



The Belgian Biodiversity Platform

2000 | 2020



Biodiversity.be



CONTENTS

Abbreviations and glossary	4
Reflections from former staff	6
Foreword	7
Introduction	8
Inception phase (2000 - 2003)	10
Formation phase (2004 - 2008)	12
Incubation phase (2009 - 2019)	16
Knowledge brokerage	18
Topical knowledge incubation: the role of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform as a catalyser	23
Open data: the pioneering role of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform	26
Acceleration phase	30
From 2020 onwards	30
Our team	33
Management team	33
Scientific team	33
Open data team	33
Communication team	33
Past members of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform	34
Our partners	35

A report compiled by Angelique Berhault and Divija Jatavallabhula in collaboration with the current team at the Belgian Biodiversity Platform.

Photos and icons: Unsplash.com © Danielle Barnes, Aaron Burden, David Clode, Chirag Saini and Pascal Van de Vendel; flaticon.com

Graphic Design: Marine De Keyzer

© 2020 - Belgian Biodiversity Platform

Printed on recycled paper



ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

<u>ANTABIF</u>	Antarctic Biodiversity Information Facility
<u>AntaBIS</u>	Antarctic Biodiversity Information System
<u>AQUACROSS</u>	A Horizon 2020 project which aims to support EU efforts to protect aquatic biodiversity and ensure the provision of aquatic ecosystem services
<u>BCCM</u>	Belgian collection of microorganisms
<u>BeBIF</u>	Belgian node to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility
<u>BEES</u>	BElgian Ecosystems and Society (community of practice)
<u>BELSPO</u>	Belgian Science Policy Office
<u>BFIS</u>	Belgian Forum on Invasive Alien Species (community of practice)
<u>Biodiv-Belnet</u>	An online database aiming at developing an inventory of Belgian biodiversity-related programmes, projects, scientists, and research teams
<u>BiodivERsA</u>	A pan-European network of national and regional funding organisations promoting research on biodiversity, ecosystem services and nature-based solutions, and offering innovative opportunities for the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity
<u>CAML</u>	Census of Antarctic Marine Life
<u>CBD</u>	Convention on Biological Diversity
<u>COST</u>	European funding organisation for research and innovation networks.
<u>DEMNA</u>	Département d'Etude du Milieu Naturel et Agricole (Department of Study of the Natural and Agricultural Environment)
<u>EMBN</u>	Belgian Node of the Global Bioinformatics Network
<u>ENBI</u>	European Network for Biodiversity Information
<u>EPBR</u>	European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy
<u>ERA-Net</u>	A funding instrument of the European Commission designed to support public-public partnerships
<u>FADA</u>	Freshwater Animal Diversity Assessment
<u>FIP</u>	Freshwater Information Platform
<u>FRS-FNRS</u>	National Fund for Scientific Research for the French Community
<u>FWO</u>	The Research Foundation – Flanders for the Flemish Community
<u>GBIF</u>	Global Biodiversity Information Facility
<u>GIS</u>	Geographic Information System
<u>IAS</u>	Invasive Alien Species
<u>IISD</u>	International Institute for Sustainable Development

IMoSEB	International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity
<u>INBO</u>	Instituut voor Natuur en Bos-onderzoek (Research Institute for Nature & Forest)
<u>INVASIVESNET</u>	International Association for Open Knowledge on Invasive Alien Species
<u>IPBES</u>	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
<u>IUCN</u>	International Union for Conservation of Nature
<u>OBIS</u>	Ocean Biogeographic Information System
<u>OCDE</u>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<u>RBINS</u>	Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences
<u>SCAR</u>	Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research
<u>SCAR-MarBIN</u>	Marine Biodiversity Information Network of SCAR
<u>TrIAS</u>	Tracking Invasive Alien Species, a project funded by the Belgian Science Policy Office
<u>UNEP</u>	United Nations Environment Programme
<u>VLIZ</u>	Flanders Marine Institute
<u>WPIEI</u>	Working Party on International Environment Issues

REFLECTIONS FROM FORMER STAFF

"Over the past 20 years, the Belgian biodiversity platform has worked with admirable adaptability to answer evolving research and policy needs, and has thereby illustrated the added value of a dedicated, well-functioning science-policy platform"

Hendrik Segers, National Focal Point to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (Coordinator, Formation - Incubation phase)

"The Belgian Biodiversity Platform initiated several European and international initiatives, today playing a crucial role in biodiversity (research) policy: the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS – influencing several Framework Programmes from the European Commission), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), BiodivERsA (network of national and regional funding organisations promoting pan-European research on biodiversity and ecosystem services), and the biodiversity research infrastructure LifeWatch."

Jurgen Tack, Scientific Director, European Landowner's Organisation (Biodiversity Expert, Formation phase)

"The Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been this amazing incubator for innovative ideas in support of a more efficient and creative interface between scientists, policy makers and society. I remember in particular one of the most ground-breaking event for me, 10 years ago in 2010 with the summit "Positive Visions for Biodiversity" where the Belgian Biodiversity Platform along with partners at national and European level triggered a large brainstorming session with representatives of society on the future of the relationship between humans and nature...It is still very much relevant and I am sure the Belgian Biodiversity Platform will be this catalyser for more transformative initiatives like this one to be part of the change we need for a better world for us and for the rest of the living world"

Estelle Balian, CEO, Facilitation for Environmental

Action and Learning (Biodiversity Expert, Formation - Incubation phase)

"I spent several years working for the Belgian Biodiversity Platform and I had a nice professional experience at that time in involving the scientific community to develop decision support tools on invasive alien species in Belgium"

Etienne Branquart, Biodiversity Expert, Service Public de Wallonie - DEMNA (Biodiversity Expert, Inception phase)

"I've had the chance to collaborate with the Belgian Biodiversity Platform for 10 years and noticed its role and impact for the development of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) network cannot be overstated. On a personal level, I've truly grown a lot by closely working with such dynamic, positive, and very professional bunch of people!"

Nicolas Noe, Open Data Manager, Research Institute for Nature and Forest (Data Manager, Incubation phase)

"The Belgian Biodiversity Platform is a key player in the international Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) community and an example regarding data publication and outreach. On a personal level, it has been a springboard for my career in biodiversity informatics."

Peter Desmet, Open Data Coordinator, Research Institute for Nature and Forest (Data Manager, Incubation phase)

"The work that I do would not be possible without the Belgian Biodiversity Platform. The SCAR Antarctic Biodiversity Portal has an continues to benefit from their advice and support. Working with them has always been a joy."

Anton Van de Putte, Science Officer, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (Science officer, Incubation phase)

Aline van der Werf

Manager of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform & Programme
Manager for the Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO)



FOREWORD

In the last year, young people across the world have taken to the streets to call for action from political leaders to fight the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. The attention given to both topics in the media and the increasing public awareness of the issues at stake have never been so high. Local and global initiatives are being launched across the world to protect life on Earth; many debates and deliberations are taking place across different disciplines and sectors; and people are becoming increasingly concerned about how to reverse the impacts biodiversity loss, recently identified one of the top five risks to global sustainability as for. In this context, governments are now under pressure to take action. In the current post-truth era, science-policy interfaces are playing a key role at national, European, and international levels by acting as intermediaries between the different communities of science, policy and practice, allowing decisions to be made based on the best available knowledge.

In Belgium, our organisation acts as a science-policy-practice interface for biodiversity. The Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been active in connecting the different communities since its inception in 2000. After 20 years of being active, the time has come to look back at how our organisation has evolved and how it has enriched the landscape of biodiversity research and policy in Belgium and beyond.

From 2004 to 2008, during its main 'formation phase', the Belgian Biodiversity Platform provided support to ministries and funding agencies in the development of research programmes. We organised activities where scientists identified knowledge gaps and research priorities that fed into projects at Belgian and European levels. With regards to data, we started by mapping Belgian biodiversity researchers' and their related

projects, then we implemented numerous digitisation projects and eventually published biodiversity data generated by scientists.

Over the course of the 'incubation phase', from 2009 to 2019, several new ideas, practices and projects were born and implemented. Our activities greatly diversified: from providing support towards fundamental and strategic research, to developing tools for scientists and practitioners. We promoted transdisciplinary activities, engaged stakeholders, and acted as a fully-fledged science-policy interface at national, European and international levels.

