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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

39th meeting
Strasbourg, 3-6 December 2019

REPORT

**ON THE SPOT EXPERT APPRAISAL OF THE
NATIONAL PARK WEERRIBBEN-WIEDEN**

(NETHERLANDS)

29-30 August 2018

*Document prepared
by Mr Maurice Hoffmann (Belgium)*

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Table of contents

1.	Introduction.....	- 3 -
2.	Programme	- 4 -
3.	Summarized original motivation for application (Weerribben)	- 5 -
4.	Description of the National Park	- 5 -
4.1	Designations	- 6 -
4.2	Description	- 6 -
4.3	Landscape.....	- 6 -
4.4	Fauna	- 6 -
4.5	Flora.....	- 7 -
5.	Have conditions been met with, have recommendations sufficiently been taken care of?.....	- 8 -
5.1	Conditions, 2015.....	- 8 -
	Condition 1.....	- 8 -
5.2	Recommendations, 2015	- 9 -
	Recommendation 1	- 9 -
	Recommendation 2	- 10 -
	Recommendation 3	- 10 -
	Recommendation 4	- 11 -
	Recommendation 5	- 11 -
	Recommendation 6	- 12 -
	Recommendation 7	- 13 -
	Recommendation 8	- 13 -
6.	Expert advice on additional conditions and recommendations	- 14 -
6.1	Remaining conditions	- 14 -
6.2	New conditions	- 14 -
6.2	Existing recommendations	- 15 -
6.3	New recommendations	- 15 -
	New recommendation 1	- 15 -
	New recommendation 2	- 15 -
	New recommendation 3	- 15 -
7.	Conclusions.....	- 16 -
8.	References	- 16 -
8.1	Official documents concerning the European Diploma that were put at the expert's disposal.....	- 16 -
8.2	Other consulted and cited references	- 17 -

1. INTRODUCTION

The period of validity for the European Diploma of Protected Areas for the Weerribben-Wieden National Park is due to expire in 2020. In accordance with the regulations, we carried out an on-the-spot appraisal in August 2018. The Weerribben nature reserve was awarded the European Diploma of Protected Area (EDPA) in 1995. A first renewal was assigned in 2000, a second renewal was assigned in 2010. A third renewal was assigned in 2014. Deviation of the regular ten-year period in the latter case was probably due to the fact that the EDPA was extended with the Wieden nature reserve, while before that period it consisted of the Weerribben nature reserve alone. All renewals were assigned so far. For practical reasons (combination of two Dutch EDPA's for which renewal is due within a period of two years (Weerribben-Wieden National Park (2020, hereafter abbreviated as WWNP) and Oostvaardersplassen nature reserve (2019), it was decided by the Secretariat that both expert visits would best be combined in 2018. This report refers to the expert renewal appraisal of the Weerribben-Wieden National Park. The expert was not accompanied by people of the COE-Secretariat.

The dates of the field visits to the Weerribben-Wieden area were:

Arrival: 28 August 2018

Visit of the National Park: 29-30 August 2018

Departure: 30 August 2018, 13h30

The mandate consisted in evaluating the nature values, conservation status and management aspects of the reserve and its relations with the environment. I consider the specific task of the expert to be

1. Evaluation whether conditions formulated in the third renewal report were met with;
2. The level of fulfilment of the recommendation formulated in the third renewal report;
3. Advice on new or supplementary conditions for the fourth renewal;
4. Advice on new or supplementary recommendations for the fourth renewal.

I prepared answering the above-mentioned questions departing from the on-the-spot appraisal report De Weerribben and De Wieden Nature Reserve (Netherlands) from June 2014 (expert: Robert Brunner, Austria, hereafter referred to as Brunner 2014))

During the visit, I was duly informed about the way both managing organisations (Natuurmonumenten and Staatsbosbeheer) dealt with the conditions and recommendations given by the Council in 2015, with internal and external management measures, the educational efforts, the (potential) impact of outdoor recreation, agriculture and other activities, and the cooperation of both managing organisations.

