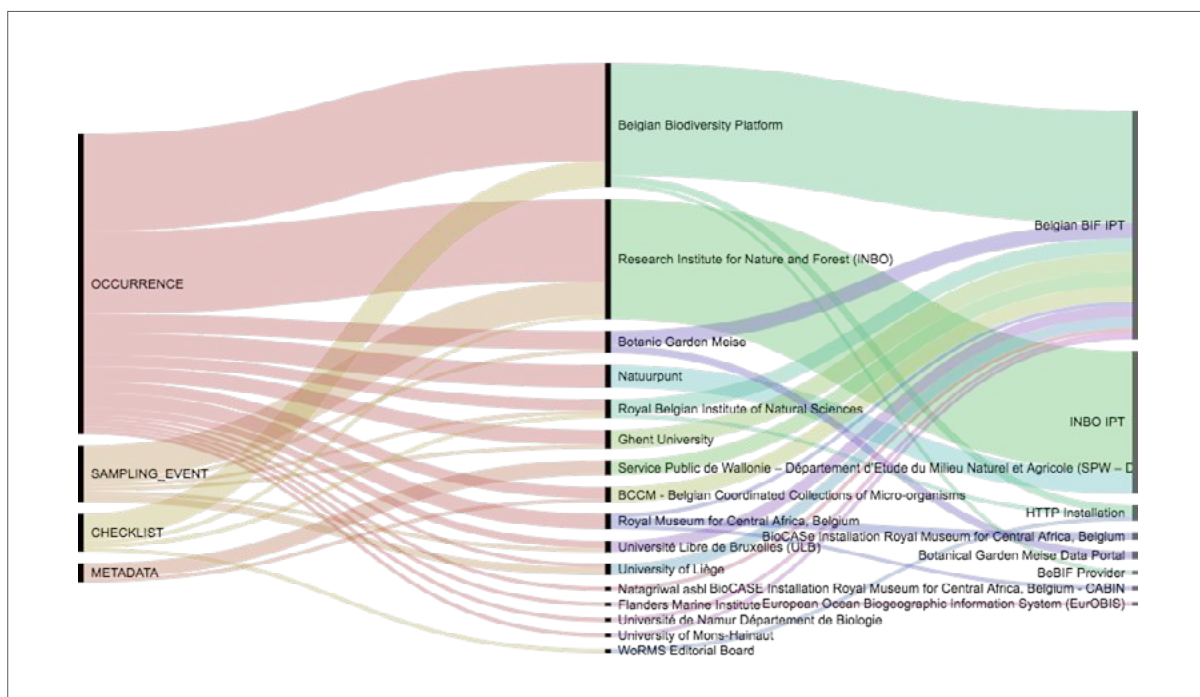
Examples of occurrences from Belgian scientists published on GBIF in 2017



Examples of occurrences from Belgian scientists published on GBIF in 2017



Examples of occurrences from Belgian scientists published on GBIF in 2017



Alluvion graph showing the 110 Belgian datasets published through GBIF by: type of data (left hand); Publishing Organisation (center); Technical Installation, e.g. IPT (right hand). Flows sizes refer to the number of datasets (not the number of records).

DATA ACCESS & USAGE

Once published, the data can be accessed and used by any interested party. In 2017, there were 18 peer-reviewed articles using GBIF-mediated data by co-authors based in Belgium. And overall, there were 6,029,475,314 records downloaded in Belgium by 121 users.

In 2017, we started the [Bireme project](#) with four other European GBIF nodes. This project aims to describe EU reporting processes and data flows in five EU countries, investigate how GBIF could facilitate EU reporting and recommend changes to GBIF tools and procedures, if appropriate. Best practices will be identified, summarised and spread to all EU countries.

Researchers from Belgium contributed to

18

peer-reviewed articles citing GBIF use in 2017 and a total of

61

articles since 2008

Data download requests in Belgium

6,029,475,314

records in

896

downloads by

121

users

CAPACITY BUILDING

The Belgian Biodiversity Platform is also active in mentoring programmes. Mentoring activities consist in interactions among two or more GBIF nodes where the core objective is the transfer of information, technology, experience and best practices in small groups. The GBIF Belgian node has had a long history of mentoring projects in Africa, Asia and Europe. In 2017, we provided mentoring support to projects in Cameroon, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Ivory Coast*.