In the 'acceleration phase', from 2020 onwards, our ambition is to once again transcend current boundaries of conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity, in all sectors and domains from which we benefit and impact. As the socio-economic context evolves, it is timely for us to look ahead and envision how we can further contribute to the transformative change needed across society, policy and economy. The ultimate goal being to inspire people with best practices, focus on solutions, provide options for better governance and management of natural resources, and eventually create positive outcomes for biodiversity.

Wishing you a pleasant read,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Aline'.

Aline van der Werf



INCEPTION PHASE

2000 - 2003



FORMATION PHASE

2004 - 2008

INTRODUCTION

The [Belgian Biodiversity Platform](#) was created with the objective of developing research strategies on biodiversity within the context of Belgium. Our organisation is a federal initiative funded by the Belgian Science Policy Office ([BELSPO](#)) and our Cooperation Agreement is set between Belgian federal and federated authorities (the federal government, the Communities, and the Regions). The Cooperation Agreement was put in place to allow for maximum ownership from, and impact for all collaborators in the complex political landscape of Belgium with regard to both biodiversity and scientific matters.

The key objective of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform's structure is to be an anchor for the different science – policy – practice entities within the country. It was decided that members of our organisation would be distributed within three designated host research institutions: The Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences ([RBINS](#)), the Department of Study of the Natural and Agricultural Environment ([DEMNA](#)) of the Service Public de Wallonie, and the Research Institute for Nature and Forest ([INBO](#)). The Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been functioning within a closed envelope of 700.000 Euros per year since 2009.

The Platform provides services to the Belgian scientific community engaged in biodiversity research as well as to policymakers and practitioners. Our activities have rapidly evolved in relation to the needs of our stakeholders. We have also been prompt in reacting to the overall changing context of national, European and international biodiversity research and policy.

In this report, we invite you to discover the evolution of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform through the non-exhaustive presentation of key activities under four main phases:

1. **Inception phase** (2000 to 2003)
2. **Formation phase** (2004 to 2008)
3. **Incubation phase** (2009 to 2019)
4. **Acceleration phase** (from 2020 onwards)



INCUBATION PHASE

2009 - 2019



ACCELERATION PHASE

From 2020 onwards

As the following pages will show, our work has been continuously expanding within, but not limited to, the following areas:

- Our network in Belgium within science, policy, and practice has boomed and extended beyond borders.
- Many of our activities were initially planned with a few participants (through workshops, conferences, reflections on the need for specific scientific projects, the elaboration of funding priorities, etc.). These evolved into individual projects or long-term initiatives firmly rooted within the international context.
- Our role in European projects and international initiatives has grown, evolving from acting as country representatives to being appointed as coordinators and other official roles. This includes hosting the Secretariat, Coordination body or National Focal Point of European and international science-policy initiatives on biodiversity.
- With regards to the budget, though our organisation has always worked with an unchanged closed budgetary envelope, we have been able to gain leverage by receiving external funding from the projects we have been involved in.





INCEPTION PHASE

2000 - 2003



FORMATION PHASE

2004 - 2008

INCEPTION PHASE

FROM 2000 TO 2003

BELSPO launched several initiatives for managing information on biodiversity, which primarily consisted of: [Biobel](#), Belgium Biodiversity Platform and [BeBIF](#). At the end of 2003, BELSPO conducted a prospective evaluation of the three initiatives in order to explore the feasibility of creating an integrated knowledge-based biodiversity information system. This gave rise to the creation of 'Belgian Biodiversity Platform' as we know it today.

Biodiv-Belnet (Biobel)

An online database of Belgian biodiversity-related programmes, projects, scientists, and research teams. This tool was a result of the Biodiversity Resources in Belgium project supported by the BELSPO Impulse programme for the promotion of new services linked to Belnet and supervised by the Meise Botanic Garden. Later, it was rebranded as the 'Biobel' database, and is now integrated within the current pan-European BiodivERsA database managed by the Belgian Biodiversity Platform.

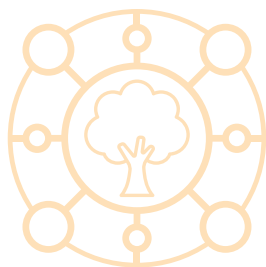
The Belgium Biodiversity Platform

A BELSPO Support Action set-up to exchange knowledge on biodiversity and scientific data among scientists, policymakers and practitioners. Spread across three institutions, the Platform was in the beginnings of analysing, developing and promoting biodiversity-related research within

the scientific community and towards Belgian and European decision makers in charge of science policy.

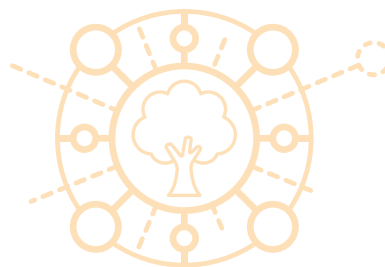
BeBIF

The Belgian node to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility ([GBIF](#)). GBIF was created in 2001 to develop a global biodiversity data infrastructure. In Belgium, the initial goal of BeBIF was to expand a registry of biological resources related to specimen collections. [BeBIF](#) was closely related to [EMBN](#) (Belgian Node of the Global Bioinformatics Network) and [BCCM](#) (Belgian Coordinated Collection of Microorganisms).



INCUBATION PHASE

2009 - 2019



ACCELERATION PHASE

From 2020 onwards





INCEPTION PHASE

2000 - 2003



FORMATION PHASE

2004 - 2008

FORMATION PHASE

FROM 2004 TO 2008

In 2004, the formation of the Belgium Biodiversity Platform resulted in a composite structure of some nine staff members (biodiversity scientists, IT specialists and a manager) posted in both federal and regional research institutions.

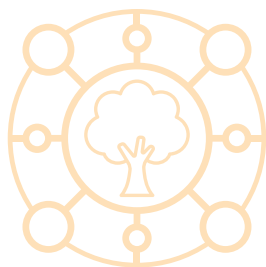
The Platform actively contributed to the work of the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy ([EPBRS](#)), a forum where natural and social scientists, policymakers and other stakeholders identified, structured and focused the strategically important research for biodiversity and ecosystems. As member and Secretariat of EPBRS, we surveyed the Belgian scientific community and joined forces with other EU members to collaboratively identify knowledge gaps and provide recommendations on the research strategies of European institutions and Member States. This was conducted within the framework of the EPBRS thematic priorities defined by the rotating EU Presidencies. The activities of EPBRS were key in influencing the calls launched within the successive Framework Programmes of the former Directorate-General Research of the European Commission. The outputs of EPBRS also inspired specific BELSPO programmes, such as the Global change programme, Science in support of sustainable development, to name a few.

The Platform then started to develop policy supporting tools across different topics. Invasive

Alien Species (IAS) and forest conservation were initially prioritized. This resulted in science-based metrics, guidelines for forest management, and IAS risk assessment tools.

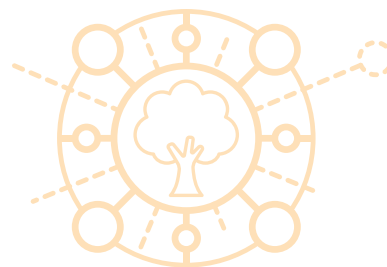
Inspired by the GBIF strategy, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform was also actively promoting data publication. We decided to go beyond specimen collections and publish observational data that document the location of organisms in time and space, as well as thematic checklists (geographical, taxonomic, ecological list of organisms). At the time, the Platform also started to promote the importance of digitisation and data publication with the EU-funded [ENBI](#) (European Network for Biodiversity Information) project. After that, five digitisation calls were launched, enabling the Platform to present and advocate GBIF standards and tools to several Belgian institutions.