Meetings were jointly organised by Natuurmonumenten (Wieden) and Staatsbosbeheer (Weerribben) with local councillors of the municipality of Steenwijkerland (both parts of the National Park are on the territory of this town), representatives of private owners, managers and management representatives of both parts of the WWNP, representatives of the province of Overijssel, volunteers contributing to management, recreation and tourism support.

I am very grateful to Bea Claessens (region manager Wieden, Natuurmonumenten (NM)), Hans van de Beek (region manager Weerribben, Staatsbosbeheer (SBB)), who together coordinated the on-the-spot meetings and visits to the National Park. Special thanks to the management staff members of both organisations, Egbert Beens (education, PR SBB), Jeroen Bredenbeek (ecologist, SBB), Rosalie Martens (ecologist, NM), Gidon Kok (coordinator nature management Wieden, NM), Tim Boerrigter van Weerd (coordinator nature management Weerribben, SBB), Wijtze Landstra (project leader Weerribben-Wieden, province of Overijssel), Bram Harmsma (alderman, municipality of Steenwijkerland), Jurr van Dalen (Stichting Weerribben-Wieden), Harry Koenders (Head of Department Communication, SBB), Piet Zuijderwijk (volunteer educational programmes), Miranda Borkers (Manager Education Centre de Weerribben, SBB), Wim Liesker (local inhabitant, expert in flight path issues related to the Lelystad Airport plans). Special thanks to Egbert Beens for organizing local accommodation and transport.

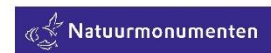
2. PROGRAMME

29.08.2018:

- morning: Meeting at the NM management office, Veneweg 253, Wanneperveen, with focus on the Wieden part of the area, with presentations on
 - o The role of the province of Overijssel
 - o The Natura 2000 management plan
- noon: visit to the Visitor Centre De Wieden in Beulakerpad 1, Sint-Jans klooster with short walk through hayfield meadow
- afternoon: visit to the area by boat with NM- and SBB employees to area around the NM management office (Boschwijde, Belt-Schutsloot, Westelijke Belterwijde, ...), visit of the quacking mire ("trilveen") Kikkerlanden and PAS-management site
- evening: dinner with informal discussions with Bram Harmsma (alderman, municipality of Steenwijkerland), Jurr van Dalen (Stichting Weerribben-Wieden) and Harry Koenders (Head of Department Communication, SBB) at Hotel-Restaurant Geertien, Muggenbeet 3, Blokzijl

