

tussen Duin & Dijk



Connection and defragmentation

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Online-monitoring *through wildspotter.nl*

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can analyse the material wildlife cameras have captured.
The results have been very positive.*



● Otter. Drawing: Jos Zwarts.

Over the last couple of years, many ecological connections have been created across Noord-Holland. From the most minor wildlife tunnels to large ecoducts, they all contribute to the defragmentation of natural areas, the restoration of migration routes for animals and to road safety. Wildlife facilities are a means and not an end in themselves. Consequently, it is important to investigate whether they actually function as intended. By installing camera traps in and around the wildlife passages, we can find out how they are being used. Analysing the material obtained, however, takes a lot of time and is therefore costly. That is why the province of Noord-Holland chose to work with wildspotter.nl, an online platform where volunteers can analyse the material cameras have captured.

Citizen participation

The monitoring of wildlife facilities requires ecological expertise, time

and a sufficient budget. We are increasingly seeking to connect with citizens to achieve this. Volunteers can make a major contribution to the monitoring of wildlife passages. Because of the many additional eyes in the field, both success stories and problems are found faster. Many hands make light work, also when it comes to analysing camera images. And that is exactly what the wildspotter.nl platform was developed for.

On wildspotter.nl, videos of animals in wildlife passages are shown, and visitors to the website are invited to help name the animals that they see using the wildlife passages. Everything is viewed and analysed by a large group of people. On wildspotter.nl, users can share their findings and discuss amongst each other in order to arrive at the correct answer. That's the power of crowdsourcing: the shared knowledge of a large group of people leads to the correct answer.

Support

Through wildspotter.nl, the province ensures that 'extra hands' are available to help do the monitoring. A second objective in using the website is increasing support for the construction of ecological connections. Negative attention is easily generated whenever a costly facility is not working according to plan. It is more difficult to get the positive results obtained through monitoring in to the public eye. Just telling people about it does not always seem to be enough. So how should you go about creating support? There is a Chinese proverb that has an answer:

*Tell me and I will forget
Show me and I may remember
Involve me and I will understand*

Wildspotter.nl also offers room for critical opinions and people who are not yet familiar with wildlife passages are equally welcome.



● Wildspotter camera at a wildlife passage. Photo: Province of Noord-Holland..

They can find out for themselves what wildlife passages are and whether they work.

Results

Since 2016, forty wildlife passages in Noord-Holland have started monitoring using wildspotter. The camera monitoring was limited to the periods in which the peak in activity takes place: in autumn (September and October), when many young animals go in search of a new habitat, and in spring (April and May), during their mating season, when many species are very mobile. The data from the cameras was read out once every two weeks, after which the video material was put on the website.

Within that period, more than 18,000 people visited wildspotter.nl and viewed the material. Out of this group, 2,400 people actually volunteered to assist in identifying the animals. An important detail here is that wildspotter.nl attracts a young audience: 30% of the visitors are under the age of 24, 55% is younger than 34. So far, more than two thousand videos and images have been analysed by volunteers and more than 98% of their identi-

cations have been correct.

On a so-called 'dashboard' on the website visitors can see what species have made use of the different wildlife passages. This shows us, among other things, that exciting species such as grass snake (*Natrix helvetica*), weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) and European polecat (*M. putorius*) are among those present well within the city limits of Amsterdam. But the differences in use between the passages is striking, with some being visited by the same badger

(*Meles meles*) or pine marten (*Martes martes*) every night, while other passages are used by more species, but less frequently.

Continue the development

Over the years, wildspotter.nl has kept on working on further development. For example, game elements have been added to appeal to a younger audience. And there are still more ideas waiting to be explored. We are for instance looking into the possibilities for self-learning software in the identification process and creating a direct link with wildlife databases. Thanks to the help of citizens, wildspotter.nl is generating valuable and reliable data.

For us to keep developing this way, it is particularly important that more sites will be opened up for research. This gets more people involved and creates more support for initiatives of this kind as a result.

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● Weasel in Amsterdam. Photo: Province of Noord-Holland.

