

InterLIFE Benelux 17-18 June 2025

As part of the Peat Pals for LIFE project (LIFE22-NAT-NL-Peat Pals)



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Introduction

The last InterLIFE Benelux was organised before the COVID-19 pandemic in September 2019 in Kalmthout, Belgium. Now, as part of the Peat Pals for LIFE project, Natuurmonumenten has taken the initiative to organize a new InterLIFE Benelux. This meeting took place on the 17th and 18th of June. It was a two-day event; the first day took place in the Provincial house of Drenthe in Assen and on the second day one group visited the N2000 area Fochteloërveen and one group visited N2000 area Bargerveen.

The event provided an unique opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences in the developing and running of LIFE Nature projects implemented in the Benelux. The InterLIFE meetings often contribute to the initiation of new projects or collaborations within existing projects. The events main focus was on nature-related projects by addressing the role of transition zones for managing and restoring habitats in Natura 2000 sites in the Benelux.

In the Netherlands the transition zones around our nature areas are a topic of discussion. Due to climate change issues, the biodiversity goals, our nitrogen problems and housing challenges the subject of integrating functions becomes more and more urgent. The question remains how to achieve this integration. Examples of best practices already exist (we have heard great examples during the InterLIFE event), but the challenge remains. The InterLIFE meeting helped to exchange ideas/best practices connected to this subject and share ideas about how to integrate transition zones in future European Projects.

Message to policy makers

“The importance of transition zones for sustainable nature restoration is of imminent significance.” This was emphasized by Jeroen de Koe (Natuurmonumenten) and Joseph van der Stegen (European Commission-CINEA) at the InterLIFE meeting in June 2025 in Assen and is also supported by the Dutch Ecological Authority and the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL).

According to the Dutch Environmental Assessment Agency transition zones are identified as areas for nature-inclusive measures. However, they are still insufficiently defined in provincial plans and require further elaboration through area-based planning and cooperation.

At the same time, accomplishing well-suited transition zones is an extremely complicated matter as it interferes with a variety of land uses, interests, and stakeholders. This was highlighted by various presenters during the InterLIFE Benelux meeting. It is therefore of the utmost importance that concrete EU policies to establish transition zones are drafted to promote nature restoration in line with the goals of the Habitats and Birds Directives and the Nature Restoration Law. The LIFE Programme and LIFE funding will be vital to achieve this.

As Jeroen de Koe, director of Nature at Natuurmonumenten, stressed during the InterLIFE-meeting: “We need softer transitions — zones where nature, agriculture and recreation coexist in a more balanced way, and where climate adaptation measures are integrated into the landscape.” Such transitions require rethinking land use, with wetter buffer zones, reduced use of fertilizers, and fair compensation for farmers who contribute to ecological goals. “This responsibility lies both with government and the market.”

This message is strongly supported by the Dutch Ecological Authority, which in its advice on the updated guidelines for the National Programme for Rural Areas (NPLG, August 2024) concludes that the most persistent ecological bottlenecks lie outside the protected areas. Solutions must include restoring groundwater flows, adjusting water levels, restoring river and landscape dynamics, and developing agriculture-inclusive buffer zones that reduce external pressures on nature.

The possibilities in transition zones were further explored in the InterLIFE workshops, which addressed practical approaches for the use of carbon credits, the management of invasive species, possibilities for paludicultures in transition zones, and tools such as the KANO quickscan, which support cooperation in transition zones. While best practices already exist and were shared during the InterLIFE event through presentations, workshops, and field visits, the question remains how to effectively achieve this integration at scale.

To meet the ambitions of the Birds and Habitats Directives and the Nature Restoration Law, the EU must develop concrete policy frameworks that support integrated, multifunctional transition zones. The LIFE Programme will continue to play a crucial role in enabling this shift from fragmented efforts to systemic change.

During his speech, Jeroen de Koe left the audience with the following message: “And because the LIFE Programme is so important for nature restoration in the EU, we must cherish it. That’s why I want to stress how much we hope that in the new Multiannual Financial Framework, we can continue to count on LIFE to support our shared mission of restoring European nature.”