De Wieden

Route veldbezoek Europees Diploma



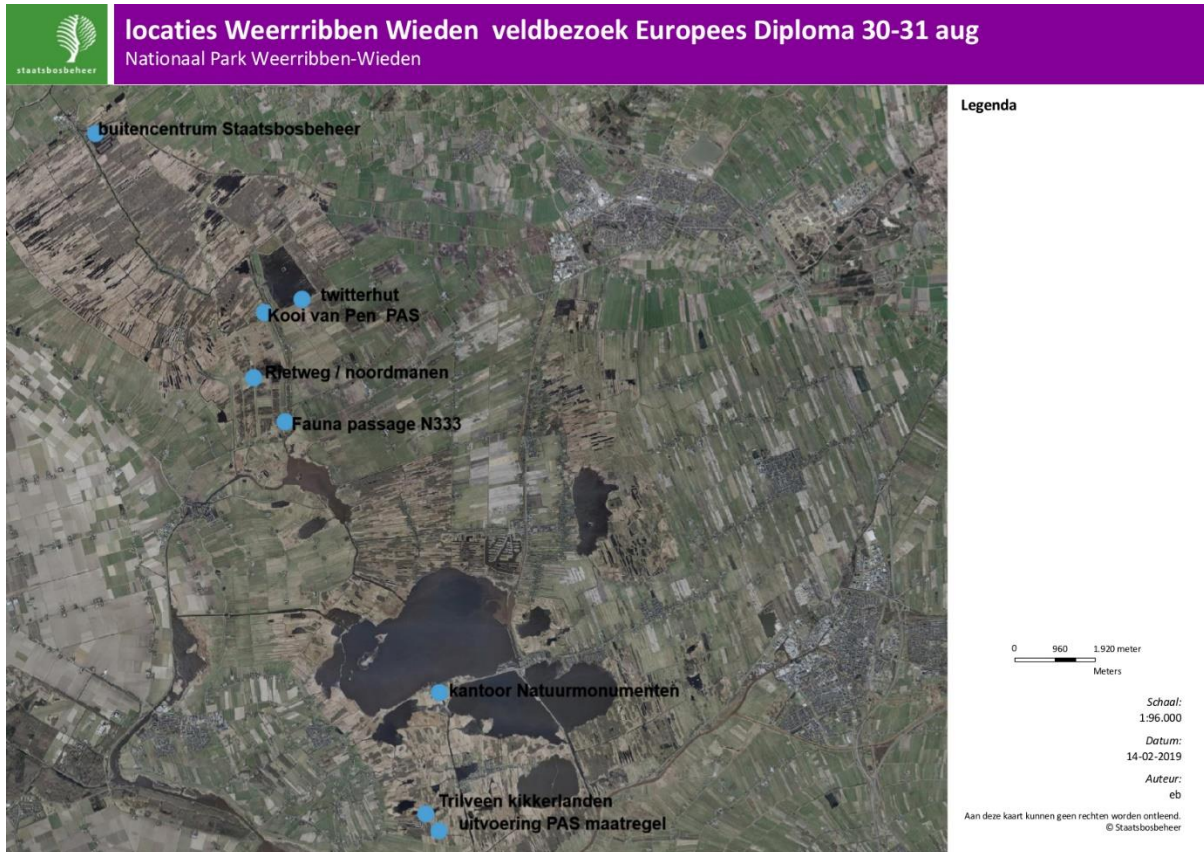
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Boat trip and quacking mire ("trilveen") excursion location and PAS-measure example, explored during the visit of the Wieden part of the National Park.

30.08-2018:

- morning: visits with SBB-managers to several locations of the Weerribben part of the area (see figure below);
- noon: visit to the Buitencentrum Weerribben, conversations with local volunteers/employees (Piet Zuijderwijk (volunteer educational programmes), Miranda Borkers (Manager Education Centre de Weerribben, SBB) in the centre, followed by lunch with discussion on the potential noise disturbance by flight routes towards Lelystad airport with Wim Liesker. Interview with local journalist (Radio Oost) on the EDPA principle and the values of the WWNP.
- departure around 13h30



Visited locations during the excursions on 29th and 30th of August 2019.

3. SUMMARIZED ORIGINAL MOTIVATION FOR APPLICATION (WEERRIBBEN)

"De Weerribben" forms together with the neighbouring nature reserve called "De Wieden" one of the most important marshlands in North Western Europe.

- a. The great abundance of water in the region makes it internationally significant as a permanent place of refuge and breeding ground for waterfowl. This is why "De Weerribben" has been considered internationally already long times as a European Wetland of great importance. Since the ratification of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance by the Dutch Government in 1980, "De Weerribben" has the status of "Wetland".
- b. "De Weerribben" nature reserve is an EC protection zone under the Bird Directive.
- c. Among the many bird species, breeding in "De Weerribben" there are 18 species mentioned on the "Red List"; another 5 species are regularly noticed, but it is not sure if they are also breeding in the reserve.
- d. Eurosite Twinning Contact "De Weerribben" has a Eurosite Twinning contact with the National Park "The Broads" (East Anglia/GB) and with the nature reserve "Le Marais de Audomarais" (Nord, Pas de Calais/F). The aim of this Twinning contact is the exchange of knowledge and experience of wetland management in a nature reserve with facilities for the public.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL PARK

The Weerribben-Wieden National Park (WWNP) is situated in the municipality of Steenwijkerland (province Overijssel, the Netherlands). Together with the neighbouring Rottige Meenthe (prof; Friesland), it comprises the largest bog area of northwestern Europe. It consists of two areas, De Weerribben and De Wieden, and has an area of roughly 100 square kilometres (39 sq mi).

