

## 1 General information

**Seaport:** Port of Antwerp-Bruges

**Country:** Belgium

**Project title:** Species Protection Program

**WPSP theme:** Environmental Care



## 2 Introduction

The Scheldt Estuary, the funnel-shaped mouth of the Westerschelde river influenced by tides, consists of a unique interplay of water and land, creating exceptional natural beauty. The entire estuary, from Ghent to Vlissingen, encompasses over 92,000 hectares of protected nature. The gradual transition from fresh to saltwater, tidal effects, and numerous mudflats and salt marshes make the Scheldt area a valuable habitat for plants and animals. The port area in Antwerp comprises 580 hectares of protected nature.

The port has implemented several initiatives to protect biodiversity within its area. With over 90 protected plant and animal, so called “port specific”, species inhabiting the port, a comprehensive Species Protection Program was developed in cooperation with Natuurpunt (NGO nature conservation). This program ensures the preservation of sustainable populations of these species while allowing for the sustainable development of the industry within the port.

Preservation of these species is attained by the development of a network of ecological infrastructure tailored to these port-specific plant and animal species, creating a green corridor that connects natural areas within and at the borders of the port area.

### 3 Description of the project

Since 2001, the Port of Antwerp-Bruges has partnered with Natuurpunt, Belgium's largest nature conservation organization, to safeguard and manage natural areas within the Antwerp port region. Through the "Antwerpse haven natuurlijker" project, this collaboration aims to bolster ecological infrastructure without hindering economic progress. Initiatives include habitat creation for the natterjack toad, establishment of fish spawning areas, and provision of nesting sites for sand martins, among other species-specific actions.

The Antwerp port area, nestled along the Scheldt river, boasts a diverse ecosystem, harboring notable species such as the Natterjack toad, Fen orchid, and Black-headed gulls. A total of 90 protected species call this area home. The joint effort with Natuurpunt involves implementing a Species Protection Program, focusing on preserving threatened or unique plant and animal species by creating conducive habitats for their sustenance.

Under the Species Protection Program 2022-2027, devised collaboratively with Maatschappij Linkerscheldeoever, measures have been outlined to bolster biodiversity in designated zones. Previous efforts included establishing eco-tunnels for Natterjack toads, Sand martin walls, and bat nest boxes. The ongoing optimization aims to further enhance natural habitats and upgrade their connectivity to facilitate the movement and survival of species like the Argus butterfly, Natterjack toads and Bluethroat. Other measures include less mowing of the grass to support the habitat of the Argus butterfly, planting of reeds to facilitate nesting for Bluethroat birds, positioning of street lights downwards to facilitate the flyway of bats, and installation of permanent sand walls to provide nesting sites for Sand martins. These key measures ensure that conservation and industrial development can coexist harmoniously within the port area. This unique initiative stands as Flanders' sole species protection program for a designated area, emphasizing a commitment to conservation and sustainability.



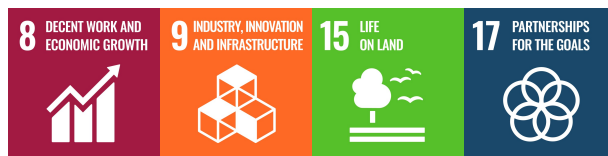
Central to the program are ten "umbrella species," including the Argus butterfly, Bluethroat, Natterjack toad, and Fen orchid. Conservation measures for these species benefit associated flora and fauna within their habitat, illustrating the interconnectedness of biodiversity preservation efforts. The project, led by the Port of Antwerp-Bruges, Maatschappij Linkerscheldeoever and Natuurpunt, involves a host of stakeholders, including governmental bodies, research institutes, and local authorities, reflecting a collaborative approach to environmental stewardship and wildlife conservation.

## **4 Vision and leadership deployed by the port's management**

The Port Management of Antwerp demonstrates a forward-thinking vision and proactive leadership in its approach to environmental conservation and sustainable development. Recognizing the unique ecological significance of the Scheldt Estuary and the diverse species inhabiting the port area, the management has embraced a holistic strategy that integrates conservation efforts with economic activities. By collaborating with organizations like Natuurpunt and implementing innovative programs such as the Species Protection Program, the port management exhibits a commitment to preserving biodiversity while fostering growth. Through strategic partnerships, transparent communication, and forward-looking policies, the port management sets an example of responsible stewardship, striving to ensure that the port remains a thriving economic hub while safeguarding its natural heritage for future generations.