Summary of workshops

Workshop 1A: Carbon Credits, a case study of the Barsbekerbinnenpolder

Gidion Kok & Wiebe Borren (Natuurmonumenten)

Moderator: André Hassink (Natuurmonumenten)



Gidion Kok and Wiebe Borren presented the case study in the Barsbekerbinnenpolder (The Netherlands) in which carbon credits were established. Based on groundwater modeling and the methodology “Valuta voor Veen” the carbon credits were granted by the National Carbon Market Foundation. Main discussion points from the InterLIFE meeting were:

- Carbon credits should be used to actually reduce emissions and not to compensate emissions, thus avoiding greenwashing. This was a concern raised by part of the audience. The “Valuta voor Veen” validation process and the application in a trustworthy and nearby project should overcome this concern.
- Adding up different sources of funding – including carbon credits – should be possible, as long as the additionality principle is not breached.
- Working in this way opens up possibilities to combine ecosystem services as they are helped by the same measures. This also means that extra financial incentives can be added.
- But be aware that the approach and accreditation of co₂-credits takes time and can cost a lot (especially if there is no historic knowledge on (ground-)water levels); verify that these costs in time and EUR are worth it!
- And that it asks for a clear explanation that the CO₂ approach is additional (specific to the area).
- How to deal with climatological extremes (droughts and wet events)? These extremes could affect the actual emission reduction. Therefore the carbon credits are issued for 5 year tranches, so a correction could be made after 5 years, based on monitoring.
- Monitoring is crucial to evaluate the emission reduction. A reference monitoring site is needed to correct for climatological fluctuations.

Workshop 1B: Invasive Alien Species: Approaches to target IAS

M. Thirion (Brussels Environment, LIFE RIPARIAS), M.C. van Riel (Stichting Bargerveen, LIFE RESILIAS)

Moderator: Tamara Koekkoek (Natuurmonumenten)



Questions for discussion

What are your experiences with IAS?

- When considering connectivity, IAS is not addressed well enough in projects
- Managing one's "own" side is easier than sides that others own – mapping IAS is not easy either
- Focus on river inside N2000 area while main source of IAS was river stretch outside N2000
- Experience with Salix as a competitor (shading)
- Risk: competitor might compete with native species present
- Impact IAS determines motivation of stakeholders for action (e.g. health impact --> biodiversity impacts)

To what extent is inclusion of RIPARIAS & RESILIAS in transition zones possible?

Risks/challenges that should be considered

- Reintroduction of IAS
- High costs related to the containment of IAS
- Transition zones are often characterized by many landowners. Thinking of how to deal with them, what action is possible?
- Role of legislation: what if a private owner does not want to participate?

Overall considerations

- Eliminate IAS in heart of the area, let it as it is at boundaries since elimination is rarely effective
- Ecosystem approach can act as an opportunity in combating invasive alien species
- Main advice is to find local species that can survive in good competition with each other

Concluding considerations: working on eliminating or containing IAS is not easy. Clear regulations on a national level are required.

Workshop 2A: Possibilities for Paludicultures in transition zones

Gert-Jan van Duinen (Stichting Bargerveen)

Moderator: Arnoud Popping (Natuurmonumenten)



Introduction:

- The drainage of peatlands leads to the degradation of peat. When peat is exposed to oxygen, it breaks down, releasing CO₂ into the atmosphere.
- Drained peat grasslands emit large amounts of CO₂. The only way to stop this is rewetting. If you want to continue the productive use of peatlands, wet use is preferred, for instance through sustainable and wet agricultural practices. There are many potential wet crops. Which crops are best for a site, depends on the aims, the local economic situation, as well as the site conditions, like water table regime and nutrient availability (Sheet 26 of the presentation gives a list of check points.)

Gert-Jan van Duinen inspired the audience with his knowledge of Paludiculture and peatland restoration. By presenting information on the effects of paludiculture on ecosystem services, including biomass production, nutrient removal, biodiversity and greenhouse gas emissions and some best practices across the Netherlands Gert-Jan shows the current state of development of paludiculture in the Netherlands. First the participants discussed about the possibilities and treats of paludiculture. After this discussion participants were thinking of possibilities of paludiculture in their areas.

Discussion Points and Questions:

- Is there already an example of a paludiculture business case without additional funding?

