

The Weerribben and the Wieden

Nature Reserve NL

2013



**ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD
1 SEPTEMBER, 2012 - 31 AUGUST, 2013**

Pursuant to the applicable directive
of the Council of Europe, this report describes only the changes
that took place in the period under review.

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The Weerribben and the Wieden
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State: the Netherlands

Name of the area awarded the Diploma:

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION	
1. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorphology, geology and hydro ecology, habitats, flora, fauna, landscape) - Conservation status.	

- The peat areas of the Wieden and the Weerribben were consolidated into one European Diploma area in 2010. The total surface of the peat marsh is approximately 10,000 ha, 6,200 of which are managed by Natuurmonumenten (Wieden) and 3,500 ha by Staatsbosbeheer (Weerribben). As far as the landscape ecological system is concerned, the two areas are comparable. They have the same habitats and flora and fauna.

1.1. Environment: changes or deterioration to the environment of natural or anthropological origin, incidental or permanent, actual or anticipated.

- By the end of 2013, a new LIFE project will be started in the Wieden. This project is part of a large, national project for the recovery of peat marshes.
- In addition, an environmentally-friendly embankment will be created by the end of 2013, which we expect to develop attractively.
- The Reest and Wieden Water Board, manager of the waterways and responsible for the quality and quantity of the water, started with dredging operations in the National Park this year. Dredgings consist of soil, plant debris, mud and water. The build up of dredgings is a natural process. The dredging operations maintain the water flow. Both the water quality and marine life also gain from this, resulting in more space for the development of a varied eco system.
- In collaboration, National Park Weerribben-Wieden, Natuurmonumenten and Staatsbosbeheer prepared a plan for a vital ecological link between the Wieden and the Weerribben. Its implementation depends on funding, but agreement has been reached about its development at government and planning levels. So far, approval has been obtained from the Provincial Council to create the N333 wildlife underpass. The Province of Overijssel decided to start the construction of this underpass by the end of 2012. This is now being implemented. The wildlife underpass is expected to be put into use by the end of 2014. At the Wieden side, Alterra carried out research to discover locations for stepping stones from that part of the Wieden.
- The Province of Overijssel decided that the development of the wildlife underpass between the Weerribben and the Wieden can be started in 2013. Sections of the Wetering Oost and West polders will be developed as a nature conservation area in future years. This links up perfectly with the wildlife underpass under the N333, which would also be realised in 2012. This project is currently being implemented and will also be ready by the end of 2014.
- A new 300 hectare nature reserve is being formed in the Wetering Oost and West polders, which is also able to temporarily store a great deal of water. As a consequence of climate change, the existing dikes and pumping stations in north-western Overijssel can no longer offer protection against extreme rainfall. It is for this reason that we need to create more space for water in north-western Overijssel. In times of excessive rainfall, over 2.4 million m³ of water can be stored in these new areas. The Province of Overijssel, the Reest and Wieden Water Board and the Municipality of Steenwijkerland have commissioned this project. Staatsbosbeheer will manage the area

1.2. Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetation cover: presumed

The water vegetation in open water is still developing well, Water Soldier in particular is continuing to spread enormously. There are already small fields of Water Soldier floating in the two-year-old new bog holes. Vegetation is flourishing very well in the nature development area at the north end of the Weerribben.

Several peat holes in the Wieden are closing up with Water Soldier, with vegetation mats here and there. These were peat holes that were almost nearly completely open when they were surveyed for water plants in 1982. They are now 80% overgrown with Water Soldier and other water plants.

1.3.

Fauna: changes in sedentary or migratory bird populations; concentrations and breeding places:

Mammals

- The otter population did not change in 2012, around 80 to 100 otters were counted in the National Park. The otters are increasingly spreading across the entire country.
- .Despite the rather severe winter there were no big problems with otters as a result of skating in the Weerribben. At three locations water pumps were used to create ice-free water for the otters. Despite the many improvements to dangerous road crossings, otters are still being killed by traffic. Last year about 6 otters were found dead along the roads.
- There was also a young otter killed in a musk rat trap. Fortunately, this type of accident is rare.
- A dead skunk (*Mephitis macroura*) was found in the Weerribben; luckily, it was an escaped captive animal and no den was found of this exotic species.