For a general description of the WWNP we refer to Brunner (2014), if not accurate anymore, his description is updated.

In 1992 De Weerribben protected area was founded as National Park (NP), administered by Staatsbosbeheer (SBB). It was awarded the European Diploma of Protected Area (EDPA) in 1995.

Along with the renewal of the Diploma of the nature reserve De Weerribben in 2010, the Dutch Ministry for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality also nominated the nature reserve De Wieden for the European Diploma. The nature reserve De Wieden neighbours the nature reserve De Weerribben, and is administered by Natuurmonumenten. Since 2009 these two protected areas have been appearing under the common name Weerribben-Wieden National Park with still two separate administrative organisations, but in close co-operation and with common leaflets, maps and one website. Signposts at the respective entry points show the new common name of the two adjoining sites.

4.1 Designations

The nature values of the Weerribben-Wieden National Park depend highly on a wide spectrum of nature management measures. According to the IUCN criteria for protected areas, both sites are classified as protected areas aiming to protect particular species or habitats and managing the area (IUCN category IV) with the primary objective to maintain, conserve and restore species and habitats. In 2003, the two sites elaborated first proposals for a Habitat Directive designation process and started to jointly develop a NATURA 2000 management plan. Finally, on 6th of January 2014, they were designated as NATURA 2000 sites. A management plan, drafted in 2009, has recently (2017) been officially adopted, and has been used by both authorities for day-to-day activities and both administrations are acting within the framework of the N2000 management plan. Both sites are also listed as RAMSAR sites.

4.2 Description

De WWNP builds the largest freshwater wetland in North-West Europe. They are situated approx. 85 km north-east of Amsterdam.

Two thirds of the total of 10,000 hectares belong to De Wieden Nature Reserve. De Weerribben is largely owned and managed by Staatsbosbeheer, the National Forest Service, whereas the major part of De Wieden are owned and managed by Natuurmonumenten, several hundreds of hectares are in private ownership.

Both sites are former peat extraction areas. Landscapes in the two parts differ. De Weerribben is a wetland with many canals and large reed beds. De Wieden is an open landscape with large lakes surrounded by reed belts and quaking mires (“trilveen”) as a special habitat.

4.3 Landscape

Although the landscape nowadays gives an impression of untouched nature, it was entirely shaped by human intervention and exploitation. Due to large peat extractions since the 16th century the former peat land was turned into a wetland area. The typical aspect of the Weerribben is the result of so-called “Weeren”, where peat was cut out of the bog and the “Ribben”, small stripes, used to penetrate the bog and transport peat. The “Ribben” in the De Wieden Nature Reserve were damaged by floods and storms, which led to large open water areas. The landscape is maintained through permanent human intervention. Without culling trees, cutting hay meadows, reeds and quaking mires (trilvenen), the area would be overgrown by marsh vegetation with initial reed dominance, and finally dominance of marsh wood. Thanks to its expanse, its general water quality, its relatively low number of inhabitants, the Weerribben-Wieden area together with the neighbouring Rottige Meenthe (province of Friesland) are to be considered as the most important marshland area of West and Central Europe (see also Westhoff et al. 1971). It’s also to be considered as one of the larger silence areas of the densely populated Netherlands.

4.4 Fauna

Beside a refuge for the otter (*Lutra lutra*), which was partly reintroduced in The Netherlands in 2002 after its national extinction in 1988, and whose population is growing due to enlarged wetland habitats and improvements in water management and water quality, the Weerribben-Wieden National Park is a highly important bird area. Brandsma et al. (2016) mention up to 116 and 133 breeding birds for the Weerribben and Wieden, respectively. Various warbler (*Acrocephalus*) species use the reedlands: Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*), Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*), Savi's Warbler (*Locustella luscinioides*), Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) or Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) and Bearded Titmouse (*Panurus biarmicus*). Larger species like Bittern (*Botaurus*

stellaris), Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) and Purple Herons (*Ardea purpurea*) use the site as a nesting place. Recent breeding birds are Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) and Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*). Probably the recently created new marshlands (like Wetering Oost) will have had a positive impact on the further development of the birds' population.