From 2005 to 2008, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform team, together with other Belgian stakeholders, was actively engaged in the International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB). IMoSEB started as a reflection of scientists from various disciplines (natural, social, applied and environmental sciences), representatives of governments, and international organisations, all with the need to create of a global science-policy interface on biodiversity. IMoSEB was instrumental to the organisation of intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meetings that called for the



INCUBATION PHASE

2009 - 2019

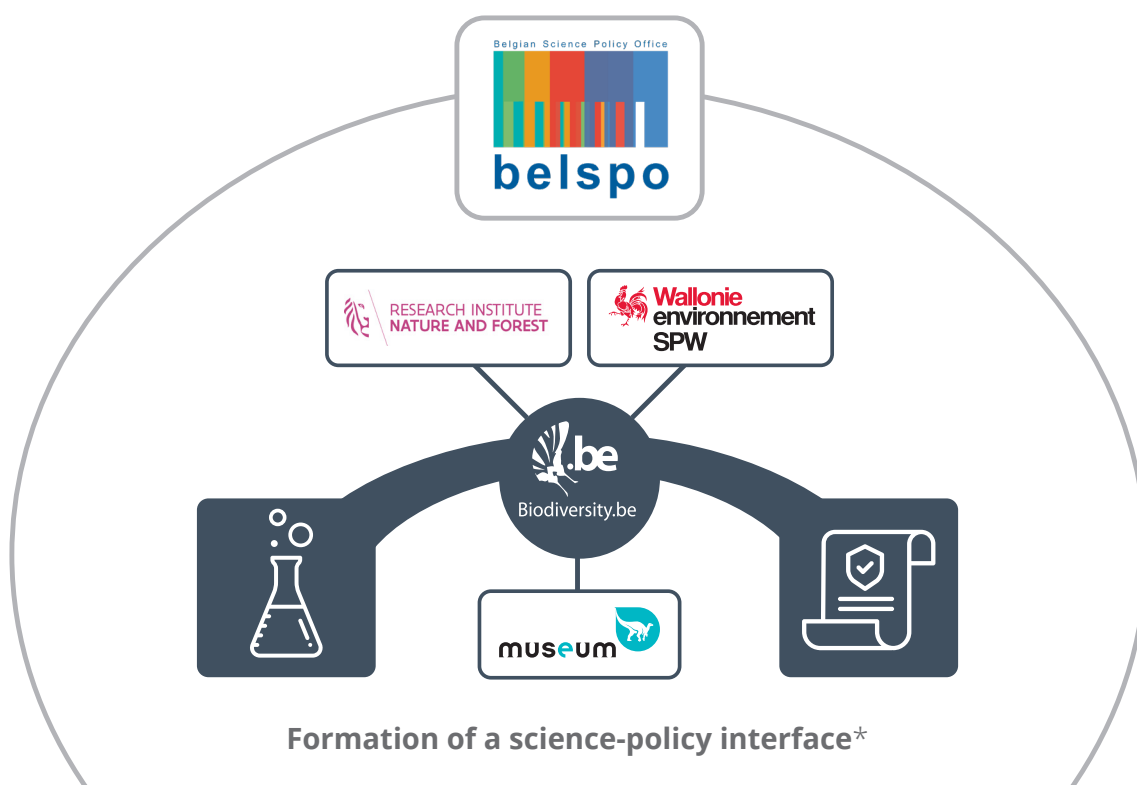


ACCELERATION PHASE

From 2020 onwards

establishment of an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services. The process eventually turned into a political initiative led by the United Nations Environment Programme (see 'Incubation phase - Highlight IPBES'). The type of reflection that took place within IMoSEB percolated into the Belgian Biodiversity Platform and our team became more active in the realm of science-policy interface in Belgium.

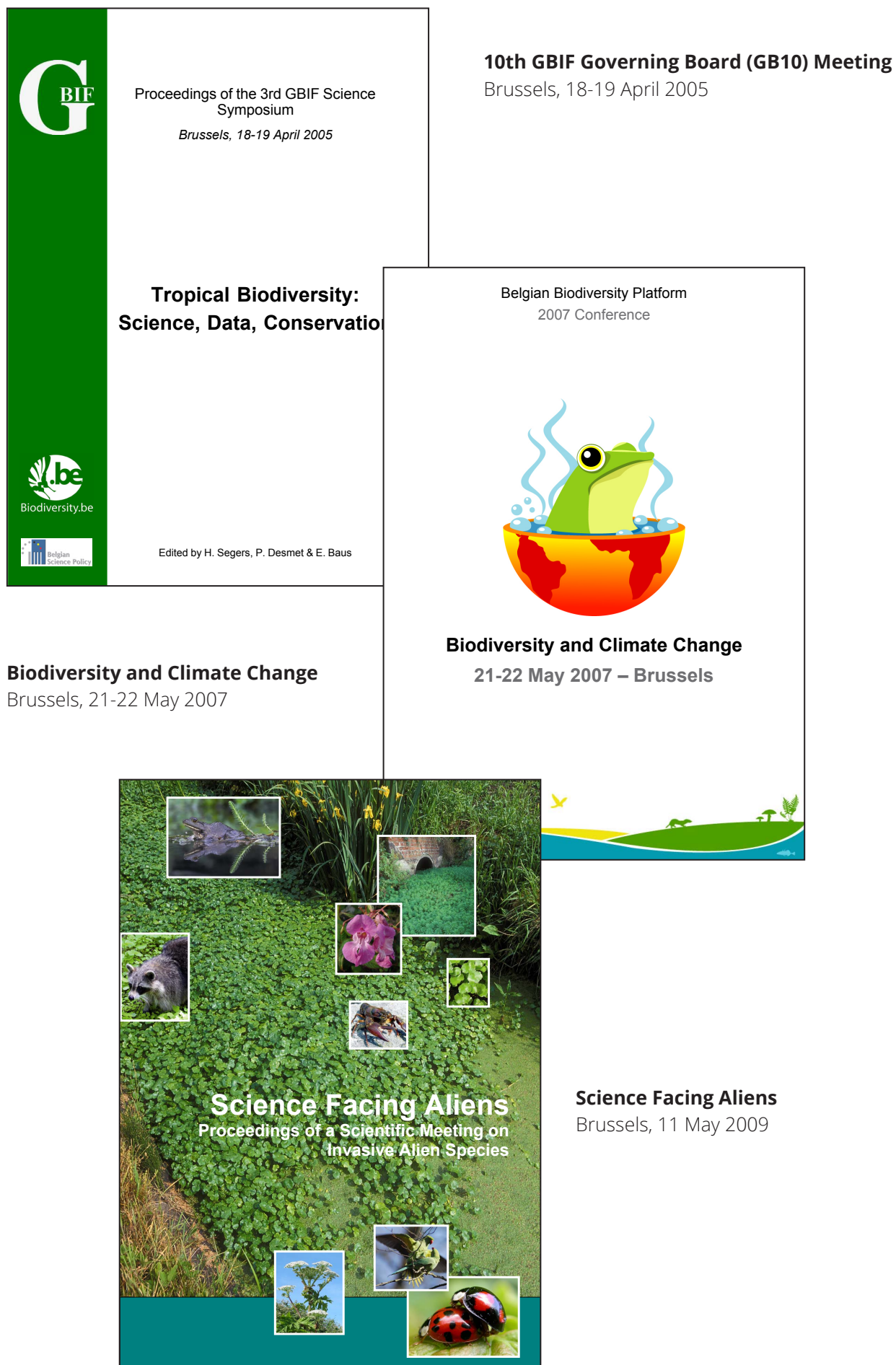
Consequently, together with our external surroundings, we have evolved from acting as a facilitating entity between researchers and research programming administrations (during the formation phase) into a science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services' (during the incubation phase).



* Social processes which encompass relations between scientists and other actors in the policy process, and which allow for exchanges, co-evolution, and joint construction of knowledge with the aim of enriching decision-making. (van den Hove, 2007, p. 807)



Notable Events during Formation phase





INCEPTION PHASE

2000 - 2003



FORMATION PHASE

2004 - 2008

INCUBATION PHASE

FROM 2009 TO 2019

In 2009, the focus of biodiversity research became strongly determined by the needs of the emerging policy landscape. This included the commitments made by governments under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 under the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#). With the international community having agreed to this framework and the European Biodiversity Strategy derived thereof, the activities of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform started booming. As a science-policy interface, we took part in several initiatives at European and international levels. We were predominantly acting as secretariat, coordination body or national focal point. In terms of capacity building for scientists, our focus shifted towards reinforcing inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches, leading to policy and societally relevant research on biodiversity and conservation. Inspired by our activities in [BiodivERSA](#), we also developed tools for practitioners and stimulated stakeholder engagement throughout the research development process. In addition, our portfolio of activities massively expanded for open data.