Birds

- The endangered marsh birds are still doing badly in the Weerribben. In 2013, only 5 pairs of Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*) were located, and 5 pairs of the Marsh Harrier (*Circus aruginosus*). Three pairs of Bearded Tit (*Panarus biarmicus*) were found in the Weerribben this year. Colleagues from Natuurmonumenten and a few volunteers counted the Purple Heron population with \pm 91 breeding pairs found in the Wieden in 2013. There were also around 13 Marsh Harriers and 25 Bearded Tits.
- Around 161 pairs of the Black Tern were breeding in the Wieden in 2012. Most of them used the artificial floating mats as their breeding ground. Two pairs were breeding on natural material in the Wieden. In the Weerribben, 6 pairs were again breeding on artificial floating mats.
- The Wieden, which has a more suitable habitat, still has \pm 95 pairs. In spring, one or 2 Raven (*Corvus corax*) were frequently seen in the Weerribben and the Wieden. They may be forerunners from the expanding Dutch population and an indication of an early breeding attempt.
- Spotted Crakes (*Porzana porzananen*) were heard in the Weerribben at three locations. And 20 Spotted Crakes were counted in the Wieden.
- This year, from midsummer onwards, there were more sightings of sub-adult White-tailed Eagles. It may be the first sign of the establishment of breeding pairs in the National Park. In the Netherlands, the White-Tailed Eagle increased by 4 pairs in 2013.
- There were also more sightings of the Common Crane (*Grus grus*) in the National Park. In late spring, 2 to 4 birds were frequently seen and heard in the southern part of the Weerribben.
- In the Beulaerpolder, in the Wieden, which has been developed as marshland since 2012, 1 Little Crake and 3 Baillon's Crakes were spotted.

Dragonflies

- One new Dragonfly species was found in the Weerribben: the Spotted Darter (*Sympetrum depressiusculum*). It is the 50th species. The larvae of this Dragonfly

prefers shallow pools with a good water quality. Two populations were found with observations of mating and egg-laying individuals.

- The Dainty White-Faced Darter (*Leucorrhinia caudalis*) was observed at many new places. Fourteen locations in the Weerribben and four in the Wieden are now known; the numbers were higher than last year.
- There is still only one known population of the Norfolk Damselfly (*Coenagrion armatum*). A few hundred of this species were seen flying here.
- Other rare species such as the Common Winter Damselfly (*Sympecma peadisca*), the Green Darter (*Aeshna viridis*), the Yellow-Spotted Emerald (*Somatachloa flavomaculata*) and the Yellow Spotted White-faced Darter (*Leucorrhinia pectoralis*) are doing very well in the Weerribben and the Wieden.
- The increase in both the Weerribben and the Wieden is due to a higher-quality biotope resulting from the management activities and the improved water quality.

Butterflies

- The Mourning Cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*) has been spotted in the Weerribben at many sites, especially in the Woldlakerbos. This woodland species is still increasing. High numbers of the Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus malvea*) were seen in the Wieden this year. In 2013, the Grizzled Skipper was found on more plots than in 2012. In the northern part of the Weerribben, many Pearl-Bordered Fritillary were counted during Large Copper monitoring.

The Large Copper (*Lyceana dispar batava*) had a good year in the Weerribben, More eggs were counted on the monitoring plots. Due to the long winter and the late spring, the butterfly flew 14 days later than normal. Because it was a dry and hot summer, the Large Copper had a long flying time. Many butterflies were seen and even a second generation flew in September in the Weerribben. Unfortunately, there were no sightings in the Wieden. Again no adult species were found this year, although one caterpillar was found. The Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary had the usual number of first generation of butterflies, the second generation had also good numbers, although the butterflies were rather small in size.

Reptiles and amphibians

- The large population of the Live-Bearing Lizard in the Weerribben is still doing well. The lizards were seen at a well-known location. In the northern section of the Wieden and near the Dwarsgracht, an increase in the grass snake population was observed, and in the newly-developed nature areas near the Beulakerpolder, a big increase was seen in the Moor Frog (*Rana arvalis*).

2. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context

2.1. Cultural heritage

In the Wieden, research was carried out into the cultural-historical relics in the field. This information needs to be taken into consideration in regard to current planned operations, which will ensure that the landscape and cultural-historical domains of the Wieden will remain protected.

2.1.1. Changes regarding cultural heritage:

No Changes

2.2. Socio-economic context

In August 2013, Albert Moens, chairman of the Weerribben Wieden National Park passed away after a short illness. In the past four years, the time that Albert was in charge of the Weerribben Wieden National Park, he showed himself to be a committed and motivated chairman, who did a great deal for the development of the Park during his period of chairmanship. We will remember him with great respect, appreciation and admiration..