## 5 Contribution to sustainability and the UN SDG's

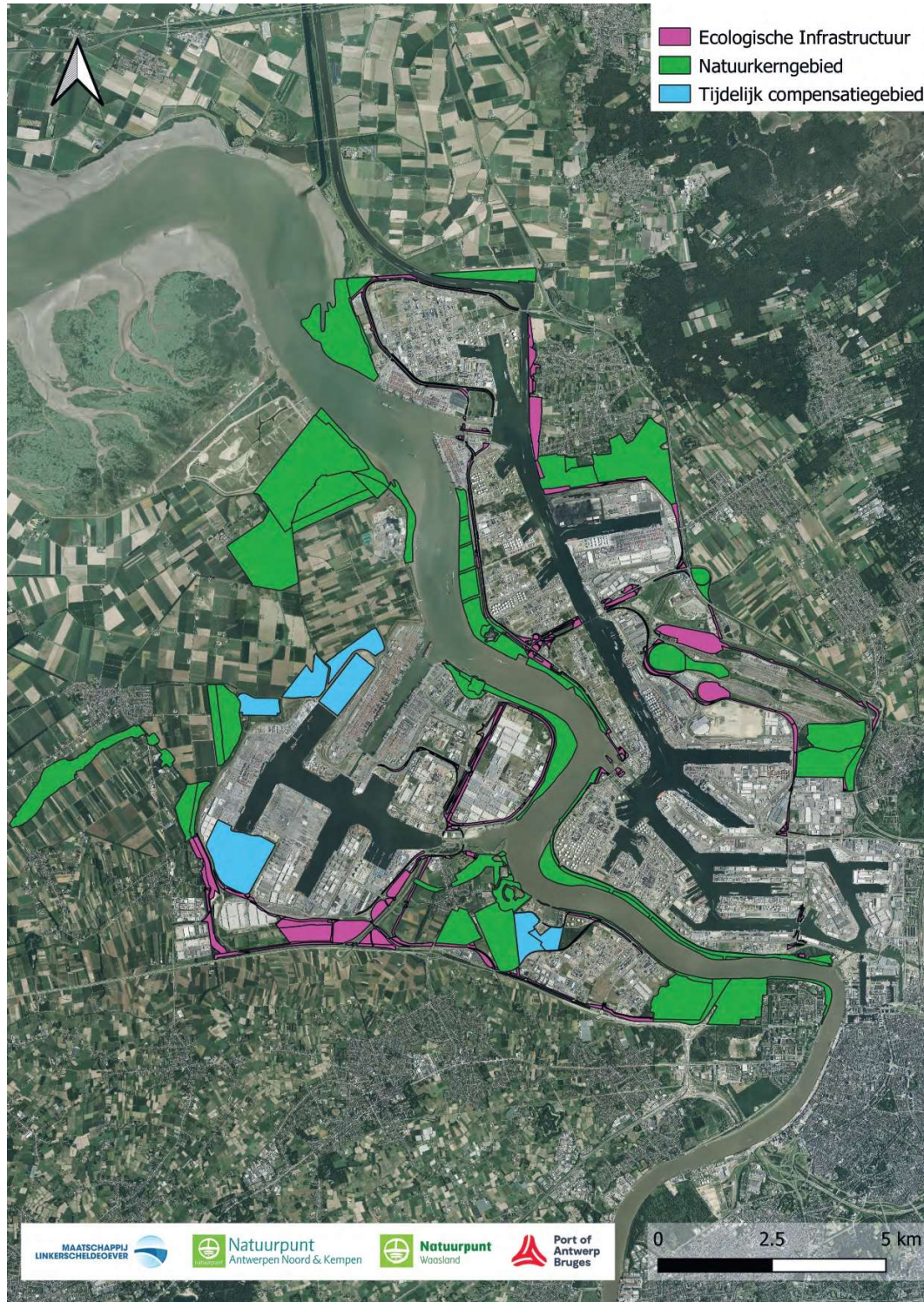
The initiatives undertaken by the Port of Antwerp-Bruges exemplify a strong commitment to sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By prioritizing biodiversity conservation through programs like the Species Protection Program and collaborating with organizations like Natuurpunt, the port actively contributes to **SDG 15: Life on Land**, by protecting terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity. Additionally, the emphasis on ecological infrastructure and environmental care underscores the port's dedication to **SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure**, by integrating environmental considerations into infrastructure development. Furthermore, the Port of Antwerp-Bruges's initiatives promote **decent work and economic growth (SDG 8)** by generating employment opportunities through sustainable practices and fostering economic development in harmony with environmental conservation. Additionally, by engaging in partnerships and collaborations with various stakeholders, including government bodies, private enterprises, and non-profit organizations, the port **advances SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals**, by promoting multi-stakeholder cooperation and collective action towards achieving sustainability targets. Through these concerted efforts, the Port of Antwerp-Bruges serves as a model for sustainable development, demonstrating how economic growth can be achieved while safeguarding the environment and fostering inclusive partnerships in line with the UN's global goals.