Given the wide range of activities conducted by the Belgian Biodiversity Platform over the last 20 years, this section will only present a few highlights. We will showcase how our organisation has acted as a catalyst for science policy interface. During the incubation phase, our actions were divided into three main areas:



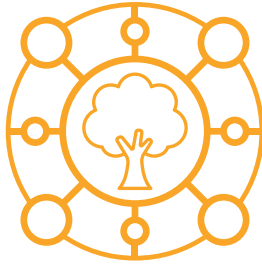
Knowledge brokerage

As intermediaries, we act as a bridge between policy makers, scientists and practitioners. We ensure that biodiversity research is disseminated in an understandable, accessible and usable manner. Here we will present the evolution of our role within two major initiatives: the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services ([IPBES](#)) and BiodivERSA. We also include brief summary of Positive Visions for Biodiversity, a major event we organised in 2010.



Topical knowledge incubation

We offer scientists, policymakers, practitioners and other stakeholders the opportunity to develop their knowledge with other experts on topical issues. The range of topics we have covered over the years include climate change, invasive alien species, freshwater biodiversity, forest ecosystems, ecosystem services, ecosystems and society, biodiversity and public health, OneHealth, nature conservation, nature-based solutions and biodiversity informatics. Particularly, we will showcase how our involvement in the capacity building of scientists focusing on three projects: freshwater biodiversity, Antarctic biodiversity and invasive alien species.



INCUBATION PHASE

2009 - 2019



ACCELERATION PHASE

From 2020 onwards



Open data

We provide services related to the mobilisation, publication, access and use of biodiversity data in an open and free manner. In this report, we will trace back the evolution of our activities and the type of impact they had in Belgium.

Notable event during incubation phase: 'Conservation Research Matters'

Brussels, 22 October 2013

Conservation Research Matters Belgian Biodiversity Platform conference

October 22, 2013 (9 am - 5 pm)

Venue:
Belgian Science Policy Office
(BELSPO)
Avenue Louisaan, 231





Highlight: IPBES



ipbes
BELGIAN FOCAL POINT

Our involvement in [IPBES](#) started with our participation in the three intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meetings (Putrajaya, Malaysia in November 2008; Nairobi, Kenya in October 2009; and Busan, South Korea in June 2010). These meetings were convened by the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) to consider ways and means of improving science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The goal of IPBES

"To be an independent intergovernmental body established by States to strengthen the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development."

Belgium became a member of IPBES since its inception in 2012 and since then the Belgian Biodiversity Platform has acted as Head of the Belgian delegation to all IPBES Plenary meetings and as national focal point. We have also been actively participating in the development of European positions through informal EU expert meetings and the so-called Working Party on International Environmental Issue Biodiversity.

As focal point, our activities include:

- Providing the scientific evidence base for policymaking at national and global levels
- The mobilisation of Belgian experts and other stakeholders in IPBES deliverables
- The organisation of expert consultations, awareness raising and capacity building events
- The exchange of good practice with other IPBES national focal points
- Creating linkages with other relevant organisations such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#)) and BiodivERSA.

Our IPBES work is strongly rooted in the Belgian Ecosystems and Society community (BEES) community of practice, a network of experts in Belgian ecosystem services that originated from a 'Belgian Ecosystem Services (BEES)' project (2009-2012).

"The Belgian Biodiversity Platform is an important supporter of IPBES, and is playing a key role in helping to make IPBES deliverables and key messages relevant for national and local decision-making and governance. The achievements of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform highlight the important role such initiatives can play in strengthening the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services, which is an inspiration for other countries seeking to develop national platforms."

Ingunn Storro, Head of IPBES Technical Support Unit on Capacity Building



BEES has evolved from this exploration project to an active network that has provided a space for collaboration, coordination and communication between scientists, administrators, policy makers and practitioners working on ecosystem-society interactions in Belgium. It has also published a book on Ecosystem Services¹. Over the years, it has enlarged its scope from ecosystem services

to the broader perspective of 'Ecosystem & Society'. This aligns with the general trend at local and global levels to increasingly emphasise the multiple values of nature rather than only economic values. The networking activities hosted within the informal BEES community have increasingly merged into formal ongoing works by the platform. Particularly, as the topic of ecosystems and society is becoming a mainstream scientific and policy domain. The network is also our key channel to reach out on IPBES matters.



7th Session of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

Paris, 29 April – 4 May 2019

Delegates from Germany, the US, and Belgium (Hilde Eggermont – Belgian Biodiversity Platform), discuss the draft decision. Photo credit: Photo by IISD/ENB | Sean Wu



IPBES Belgian Uptake Event

Brussels, 1 October 2018



¹ [Jacobs, S., Dendoncker, N. and Keune, H. eds., 2013. Ecosystem services: global issues, local practices. Elsevier.](#)

Highlight: BiodivERsA



BiodivERsA is a network of national and regional funding organisations promoting pan-European research on biodiversity, ecosystem services, and Nature-based Solutions. The network currently consists of 39 agencies and ministries across 25 countries. Our involvement in BiodivERsA started in 2005. Over the years, our role in BiodivERsA has been constantly growing. From 2008 to 2019, BiodivERsA launched nine calls (BELSPO contributed to 7 of them) and funded 104 transnational research projects selected for their scientific excellence, societal/policy relevance and quality of stakeholder engagement. This corresponds with a total amount of ca. 238 million Euros (including 150 million Euros directly raised by BiodivERsA partners and the European Commission).

Furthermore, BiodivERsA also develops a diverse range of activities such as: mapping and foresight activities, research programming stakeholder engagement, knowledge brokerage and dissemination of project outputs all in which the Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been involved.

The Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been instrumental in mobilising the Belgian scientific community around BiodivERsA calls, and by involving the three main Belgian funding agencies: BELSPO (since 2010), FWO and FRS-FNRS (since 2018). So far, over 6 million euros, including co-funding from the European Commission, has been allocated to 25 selected projects including teams from Belgium. In addition, the platform has also been involved in additional activities that have made crucial contributions towards the development of the EU biodiversity research strategy.

Our role in the following BiodivERsA activities:

- Leading some of the foresight activities
- Co-authoring the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda
- Providing support to the elaboration of a Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit
- Disseminating project outputs by co-drafting policy briefs
- Developing videos that present the results of funded projects
- Provide guidance to citizen science engagement, as well as data management practices
- Linking with IPBES
- The [BiodivERsA database](#): The development and update of the database has been assigned to the Belgian Biodiversity Platform. It presently includes over 11,000 research projects and over 500 funding programmes. It can be used as a search tool and allows for analyses of the biodiversity research landscape in Europe.



238 million Euros



7
CALLS

22
PROJECTS

4.920.000
EUROS

6 million Euros





Since 2014, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform is also hosting one of the two Vice-Chairs to BiodivERsA. Besides strategic guidance to BiodivERsA and its work, this role also includes working towards a co-funded European Biodiversity Partnership under [Horizon Europe](#) (the new Framework Programme of the European Commission) and reinforcing engagement with other relevant bodies in Europe and beyond.

By acting as Vice-Chair to BiodivERsA and by actively leading and engaging in several initiatives of the consortium, we participate in shaping the research agenda at a European level, as well as raising the profile of biodiversity as a (research) priority on the political agenda. We also contribute to supporting Belgian researchers by mobilizing Belgian research funding agencies in BiodivERsA.

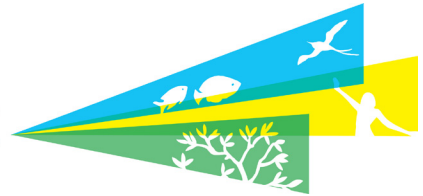
"Within BiodivERsA, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been a particularly active partner with a leading role. It also developed an excellent articulation with relevant regional bodies, and enabled Belgium to gain a prominent role in the biodiversity research landscape at the European level."

