

BIODIVERSITY IN BELGIUM

Edited by

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ROYAL BELGIAN INSTITUTE OF NATURAL SCIENCES

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Biodiversity and extinctions, present and past - K. Wouters & A. Franklin

A country profile - A. Franklin, M. Peeters & V. Leentjes

Prokaryotic and botanic diversity - G. Rappé & J. Rammeloo

Zoological diversity - M. Peeters & J.L. Van Goethem

Belgian ecosystems listed in the Habitats Directive - E. Kuijken, M. Dufrêne & J. Tack

Biodiversity of the Regions and North Sea:

 Biodiversity in the Brussels Capital Region - M. Gryseels

 State of Nature in Flanders - E. Kuijken, J. Tack & L. De Bruyn

 Biodiversity in Wallonia - E. Branquart, C. Debruyne, L.-M. Delescaille & Ph. Goffart

 Biodiversity of the Belgian marine areas - F. Kerckhof & J.-S. Houziaux

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House sparrow, *Passer domesticus* (Thierry HUBIN / RBINS).

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Foreword

'Biodiversity in Belgium' is the result of an ambitious collective effort by experts from federal and regional scientific institutes, as well as from universities in Belgium and abroad. This country study provides a detailed report on the status and trends of Belgium's biological diversity by bringing together, and integrating, large quantities of data usually widely scattered in both scientific and grey literature, as well as numerous not yet published information provided by a wide range of experts.

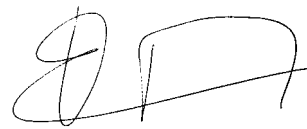
This comprehensive information source will undoubtedly be helpful and prove indispensable not only to researchers, but also to policymakers, educators and everyone who is concerned with the preservation of Belgium's environment.

We hope that this study will serve as an important tool in evaluating options for the future actions needed to halt the loss of biodiversity, one of the most serious -if poorly understood and underestimated- environmental threats of our era. The governmental agreement approved in July 2003 specifically addresses biodiversity, both in its internal and external dimensions, and with full respect to international environmental agreements and legislation. Responsible consumption and an active support to conserve biodiversity are amongst our primary goals.

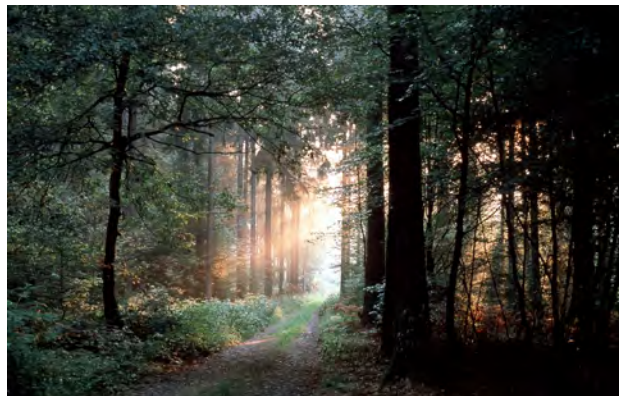
Brussels, 26 August 2003.



Freya VAN DEN BOSSCHE,
Minister for the Environment,
Consumers Interests and Sustainable Development.



Fientje MOERMAN,
Minister of Economy, Energy,
External Trade and Science Policy.



Bertrix (Thierry HUBIN / RBINS).

Preface

From microscopic bacteria to gigantic whales, from barren deserts to luxurious tropical forests, life on Earth is extraordinarily diverse. The concept of 'biological diversity' or 'biodiversity' highlights this multiplicity: biodiversity is the variety of the world's organisms, including their genetic diversity and the assemblages they form. Biodiversity also refers to the natural biological wealth that is essential to human life and well-being.

Yet, despite its importance for humanity, our knowledge of biodiversity remains poor and many questions remain unanswered. Even in Belgium, a widely explored country, only higher plants and a few zoological groups have been studied extensively. The majority of invertebrate groups, fungi and unicellular organisms are poorly known. Paradoxically, millions of telephone numbers are precisely catalogued but there is no exhaustive inventory of species living in Belgium.

In order to address the lack of information, the Inter-ministerial Conference for the Environment decided to prepare a monograph on biodiversity in Belgium. This huge task was entrusted to the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, in its quality of Belgian National Focal Point to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The importance of the initiative was stressed again by Mrs Magda AELVOET, former federal Minister for the Environment, at a symposium held in 1999 at the Institute.

The preparation of this monograph, the first of its kind for Belgium, was not that easy. Finding specialists of poorly-known biological groups, bringing together key actors -often overloaded with work- for the redaction of the manuscript was a challenge. The monograph has been axed primarily around two chapters addressing botanical and zoological species diversity. They attempt to give a thorough overview of the groups present in Belgium. Ecosystem diversity is presented in the particular context of the EU Habitats Directive. Moreover, the monograph also reflects the distribution of competences between the regions and the federal level. A section is specifically dedicated to the regional aspects of biodiversity and focuses on trends, threats and actions in the three regions and in Belgian marine waters.

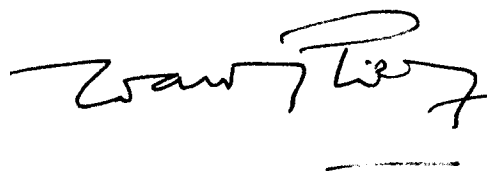
The monograph does not pretend to be exhaustive. A logic follow-up would be the compilation of a directory of all species living in Belgium, usefully complemented by annotations at the species level. Genetic diversity is not addressed, as compiling such information is a huge task in itself, and *ex-situ* biodiversity in Belgium is another essential subject that should be considered in the future.

After this first general overview of biodiversity in Belgium, one of the upcoming challenges is the elaboration of a National Biodiversity Strategy. It is not only a formal obligation under the Convention on Biological Diversity, but also a practical necessity to suggest priority themes and goals to policy-makers. In addition to the gaps in knowledge and the major threats to biodiversity highlighted in this monograph, the strategy will also be able to rely on existing and planned regional strategies to effectively address biodiversity conservation issues.

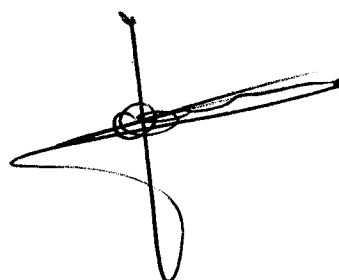
During the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, also known as Rio + 10, biodiversity was recognised as one of the fundamental cornerstones for sustainable development, and the Convention as the key instrument to address biodiversity issues. The Summit also confirmed that massive practical and urgent action in all parts of the world is now needed to meet the three goals of the Convention: *the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.*

This monograph is undoubtedly a milestone for enhancing and improving Belgium's future work towards the Convention.

Brussels, 22 May 2003.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yvan YLIEFF', with a horizontal line underneath.

Yvan YLIEFF,
Minister, attached to the
Minister for Scientific Research.

A stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jef TAVERNIER', with a horizontal line underneath.

Jef TAVERNIER,
Minister for Consumers Interests,
Health and Environment.