Unfortunately not, at the moment it is necessary to find extra funding for Paludiculture initiatives. Compensation for farmers is needed to compete with traditional livestock activities. On the other hand, if we decide -based on the Paris Agreement- that CO₂-emission must be reduced, drained peatlands must be rewetted and then the question is: which options are there for farmers for the wet and productive use of the peat soils? Carbon credits and blue credits can be part of a potential business model. E.g. the wet use of peatlands in depressions in the landscape or valleys -where paludiculture is a possible form of land use- can be a solution to store water and thereby help to avoid problems of heavy rain events in other crops and urban areas. Moreover, if water is stored in such lower parts in the landscapes, problems in long periods of drought in crops on the higher grounds can be reduced. Such services have a high value in a climate robust landscape and the land owner/farmer should be paid for providing these services to their neighbors or to the community.

- Which species benefit the most of paludiculture projects?

Depends on the pilot area and the kind of paludiculture, including the crop (vegetation structure and harvest time) and water table regime. Sheet 25 of the presentation gives an impression.

Workshop 2B: Starting Cooperation in Transition Zones to Benefit Natura 2000 Areas with quickscan webtool: Opportunity analysis for nature development

Marten Schoonman (Naturalis)

Moderator: Ed Weijdemans (Provincie Zuid-Holland)



The session was guided by **Marten Schoonman (Naturalis)**, explaining the **KANO quickscan** – a practical method developed within the **LIFE All4Biodiversity** project.

Opportunities Analysis for Nature Development (KANO) is a quick scan that maps the potential for nature areas and their surrounding landscapes, and identifies which themes contribute to improving overall nature quality. The quickscan gives stakeholders—such as land managers, provinces, municipalities, farmers and collectives, water authorities, other landowners, and experts—a voice in nature restoration. It provides clear insight into which factors can have a positive impact on (regional) nature quality.

The KANO is a quick scan developed by Naturalis, partner of the All4biodiversity project, and builds on the Ecological Assessment developed and carried out by the Knowledge Network Development and Management of Nature Quality (OBN Knowledge Network) in 2020). On the basis of 41 topics, subdivided into six overarching targets and four dimensions (impact, feasibility, current efforts and knowledge), opportunities in the area are made clear. The analysis results in an overview of the opportunities related to the area, and it is possible to make an inventory of which actions have a positive effect on the overall quality of nature.

Discussion by using the Mentimeter:

How can you benefit from applying the KANO quickscan?



At which location?



When will its application be a success?

measures supported by all
better quality of plan
recognition results
all stakeholders consulted
representation stakehold
shared communication
clear idea of measures
experts included
in the beginning
combined stakeholders
when its used
many respondents
joint actions
involved stakeholders
when action becomes clear
when results are usefull
if tool shows no more opp



More information: [KANO Opportunity analysis for nature development | Naturalis](#)

Overall reflections from the event

Overall reflections of the day by participants (1- most important lesson and 2- advice)

Rieke Lenaert– ANB

“It is great to be part of the nature conservation club. Together we do have an impact. By working together we can make a change”.

Ben Delbaere – ELMEN

“Together, we share and exchange great messages that relate to wider societal challenges and go beyond nature conservation. For the future of LIFE, it is important to experience and share these messages with the wider society”.

Charlotte van den Auwelant – Natuurpunt

“I stumbled upon the number of LIFE-projects we have just in the Benelux. It is great to see so many colleagues working together”.

Gert-Jan Hoeve – Province of Overijssel

“This event contributes to people’s awareness of activities and perspectives we can undertake as nature conservation community”.

Joseph van der Stegen-European Commission - CINEA

“The challenges ahead are huge but with motivated people, collaborations “beyond the usual suspects”, and some money (of which LIFE money hopefully), a lot can be achieved and have a snowball effect. I hope that the preparation of the Dutch Nature Restoration Plans will be the occasion to progressively shift to more sustainable management practices in the buffer (transition) zones”.

Links to communication about interLIFE:

[InterLIFE Benelux 2025: Samenwerken aan natuurherstel | Natuurmonumenten](#)

[InterLIFE Benelux 2025: Working together restoring nature in the Benelux | Peatpals.eu](#)

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/natuurmonumenten_interlifebenelux-peatpalsforlife-life-ugcPost-7341466613184917505-qNZl?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_ios&rcm=ACoAAAYBGPpBp1T7gADCSNfRCxlqExrLFtPtt94