Xavier Le Roux, Chair of the BiodivERsA Partnership

Highlight: Positive Visions for Biodiversity

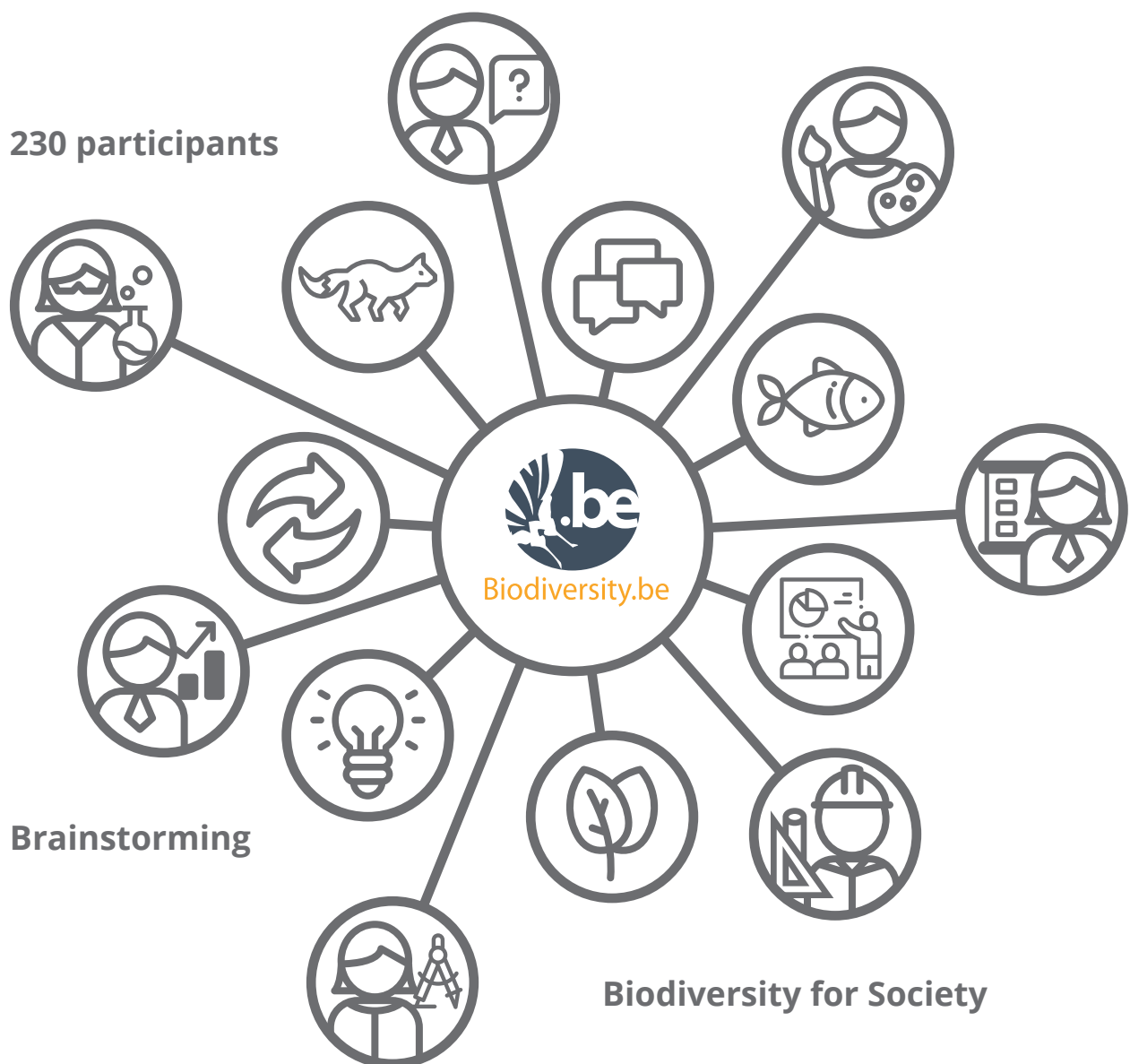
In 2010, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform organised [Positive Visions for Biodiversity](#), a major conference during which 230 participants undertook a positive attitude and reflected on the future of our planet. The participants played leading roles as stakeholders from their respective countries as economists, artists, architects, philosophers, politicians, and scientists. They represented the future interests of society regarding biodiversity. During a [concerted brainstorming session](#), the participants defined 10 main visions and the necessary steps to achieve them. This conference was followed by a 'European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS)' meeting of European scientists in order to discuss the research strategy of Europe. They analysed how best biodiversity research can be shaped to meet the challenges identified at the conference..

**POSITIVE
VISIONS**
FOR BIODIVERSITY



Positive Visions for Biodiversity caused a shift in practice: the meeting acted as a springboard for the Belgian Biodiversity Platform to continue using participatory approaches that ensure effective discussions among stakeholders. Also, we increasingly used and promoted transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary methods to ensure efficient dialogue among stakeholders and scientists of various disciplines.

230 participants



Brainstorming

Biodiversity for Society



TOPICAL KNOWLEDGE INCUBATION: THE ROLE OF THE BELGIAN BIODIVERSITY PLATFORM AS A CATALYSER

Highlight: Freshwater biodiversity

Freshwater Information Platform

The involvement of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform in the topic of freshwater biodiversity started in 2005 with the hosting of the Freshwater Animal Diversity Assessment ([FADA](#)) database, an information system dedicated to freshwater animal species diversity and expert-based information distribution. The FADA consortium still consists of around 150 taxonomists, covering expertise on all freshwater animal groups worldwide. In order to expand the science-policy impact of FADA, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform assisted leading RBINS scientists, together with several other international partners, to launch [BioFresh](#), an EU-funded research project in the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission.

The RBINS Freshwater Biology team was leading the 1st Work Package of BioFresh in which they created a portal for open data on freshwater biodiversity (FADA was its taxonomic backbone). The Belgian Biodiversity Platform hosted the portal and provided support in terms of IT and networking, allowing for freshwater biodiversity data to be freely available through GBIF and for the development of models and scenarios.

The project ran until 2014, and was followed by the EU project [AQUACROSS](#) in which RBINS and the Belgian Biodiversity Platform were also involved. Four original partners of the BioFresh project, including RBINS, later augmented the portal to the Freshwater Information Platform ([FIP](#)), a global online network providing data, tools and resources for science and policy support. Our work in FADA was also used as the basis of a chapter in one of the CEMEX [Conservation Book Series](#): “Freshwater: the essence of life”.

“The Belgian Biodiversity Platform was instrumental in translating the taxonomic and distributional biodiversity data into tools for policy support.”

Prof Dr Koen Martens, Head of Research of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS)

As such, what started as a project gathering expertise of freshwater taxonomists from around the world triggered several large European research projects on freshwater ecosystems, providing insights and critical knowledge for the conservation of freshwater biodiversity in Europe and worldwide.



Highlight: Antarctic biodiversity



For Antarctic biodiversity information, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform contributed to the capacity building of scientists through IT tools and international initiatives.

During the International Polar Year (2007-2008), the Census of Antarctic Marine Life ([CAML](#)) noticed that, although the Southern Ocean is extremely rich in biodiversity and numerous studies had already been conducted on it, this mass of scientific and technical information was very widely dispersed, fragmented and often not easily accessible. In order to make this wealth of information more accessible, [SCAR-MarBIN](#), the Marine Biodiversity Information Network of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), was created and hosted by RBINS.

SCAR-MarBIN was initiated thanks to impulse funding from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and was implemented by the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, in close collaboration with the Flanders Marine Institute ([VLIZ](#)). The primary aim of SCAR-MarBIN was to provide a single, easy access to relevant marine biodiversity information from the Southern Ocean, focusing on two types of data: taxonomy and biogeography. SCAR-MarBIN soon became the regional node of the Ocean Biogeographic Information System ([OBIS](#)), which offers access to marine species datasets from around the world.

SCAR-MarBIN was then followed by a new project, the Antarctic Biodiversity Information Facility ([ANTABIF](#)). Where the original SCAR-MarBIN network focused on Southern Ocean biodiversity data, the new SCAR-Antarctic [Biodiversity Portal](#) network created an overarching network that provides access to data from both the marine and terrestrial realms.

It became the regional node for both the Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS) and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). The SCAR-Antarctic Biodiversity Portal became a federal component of [LifeWatch](#) ERIC, the European Infrastructure Consortium. In addition, a microbial component, Microbial Antarctic Resources System ([MARS](#)) was added to the biodiversity.aq infrastructure. Funding has been provided by BELSPO through the Antarctic Biodiversity Information System (AntaBIS) project. During this phase, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform continued to provide the IT infrastructure for the SCAR Antarctic Biodiversity Portal and its affiliated initiatives.

"By providing capacity-building support, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been a crucial resource for research, conservation and management of Antarctic biodiversity, including the microbial one and helped Belgium to fill its obligations under the Antarctic Treaty System."