Furthermore, populations of dragonflies, butterflies, amphibians and reptiles are developing well. More details and recent figures are provided in the annual reports. Special to mention are several butterfly species, such as Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria selene*), Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*) and above all a subspecies of the Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar batava*), which is only known (hence endemic) from the Weerribben-Wieden National Park and the neighbouring area Rottige Meenthe (red list category seriously threatened). The latter only feeds on *Rumex hydrolapathum*, making it a vulnerable subspecies. To protect the subspecies, a conservation plan was set up in the early twenties (Van Swaay, 2000), mainly aimed at expanding its habitat.



Lycaena dispar batava, an endemic subspecies of the Large Copper which is only known from the Weerribben-Wieden National Park and the neighbouring Rottige Meenthe (prov. Friesland). (red list category seriously threatened).



4.5 Flora

The peatland flora of the National Park is very rich in species, describing it is beyond the scope of this report. Good general descriptions are already given by Westhoff et al. (1971), and most of what has been described in Westhoff's monumental work still stands. General syntaxonomy of marsh and peatland vegetation is given by Schaminée et al. 1995. Internationally important is the presence of Parvocaricetea - Caricion nigrae - Pallavicinio-Sphagnetum ('veenmosrietlanden'). The peatland substrate is largely dominated by bog mosses (*Sphagnum*). *Stratiotes aloides*, *Thelypteris palustris* and *Scorpidium scorpioides* are just some of the rare, stenotopic species in the WWNP.



5. HAVE CONDITIONS BEEN MET WITH, HAVE RECOMMENDATIONS SUFFICIENTLY BEEN TAKEN CARE OF?

5.1 Conditions, 2015

Condition 1. Urge the responsible authorities to adopt the joint Natura 2000 management plan, by the end of 2016, as an official and binding document that will be considered as covering the requirements of the European Diploma.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2017: The Province of Overijssel is responsible for drawing up the N2000 Management Plan. After some delay, the N2000 Management Plan was at last finalised. The implementation of the PAS (Programmatic Nitrogen Approach) has been postponed. Due to the large number of intended management measures in the Weerribben, an environmental impact report must be drawn up in advance of the implementation. This does not apply to all the measures in the Wieden. In the case of some of the PAS measures, Natuurmonumenten will only start in 2018. This concerns measures that are not subject to an EIA requirement.

Expert observations and comments:

During a presentation of a representative of the province of Overijssel (Wijtze Landstra (project leader Weerribben-Wieden, province of Overijssel), it was clarified that the N2000 management plan was accepted and implemented for the entire WWNP.

On the relation with the PAS measures the N2000 management plan states the following: “In this Natura 2000 management plan, a distinction is made between PAS and non-PAS related parts. The grey accented texts and accompanying tables, figures and maps are 1 to 1 related to the PAS area analyses determined by the Provincial Executive on 11th of January 2017. The PAS area analyses are adjusted several times during the first management plan period (mostly as a result of technical changes in the calculation tool of the PAS (AERIUS) or developments from the area process). These changes will not be implemented in this Natura 2000 management plan. If necessary, this management plan will also be combined with the most recent field analyses determined by the Provincial Executive. The most recent area analysis can be found on the website <https://www.synbiosys.alterra.nl/natura2000/gebiedendatabase.aspx?subj=pas&deel=0>.

In the PAS-analysis Weerribben and Wieden are still dealt with separately.

Given these facts, the sole condition put forward in the renewal documents of 2015 can be considered to be met with. Nonetheless, further follow-up of PAS-measures remains an important task.