The State of the Netherlands has distanced itself from its responsibility for the National Parks in the Netherlands, and has transferred their tasks to the Provinces. The Province of Overijssel is currently carrying out no more than its statutory obligations through the Park's consultative body. The Provincial Executive of the Province of Overijssel are expected to take a decision about the future of the National Park in the late autumn of 2013. Staatsbosbeheer expressly opts for the continuation of the National Park and also wants to expand the park with the Rottige Meente (Fryslan) and Oldematen/Staphorsterveld (Overijssel) areas. This would result in a Park consisting of approx. 15,000 ha of unbroken peat areas with valuable landscape and natural qualities.

In the spring of 2013, members of the local employers' organisation and also members of the Provincial Executive of Overijssel were shown around the Waterrijk Weerribben Wieden National Park. Generally speaking, these visits were very fruitful for forming an image of the area and exchanging knowledge.

The National Park has developed a sponsoring scheme: 'Join the Club'. The first contributions have already come in, and will be used for local projects in the Weerribben and the Wieden. In addition, the National Park Regional Savings Account [*Stichting Streekrekening National Park*] has been established, the proceeds of which are also spent on National Park projects and management. In the meantime, an amount of €6,000,000 has been paid into the account. The revenues for the National Park are attributed to the Park through a distribution of the interest revenue over this capital.

2.2.1. Changes regarding the socio-economic context:

Subsidy management

In 2013, the groundwork for the Subsidy for Nature and Landscape (SNL) [*Subsidie voor Natuur en Landschap*] management subsidy application was prepared by a working party consisting of Staatsbosbeheer staff and representatives of the reedland tenants. The application was discussed with the tenants in the Weerribben. Apparently, the groundwork for the SNL application is a very complex matter. Natuurmonumenten applied for this SNL subsidy in 2011.

Government policy and nature management in the Netherlands

In 2011, it was decided that the expenditure on nature had to be greatly reduced. Due to decentralisation of the central government, nature-related tasks have been handed over to the provinces. For Staatsbosbeheer this means that there will be a 60% cut in their national budget of €89,000,000 a year. The organisation must rely on the SNL subsidy in the Province. Consequently, apart from the Natura 2000 areas, Natuurmonumenten will not buy any more new areas for the time being. What this decentralisation will actually mean for the Weerribben and the Wieden needs to be examined further.

In this context, Staatsbosbeheer will remain an independent state organisation with a national task but which, as regards acquiring the SNL management subsidy, enters into a contract relationship with the Province of Overijssel. The nature of this contract is the

realisation of a best efforts obligation. Within the scope of the SNL, Staatsbosbeheer will be a certified management organisation as per 2013. The present Rutte II government is taking a more moderate (positive) political course in respect of nature in the Netherlands. The tone is less sharp than in the Rutte I government.

3. Education and scientific interest

3.1. Visitors – information policy

The Weerribben Outdoor Centre of Staatsbosbeheer in Ossenzijl was given an important face-lift in 2012. The main reason for doing this was to make the Centre financially independent, because Staatsbosbeheer is no longer receiving any government subsidy for educational services.

In 2013, the planning was started for a new Centre in close collaboration with the municipality of Steenwijkerland, the National Park and a local entrepreneur. The first step is to draw up a business case and a marketing plan.

3.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (premises, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)

In collaboration with Waterrijk Weerribben-Wieden (marketing and promotion) and entrepreneurs from the area, an increasing number of sustainable arrangements are being developed. Staatsbosbeheer and Natuurmonumenten are also increasingly organising sustainable excursions, usually in collaboration with the local entrepreneurs in the National Park.

The second water taxi was launched this year. These electrically-driven vessels offer tourists new sustainable transport between the various villages in the National Park. The social media have become increasingly important in using them. Both the Visitors' Centre in the Wieden and the Outdoor Centre in the Weerribben have their own Facebook pages, which attracts an increasingly wider target group. Some National Park wardens also have a Twitter account.

3.1.2. Numbers of visitors and behaviour (number, distribution in time and space)

No changes

3.1.3. Special visits (VIPs, groups, etc.).

Foreign visitors

- A group of German journalists for an NDR Nature Programme shoot.