Dr. Annick Wilmotte, Researcher, Belgian Polar Platform, Belgium Science Policy Office



Highlight: Invasive Alien Species



With regards to the decision-making processes in the field of biodiversity conservation, we have been particularly active in addressing the challenge of invasive alien species (IAS). Our

work on this topical issue started with a limited group of scientists and has since evolved into a growing network of experts, practitioners and decision makers. This has led to the creation of several projects and initiatives responding to the demand of stakeholders at regional, European and international levels.

In 2006, when the issue of IAS was still relatively unexplored, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform organised a conference, during which scientists called for the creation of tools and practices that would allow for further collaboration between experts and stakeholders. Following this request, we created the “Belgian Forum on Invasive Alien Species” ([BFIS](#)) coordinated by the Platform. Over the years, experts have been mobilised to carry out various actions, such as the elaboration of joint publications, an inventory of knowledge, technical reports in support of legal developments, the elaboration of a code of conduct, as well as the organisation of workshops.

The Belgian Forum on Invasive Alien Species, with the technical and scientific support of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform, developed concrete decision-support tools for the management of IAS in Belgium. In particular, we developed impact and risk assessment protocols, such as [Harmonia+](#), a tool which allows for the evaluation of the degree of threat that an invasive alien species may cause. We have also developed methods to help decision makers evaluate what kind of action should be taken with regards to the stage of invasion and the feasibility of available management options.

Furthermore, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform was instrumental in setting-up and implementing the BELSPO-funded project, Tracking Invasive Alien Species ([TrIAS](#)), ongoing from 2017 to 2020. TrIAS focused on building an open data-driven framework to support policy on invasive alien species. The project established the first checklist of exotic species and associated occurrence data for Belgium. It also developed indicators to identify

emerging species, produced risk assessments and risk models from a climate change perspective.

On 1 January 2015, the EU Regulation on invasive alien species came into force in order to establish rules to prevent, minimise and mitigate the adverse effects of IAS. The Belgian Biodiversity Platform was particularly active in setting up different mechanisms and structures to implement this regulation nationwide. This was done through the development of a Cooperation agreement between competent authorities, the Scientific Council on IAS, the National Committee on IAS, and the National Scientific Secretariat on IAS.

All these activities and their successes have allowed us to connect with international projects and initiatives such as two European COST projects, the international network [INVASIVESNET](#) and IPBES for which we are actively working on IAS assessments.

During the incubation phase, and particularly in the field of invasive alien species, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform had tremendous impact in linking knowledge to management, and bridging science to policy. Furthermore, by mobilising experts, we have been able to concretely support decision making; we participated in the elaboration of the EU Regulation on IAS and its implementation in Belgium.



[Fallopia japonica](#) (Japanese Knotweed). A high risk species to the environment that is widespread throughout Belgium.

Invasive Alien Species Event organised by the Belgium Biodiversity Platform

Managing Invasive Species in Europe: sharing views and experience

Brussels, 18 December 2019



OPEN DATA: THE PIONEERING ROLE OF THE BELGIAN BIODIVERSITY PLATFORM

Acting as a pioneer, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform has always been very active in advocating open data and developing tools relevant to the biodiversity community. All of our activities are conducted under the belief that open and free access to research data will help solve global challenges faced by society. The monitoring, study and protection of biodiversity and its trends at all spatial and temporal scales is critical for decision-makers who need evidence-based knowledge to make better informed choices.

In 2001, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility ([GBIF](#)) was created following a recommendation of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD](#)) responding to the Rio Conference of 1992, calling for a global biodiversity

infrastructure. Since then, GBIF has evolved into an international open data infrastructure allowing anyone, anywhere to access data about all types of life on Earth. The Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been acting as the Belgian node to GBIF since the beginning.

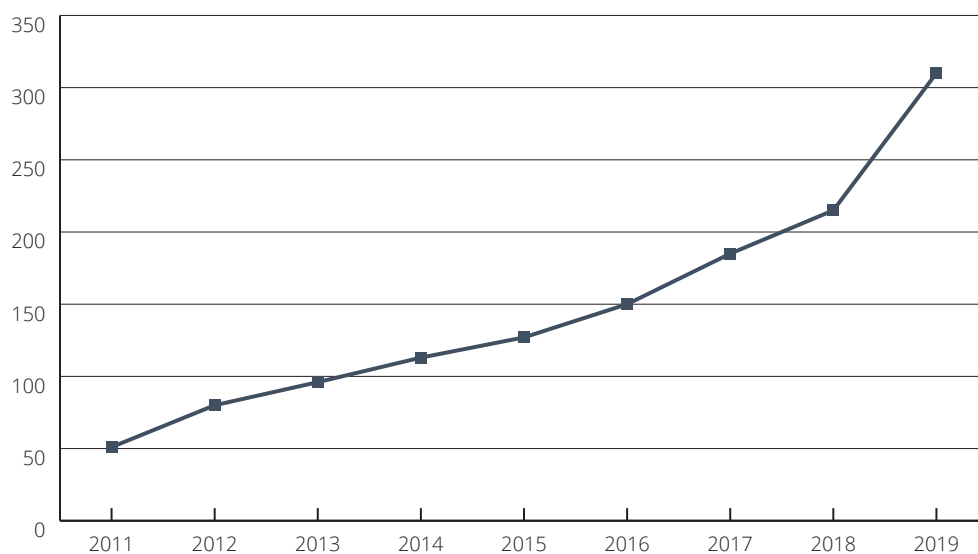
At the beginning of the incubation phase, most of our efforts were driven towards raising awareness within the Belgian scientific community on the importance of sharing data. At that time, most of the scientists were not so inclined to publish their data in an open manner. Together with a few open data champions, we ultimately succeeded in inducing a paradigm shift of scientists willing to share their data.

"The Belgian Biodiversity Platform has been a true advocate of data sharing for many years. They were most helpful throughout the entire process of publication of my first GBIF dataset on Dolichopodidae of Portugal, and I am delighted about the final result."

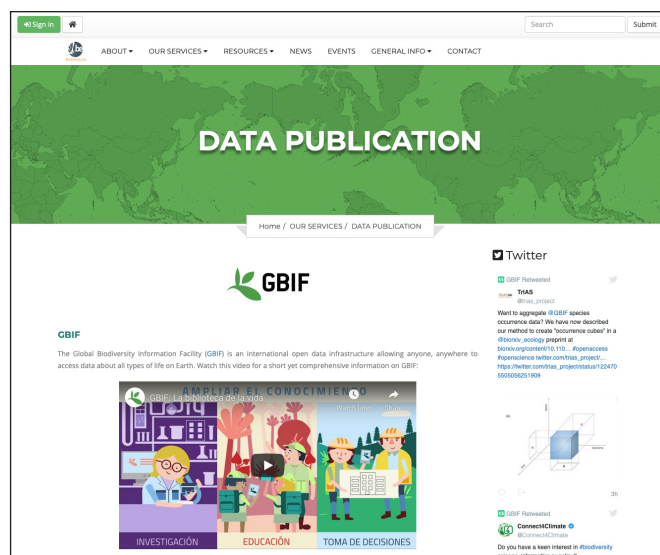
Dr Marc Pollet, President of the Royal Belgian Society for Entomology;
Research Institute for Nature and Forest

GBIF Data Publication

Number of weighted datasets published on GBIF by Belgium
(All data compiled from the [GBIF database](#))

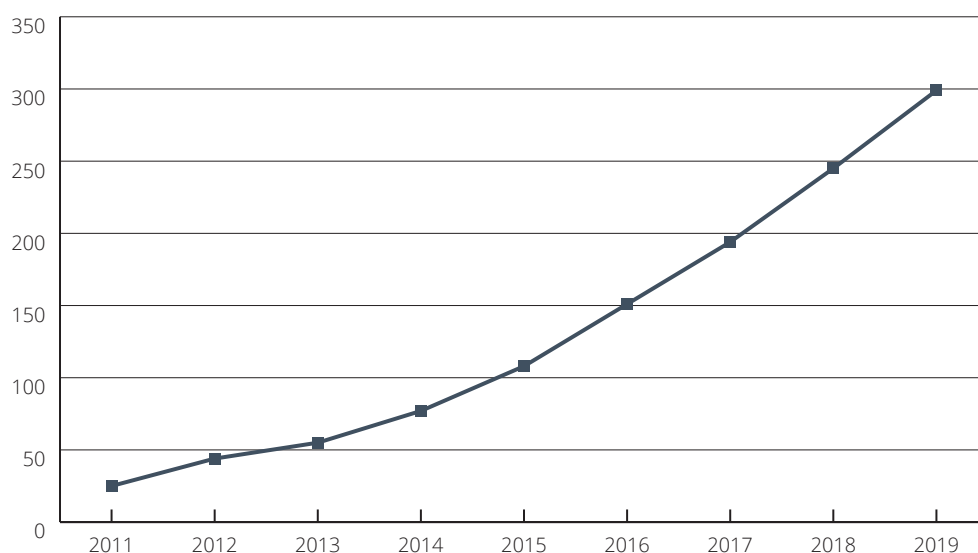


Dedicated data portals on
the Platform [website](#).