## 6 Engagement of societal and commercial stakeholders

The Port of Antwerp-Bruges actively engages both societal and commercial stakeholders in its sustainability efforts, recognizing the importance of collaboration for meaningful impact. The implementation of the Species Protection Program exemplifies this collaborative approach, with the Port of Antwerp-Bruges, Maatschappij Linkerscheldeover (MLSO), and Natuurpunt working together to formulate and execute the program. Additionally, numerous other partners, including Infrabel, the Agency for Nature and Forests, the Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO), the Flemish Waterway, Maritime Access, the City of Antwerp, the Flemish Environment Agency, and various companies, are involved in these collaborative efforts. Through these partnerships, the port engages societal stakeholders, such as local communities and environmental organizations, as well as commercial stakeholders, including port users and businesses, in collective action towards sustainable development and environmental

stewardship. By fostering dialogue, building partnerships, and encouraging stakeholder participation, the Port of Antwerp-Bruges demonstrates its commitment to inclusive decision-making and collaborative solutions for a more sustainable future.



## 7 Results

The Species Protection Program has achieved remarkable success in 2023, surpassing numerous objectives set for the conservation of various species within the port area. Notably, significant milestones were reached with species such as the Bluethroat and Building-nesting Swallows. The Bluethroat exceeded expectations with 52 breeding pairs recorded, the set target of 50-60 pairs was reached in 2020 and is maintained since then. Additionally, while the targeted area for open water surface was 28-46 hectares, an impressive 54.97 hectares were reported in 2018, surpassing the goal. With 50.27 hectares reported in 2018) of reed marsh the goal of the targeted surface of 66-84 hectares is still a long way away although some hopeful developments have also been made in the past five years in this area. For a good development of reed marsh one must simply be patient since it can easily take up 5 to 10 years before it is well-established.

Building-nesting swallows showed significant progress as well. The program met its goals in 2023 for the Common swift, establishing two colony sites on the Right Bank, and for the House martin, with three colony sites on the Right Bank and two on the Left Bank.

Further notable achievements included the Natterjack toad and several bat species populations. The Natterjack toad population on the Left Bank significantly surpassed the minimum requirement of 800 adults, with 1.116 adult individuals recorded in 2023. The bat saw the successful installation of 18 boxes for building-dwelling bats and 11 cavity boxes on the Left Bank, and 10 building-dwelling and 11 cavity boxes on the Right Bank, meeting the set goal of 1 colony site of each type (building and tree cavity) on the Right and on the Left Bank. Additionally, a winter roosting site was established.

Lastly, the goals for creating forest edge habitats and dry grasslands for orchids were exceeded, with 8 and 23 growth sites established respectively with the goal being 5 and 10 growth sites.

These accomplishments underscore the program's dedication to preserving biodiversity and highlight the positive impact of collaborative conservation efforts within the port area.

## 8 Relevant information

[PUBLICATIE Sustainability summary ENG 2023.pdf \(portofantwerpbruges.com\)](#)

[Port of Antwerp en UAntwerpen brengen aanwezigheid ongewervelde dieren in kaart \(portofantwerpbruges.com\)](#)

[Tweede soortenbeschermingsprogramma | Port of Antwerp-Bruges \(portofantwerpbruges.com\)](#)

## 9 Contact information



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