

Volunteer-based monitoring schemes for priority species in Flanders, Belgium

The Research Institute for Nature and Forests (INBO) and the NGO Natuurpunt recently initiated a set of monitoring schemes for approximately 70 European and Flemish priority species. The aim of these monitoring schemes is to provide reliable information on long term trends in abundance on the scale of Flanders (the northern region of Belgium). This information enables evaluation of policy measures and reporting on the conservation status in the framework of the Habitat Directive.

Each monitoring scheme consists of a fixed set of sites in which one or more species are counted based on a standardized protocol. For rare species, all occupied sites are counted, while for more common species a spatially balanced sample is drawn.

We follow a citizen-science approach: volunteers can claim a monitoring site and receive detailed instructions on when and how to count. This approach has already been proven to be successful for the long established bird monitoring schemes in Flanders. However, after six years of monitoring, we can conclude that volunteer based monitoring schemes can also be successful for other species groups, such as amphibians, butterflies, dragonflies and vascular plants.

We will present (1) our experiences setting up new monitoring schemes; (2) volunteer participation for different species groups; (3) the modelling approach to analyse the data; and (4) the communication of results.