GBIF Data Use

Number of peer-reviewed (using GBIF data) articles published by Belgian scientists
(All data compiled from the [GBIF database](#))



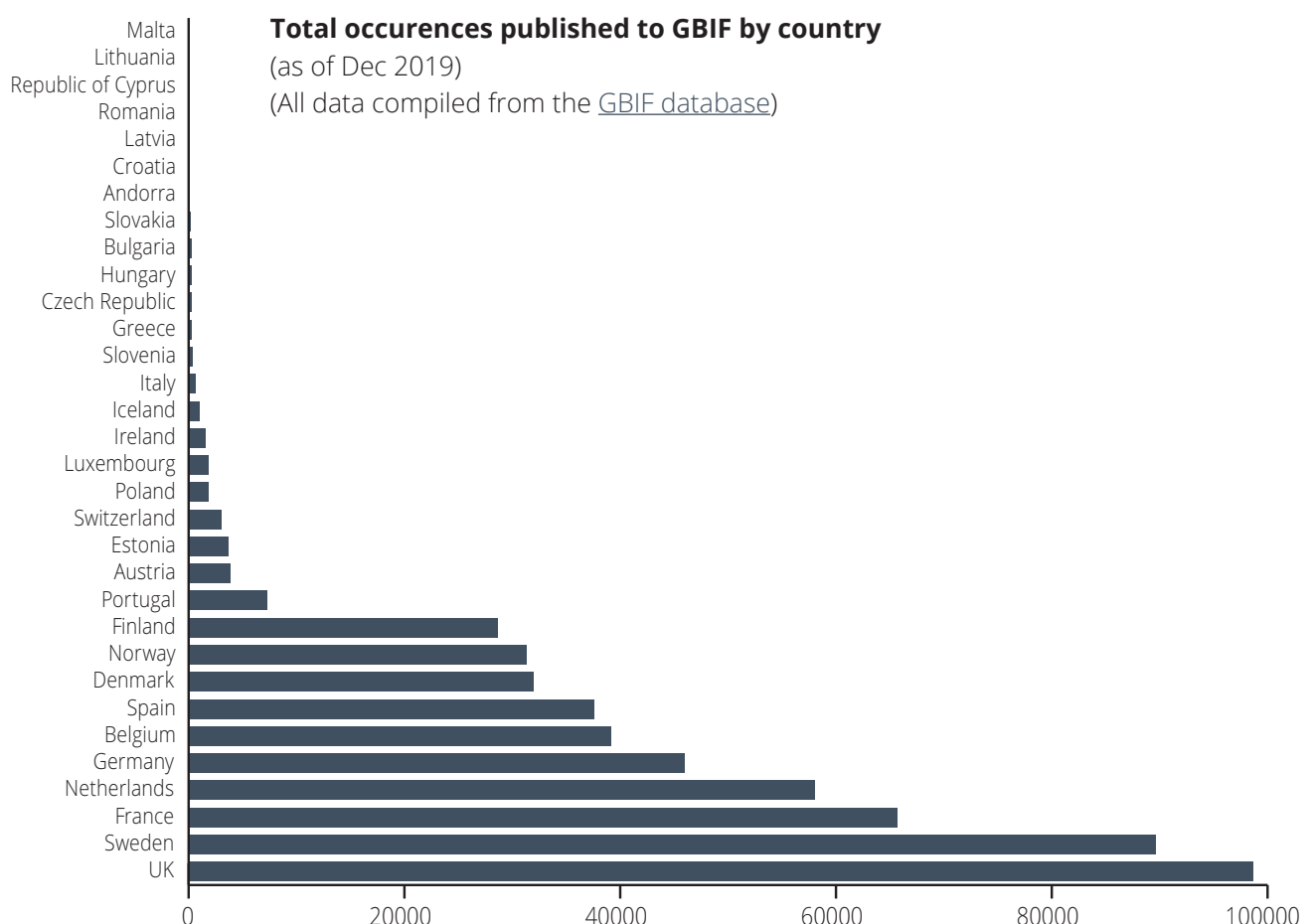
In addition to advocating for open data, our activities initially consisted of mobilising data and promoting GBIF publishing standards, which eventually enabled data interoperability. We then continued to expand our portfolio of data-related services to the community by actively working on data mobilisation and visualisation with a diverse range of Belgian research institutions. We have also worked extensively on our own [Belgian Biodiversity data portal](#). The portal showcases the biodiversity data published by Belgian scientists through the GBIF network and its scientific use by Belgian authors of peer reviewed articles.

In parallel, we have developed and hosted a series of dedicated data portals, which are tailor made user-friendly websites providing access

to biodiversity data related to specific topics. These websites were crafted by our experts in database, geographic information system (GIS) and web design. Furthermore, we have been very active promoting data re-use, using a wide variety of biodiversity informatics tools and standards. Nowadays, an increasing number of Belgian research institutes have developed their capacity in house for data publication and digitisation. Most of these initially received support from the Belgian Biodiversity Platform to build their capacity. We have also helped a number of institutions and scientific projects develop their Open Data Policies and Data Management Plans. Since 2017, we have promoted the [FAIR Principles](#): Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable which nicely complement and enlarge the open data concept.

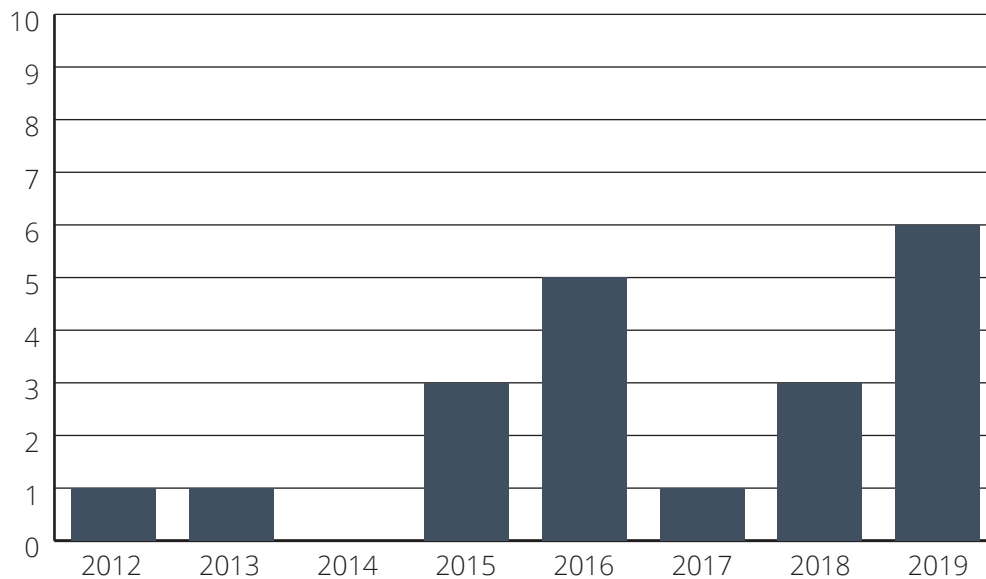
"I have now been collaborating with the IT team of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform since 2006. They have excellent technical knowledge on how to efficiently extract a huge amount of data spread across hundreds of tables and data sheets, in order to present it into a searchable and user friendly way on the web."

Jurate de Prins, taxonomist, collection and museum-based scientist and curator, who received support from the Belgian Biodiversity Platform IT team for the development of the AfroMoths dedicated data portal.