Politicians and government authorities

- Ms. M. van der Tas, Mayor of Steenwijkerland
- Municipal Executive and Members of the municipality of Steenwijkerland
- Supervisory Board of Staatsbosbeheer

- Natura 2000 Programme Executive
- Supervisory Board of the Rural Area Department (DLG)
- Supervisory Board of the Ministry of Economic Affairs
- Mrs C. Dik-Faber, Member of Parliament for the Christen Unie
- Prof. Dr. Elbert Dijkgraaf, Member of Parliament for the SGP
- B. Boerdam, Member of the Provincial Executive for the Province of Overijssel, (Christen Unie)
- T. Rietkerk, Member of the Provincial Executive for the Province of Overijssel (CDA)
- Members of the Provincial Council

Other

- Business Club Kampen
- Fellow managers.
- Dutch TV: NTR, EO, VARA and RTV East for nature and cultural programmes.

3.2. Scientific research

- 3.2.1. Current or completed research (observation, experimentation, identification or inventory of the species listed in the appendices to the Bern Convention)

Mammals: Otter: monitoring of the animals that were introduced. Otters are monitored annually in the Wieden. Roe deer: annual counting of the population in the Weerribben and the Wieden.

Birds: Breeding birds: about 1,000 ha are surveyed annually in the Weerribben for rare and characteristic breeding birds. Rare species and birds of prey: the entire nature reserve is surveyed annually. Every year, 1/6 section of the nature area in the Wieden is monitored for breeding birds. Water bird counts: the water birds present in the National Park area are counted 6 times during the winter. In de Wieden, because of austerity measures no winter counting is carried out.

Butterflies: Large Copper: in the Weerribben, each year eggs are counted in 12 plots; this data is collected together with other incidental observations. Small Pearl-Bordered Fritillary: butterflies are counted on a monitoring route every year. 1/6 section of the Wieden is currently being surveyed for butterflies and dragonflies; this is carried out by an independent agency. The entire Wieden is expected to have been surveyed by 2017.

Dragonflies: the flying areas of rare species are monitored annually; three routes are walked for the more general species. In 2012 the eastern part of the Weerribben and in the Wieden the eastern and southern part was surveyed for dragonflies. Until 2015, this group of volunteers will be monitoring the entire Park actively. See above.

Fish stocks study: the pike stocks are studied annually in the Weerribben by the Pike Study Group of the Netherlands.

3.3 Scientific publications:

- A team of experts carried out an external audit in the Weerribben in 2012. The audit was commissioned by the director of Staatsbosbeheer on the basis of the 2011 internal quality assessment. The topics were:
 - Ecological development of the Weerribben in time and space;
 - Biodiversity;
 - Thematic coherence of the area with the social context;
 - Public relations;

The Weerribben external audit report was published in the spring of 2013. The audit was led by the following external auditors: Prof. Berendse, Dr. Hillebrand, Dr. Van Wirdum and Ir. Van den Ham. Staatsbosbeheer will work out the findings and recommendations in the report in an action plan, in joint consultations with its partners. Recreational perception and opportunities.

- Annual report BMP dots, the Natuurmonumenten - Wieden monitoring team.
- Black Tern report
- Butterfly report
- NEM Monitoring Network for Scorpidium Moss (*Scorpidium scopioides*) by Melchior van Tweel.
- Peat hole plan the Wieden

4. Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)

- 4.1. Changes in the legislation or regulations of the Habitat Directive / Birds Directive
No changes
- 4.2. Changes in ownership title (conversion to public property, lease, etc.)

Due to a change of policy by the Provincial government on the eastside of the Weerribben the extension will be much smaller than the original plans. There will be less wet grassland

- 4.3. Extension or transfer, new uses (conversion to a total reserve, for example)

In the Weerribben, two large nature-development areas have nearly been finalised. In these areas, the reed vegetation is expanding despite the low water level. Next year when the work is finished, the water level will be raised resulting in a large wetland.

The construction of the wildlife underpass between the Weerribben and the Wieden was also started.

This wildlife underpass in the Steenwijk-Blokzijl provincial road improves the connection between the two nature reserves.

5. Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)

- 5.1. Improvements accomplished

No changes

5.1.1 Ecological action affecting flora and biotopes; fauna control:

No changes

5.1.2 Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)

In collaboration with the regional fire brigade, an emergency plan will be drawn up to prevent and control wildfires.

5.1.3 Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)

A new cycle path in the south side of the Weerribben has been established. To compensate the increase of disturbance for the breeding birds, the management of the bordering fen vegetation has been adjusted and an area rewetted to create more reeding habitat for marsh birds like the Sedge Warbler, Bittern and Savi's Warbler.