STRATEGIC INPUT TO GBIF

Ir. André Heughebaert, Coordinator of the IT Team of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, is Chair of the *Participant Nodes Managers Committee* and Chair of the *Nodes Steering Group* since October 2016, . The *Participant Node Managers Committee* (known as the '*Node Committee*') serves as a forum for sharing information about the status and best practices of the different GBIF nodes globally. The *Node Committee* also plays a role of advisor to the Governing Board and other GBIF instances. The *Nodes Steering Group* was established to ensure an effective planning and execution of the mandate of the *Node Committee* and to act as an interface between the Nodes and other parts of the GBIF Governance. As Nodes Chair, Ir. Heughebaert is also a member of the *GBIF Executive Committee*, therefore gaining knowledge on the global vision of the initiative and at a key position to contribute to the strategic decisions of GBIF.

STRATEGIC INPUT ON OPEN DATA

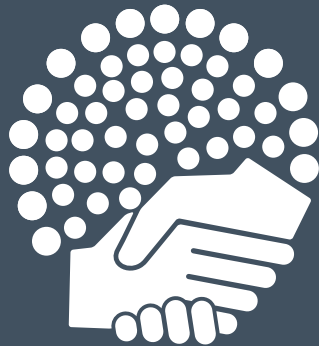
*through the Global
Biodiversity Information
Facility (GBIF)*



**African projects for which we provided mentoring support in 2017:*

- *Strengthening the biodiversity stakeholders network in Togo*
- *Capacity building and biodiversity data mobilisation for conservation and policy in Africa*
- *Mobilisation of diversity data on bees in Cameroon*
- *Capacity Building and Biodiversity data mobilization to address Amphibian conservation in DR Congo*
- *Extension and management of the reference collections of bee pollinators in West Africa (Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast).*
- *Data mobilisation for crop protection against native and invasive pest species for sustainable agricultural production in Cameroon*
- *Developing an Accessible Biodiversity Information System for Sustainable Development in Cameroon.*

structure



OUR TEAM

OUR PARTNERS

OUR TEAM

*In 2017, our team
was composed of:*



MANAGEMENT TEAM



Dr Aline VAN DER WERF
Manager



Dr Hilde EGGERMONT
Coordinator

SCIENTIFIC TEAM



Estelle BALIAN
Biodiversity Expert



Lise GOUDESEUNE
Biodiversity Expert



Dr Sander JACOBS
Biodiversity Expert



Dr Hans KEUNE
Biodiversity Expert



Dr Sonia VANDERHOEVEN
Biodiversity Expert



Jorge L. VENTOCILLA
Biodiversity Expert

OPEN DATA TEAM



Ir André HEUGHEBAERT
IT Team Coordinator



Dimitri BROSENS
Data Acquisition Manager



Julien CIGAR
System Administrator



Maxime COUPREMANNE
Data Acquisition Manager



Nicolas NOE
IT Expert

COMMUNICATION TEAM



Angélique BERHAULT
Communication Coordinator



Pierre HUYBRECHTS
Communication Officer

The Belgian Biodiversity Platform is deeply grateful to our funder, the Belgian Science Policy Office ([BELSPO](#)) for supporting our work:

OUR PARTNERS

In 2017, our partners included:



We are also very thankful to our host institutes for hosting our team in their premises:

- The Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences ([RBINS](#))



- The Research Institute Nature and Forest ([INBO](#))



- The Département de l'Etude du milieu naturel et agricole ([DEMNA](#))



The initiatives mentioned above are also members of our Steering Committee, which is also composed of the following members. We would like to thank them all for the strategic guidance they provide us with:



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*A report compiled and designed by Angelique Berhault,
Communication Coordinator of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform*

MORE INFORMATION



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contact@biodiversity.be



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