Number of datapapers* published in Belgium

(All data compiled from the [GBIF database](#))



* A data paper is a peer reviewed document describing a dataset, published in a peer reviewed journal. It takes effort to prepare, curate and describe data. Data papers provide recognition for this effort by means of a scholarly article. [Global Biodiversity Information Facility, 2020.](#)

Open Data Event organised by the Belgium Biodiversity Platform



Empowering Biodiversity Research Brussels, 21 May 2015





INCEPTION PHASE

2000 - 2003



FORMATION PHASE

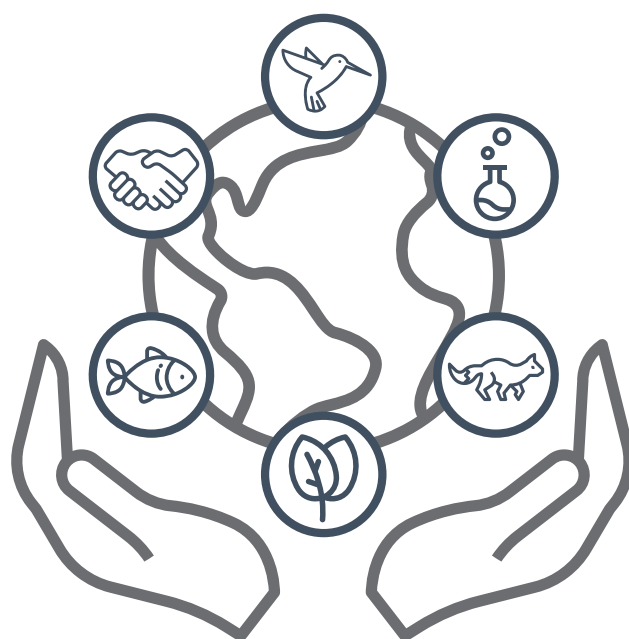
2004 - 2008

ACCELERATION PHASE

FROM 2020 ONWARDS

From 2020 onwards, the Belgian Biodiversity Platform has entered its Acceleration Phase. The overall context in which we will work will be determined by the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that will serve as a universal framework for action on biodiversity, fully aligned to the [2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#). In the European context, our work will be framed by the European Green Deal, which will include a new European Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. In addition, the IPBES has now approved its new Work Programme up to 2030 and in the European arena, a cofunded Partnership on Biodiversity is also emerging. All of this means new avenues for the Belgian Biodiversity Platform to explore, and initiatives to engage in.

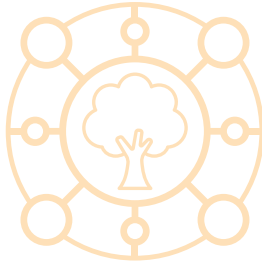
During this new phase, we intend to fully embrace the international call for mainstreaming biodiversity (i.e. ensuring that biodiversity and the services it provides are appropriately and adequately factored into policies and practices that rely and have an impact on it), for transformative change that tackles the root causes of biodiversity loss, and for taking into consideration the multiple values of nature. We will need to recognize that ecological, social and technological change go hand in hand and co-evolve and focus our activities on the breakdown of silos. We should also put civil society participation (e.g. through citizen science



activities) and co-production of knowledge more centrally into the frame and promote effective communication on biodiversity issues to achieve improved awareness of the multiple benefits of biodiversity that can induce mind-set change and values of responsibility.

We aim to do this by facilitating collaboration and engagement of regional and federal actors, by more closely aligning our strategic priorities with stakeholder needs, and by promoting holistic (i.e. cross-sectorial, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary) approaches.

Below, we highlight one of our ongoing activities that nicely fits the new context and exemplifies our role in mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors.



INCUBATION PHASE

2009 - 2019



ACCELERATION PHASE

From 2020 onwards

"We hope to help build a strong case for the importance of biodiversity in achieving sustainability and prosperity."

Hilde Eggermont, Coordinator of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform

Highlight: Mainstreaming of biodiversity through the One Health approach



Biodiversity & Health
Community of Practice

The Belgian Biodiversity Platform will be particularly active on the topic of [One Health](#). Our organisation launched a Community of Practice on Biodiversity and Health in 2011 and we have, since then, developed a growing network of stakeholders at both Belgian and global levels. This has been done through the organisation of networking events, coordination and elaboration of publications, through our work as experts on the topic in several initiatives, and by participating in European and international projects related to biodiversity and health.

The Belgian Biodiversity Platform will continue to work on this topic in the coming years, because biodiversity contributes to improving several aspects of human health and well-being, including the prevention and reduction of both infectious and non-communicable diseases, as well as by supporting nutrition and healthy diets. Furthermore, the importance of diverse green spaces in urban environments, protected areas and their physiological and psychological benefits, is gaining scientific support. It is therefore necessary to mainstream the health-biodiversity linkages into

relevant sectors and initiatives, including those for health, environment, agriculture, finance, nutrition and food security, food safety, planning (including urban planning), climate change mitigation and adaptation, and disaster risk reduction.

At the international level, the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) decided, on 21 November 2018, in Sharm-El-Sheikh, Egypt, that OneHealth is a useful framework since it offers a holistic approach that integrates a wide diversity of sub-topics related to biodiversity and health (i.e. both health benefits and health risks related to biodiversity). During this meeting, the CBD invited governments to mainstream biodiversity and health linkages into existing and future policies, plans and strategies.

As a result of this CBD decision, countries need to take action locally. In Belgium, the [Belgian OneHealth network](#) co-initiated and co-coordinated by the Belgian Biodiversity Platform (through our Community of Practice on Biodiversity and Health) took on the challenge to work on the topic. In 2016, during the European OneHealth/EcoHealth Workshop, preliminary reflections already started

and the main conclusion was that fostering better integrated transdisciplinary collaboration was vital. In 2019, during the launch event of the Belgian One Health network, the participants developed a list of actions to be implemented in Belgium. The central message of these recommendations was that there is a need to promote, facilitate and strengthen collaboration on biodiversity-health related issues in the fields of science, policy, and practice, with relevant national and regional stakeholders. There is also a need to mainstream biodiversity-health linkages effectively through holistic approaches across all sectors, as well as compiling information on relevant research, experiences and best practices, and raise the awareness of society. The network will therefore work on these actions from 2020 onwards, in line with the CBD Decision on Health and Biodiversity. As first actions, the network will work on establishing an easily accessible database for One Health experts and a map of relevant projects in Belgium. Furthermore, the network will work on mapping what expertise is currently available in Belgium, identifying knowledge gaps, and how these could be tackled. We will also increasingly focus on capacity building and networking needs.



OUR TEAM

MANAGEMENT TEAM



Dr Aline VAN DER WERF
Manager



Dr Hilde EGGERMONT
Coordinator & Biodiversity
Expert

SCIENTIFIC TEAM



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

COMMUNICATION TEAM



Divija JATAVALLABHULA
Communication Coordinator



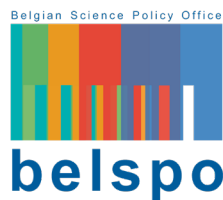
Pierre HUYBRECHTS
Communication Officer

PAST MEMBERS OF THE BELGIUM BIODIVERSITY PLATFORM

Name	Function	Phase of Involvement
Etienne Branquart	Biodiversity Expert	Inception phase
Jorinde Nuytinck	Data Manager	Inception phase
Abigail Caudron	Biodiversity Expert	Inception phase
Christine Cocquyt	Biodiversity expert	Inception phase
Patricia Mergen	BeBIF manager	Inception phase
Frédéric Wautelet	IT	Inception phase
Erika Baus	Data Manager	Formation phase
Jurgen Tack	Biodiversity Expert	Formation phase
Jan De Laet	BeBIF manager	Formation phase
Philip Desmeth	Manager	Formation phase
Estelle Balian	Biodiversity Expert	Formation-Incubation phases
Hendrik Segers	Scientific Coordinator	Formation-Incubation phases
Barbara Gonzalez	Data manager	Incubation phase
Peter Desmet	Data Manager	Incubation phase
Kristina Articus	Biodiversity Expert	Incubation phase
Nabil Youdjou	IT	Incubation phase
Nicolas Noe	IT	Incubation phase
Angélique Berhault	Communication Coordinator	Incubation phase

OUR PARTNERS

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



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)



Department of Study of the Natural and Agricultural Environment (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:





Biodiversity.be