5.1.4 Field equipment (hides and study facilities).

No Changes

5.2. Management

In 2013, drastic spending cuts were made. One of these was the closure of the Staatsbosbeheer office in Kalenberg. Management and coordination for the entire Overijssel North District now take place from the office in Rouveen. Another measure will be a further staff reduction, whereby the District will change from a management organisation towards a steering organisation. With this, an attempt is being made to increase collaboration with the region through participation.

5.2.1. Administrative department: Changes made.

In the Weerribben, the Management Office in Kalenberg was closed. A small section has been transferred to the Weerribben Visitor Centre in Ossenzijl.

5.2.2. Wardens' department: Changes made
see 5.2.1

5.2.3. Internal policy measures

See 2.2.1

The N2000 management plan has still not been completed. The biggest problem is the emission of nitrogen in agriculture. The difficulty is the spatial influence on the surrounding areas in regard to the effect and the consequences of the nitrogen deposit criteria. There is now an agreement on the measurement to reduce and compensate the negative effects of nitrogen deposit. These measurements will take effect in the coming years.

State Secretary of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Ms S. Dijkma, is expected to take a decision by the end of 2013 about the instruction and concurrent measures in respect of the ammonia emission.

5.2.4. Infringement of the regulations and damage; legal action

No changes

II. INFLUENCE OF THE AWARD OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA OF PROTECTED AREAS

Thanks to the status of the European Diploma, awareness is growing among both national and local administrators. To some extent, this is because the Weerribben and the Wieden are two unique areas within the European nature network, which deserve continuous attention as regards management and development. In addition to the rich biodiversity, there is also the cultural component. Also in that context, there are opportunities for social bonding and entrepreneurship. At managerial level, talks are ongoing to study the possibilities for future collaboration between the Rottige Meente Nature Reserve north of the Weerribben and the Weerribben-Wieden National Park.

This year, a start was made with constructing the wildlife corridor between the Weerribben and the Wieden, and construction of the wildlife underpass in the N333 is currently ongoing.

III. CONDITIONS AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AWARDING OR RENEWAL.

Progress with measures taken in order to meet the conditions and/or recommendations defined during the award or renewal of the European Diploma of Protected Areas.

Increased efforts are needed in the realisation of the 'wet axis' between the Weerribben and the Wieden reserves, connecting both reserves along a wide corridor to be developed as part of the National Ecological Network.

- The Province of Overijssel had decided that the wildlife corridor (N333 – Roomsloot crossing) between the Weerribben and the Wieden would definitely be implemented.
- In the meantime, an implementation plan was being prepared, which would be carried out in 2013. This work is currently in progress

A twinning programme is to be promoted between the Weerribben and the Wieden reserves.

- No changes

The stand-still of the recreation infrastructure (lodging, embarkation points, canoe rental stations) being a high priority is to be combined with further strict limitations as to the access of boats and canoes in vulnerable canals and core zones (e.g. temporary

closure of some routes in the breeding season); further zoning of recreation requires continued monitoring of leisure developments (number of boats, canoes, bikes) and must take this data into account with the elaboration of permanent impact assessments.

- Within the framework of the planned land usage across the municipality and the province, new cycle paths have been laid out around the Weerribben and the Wieden. The Staatsbosbeheer and Natuurmonumenten nature conservation organisations have had a voice in the planning to avoid a decrease of natural values. Compensation measures were carried out at some locations.

Through the NAC (Nature Activity Centre), a campaign to coordinate boat rental via one central agency (Kalenberg) is needed to inform all users about the vulnerability and the international importance of the nature reserve.

- See 3.1.

Studies to reduce the frequency of larger yachts and boats passing through the Kalenbergergracht will be continued.

- No changes

The further establishment of a Blankenham – Nederland bicycle route, making use of the dike owned by Staatsbosbeheer, is to be reconsidered in order to prevent or minimise disturbing effects in remote areas where, up to now, no public access has been possible.

- No changes

Staatsbosbeheer needs to investigate whether actual agreements with reed cultivators could be transformed into less rigid contracts for periods shorter than six years. Enabling stricter integration in management priorities and needs; reed cultivators need to be convinced that biennial Phragmite-vegetation is necessary for specific breeding birds, which is to be achieved by cyclic mowing of plots or strips (these detailed localities are to be included in the annual management plan).

- Every year, at least two tenant meetings are held in the Weerribben under the auspices of Staatsbosbeheer. There are around 120 tenants.