5.2 Recommendations, 2015

Recommendation 1

Implement a monitoring programme to evaluate the effects – at least on important and/or endangered species – of the new connection between De Weerribben and De Wieden, the construction of which was finished by the end of 2014, considering the exemplary role of the project.



The ecopassage Muggenbeet is a 70-meter-long passage under the elevated N333 near the hummock of Muggenbeet. The passage connects the low moorland marshes Wieden and Weerribben. Water and banks continue more or less under the construction.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2015:

In 2015, a monitoring programme was carried out by the province of Overijssel. They monitored mainly with the help of camera traps under and near the ecopassage. In 2016, monitoring will be carried out by the two TBOs (terrain managing organisations) with the help of a volunteer. This particular volunteer has always worked for the province of Overijssel and he knows a great deal about the various types of fauna.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2016:

Unfortunately, monitoring was skipped this year. In 2015, it was the Province that carried out the monitoring programme. This showed that the ecopassage was used by many different animals, among which otter and deer. In 2017, the monitoring will be jointly carried out by Staatsbosbeheer and Natuurmonumenten. Working together with volunteers, data is collected with the help of camera traps and walk-in traps.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2017:

In 2017, a start was made on collecting observations of the larger mammals by means of trace research. Traces of otter, deer, fox and martens have been found under the bridge. Points of special interest were the presence of the Large Copper in areas on either side of the Steenwijk-Blokzijl (N333) road. On the Weerribben side, small populations were found in two places, the nearest was 500 m from the road and 700 m from the ecopassage. Further research into the use of the bridge will continue in 2018.

Expert observations and comments, August 2018:

The ecopassage under the N333 connecting Steenwijk with Blokzijl was visited during the on the spot visit. It was explained by the managers that regular monitoring efforts are delivered to further evaluate the mammal movements between both areas using the ecopassage. Additionally, a report was put

available on the effectiveness of the infrastructure for invertebrate fauna (Faasen, 2015). Several recommendations were given by Faasen (2015) concerning light conditions, vegetation continuity and water conditions. Local conditions below the ecopassage could not be verified during the visit. Hence, the recommendations on smaller adjustments of the infrastructure given by Faasen (2015) remain to be considered and evaluated. Evidently, further monitoring of mammal and invertebrate passage remains to be continued. Use of tracking dogs specialized in tracking specific mammal faeces could be considered. It's has proven elsewhere to be quite effective and is of potential added value as a visitor's attraction.

Recommendation 2

Monitor the further development of fish stocks, with an emphasis on eels, to strengthen the ecological function of the reserves and natural reproduction in line with Natura 2000 requirements.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2015:

An eel conservation plan has been drawn up together with the professional fishermen. DUPAN was closely involved in this process. The plan focuses on both the welfare of the eel and that of the fishermen.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2016:

In 2017, Natuurmonumenten will extend the fishing contracts in the Wieden provided that conditions regarding sustainability are met. If not, they will be terminated. In the Weerribben, the annual pike study group will carry out the annual pike monitoring. During the winter season, throughout the Weerribben, pike are caught with a rod, measured, weighed and released again. The state of the pike is currently very good

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2017:

Natuurmonumenten is now in the process of terminating the lease agreements with the fishermen fishing for eel in the Wieden. This will continue in 2018.

Expert observations and comments:

Given the initiatives taken by both organisations, the situation of the ichthyofauna and its monitoring was not further discussed during the visit. According to the annual reports, management and monitoring of ichthyofauna made significant progress. Continuation of monitoring programmes remains necessary though.

Regular monitoring of bioaccumulation of toxicants in eels should be taken into consideration. Eel is known to be a bio-accumulator of toxic substances, because it is a species high in the trophic pyramid. It is considered a good indicator for the general toxicant situation of the fish fauna, which is an important parameter to evaluate chances of fish predating birds (e.g. Osprey, ...) and mammals (e.g. Otter, ...).

Recommendation 3

Limit the impact of fishing by defining a maximum number of licenses or limiting the catch; define methods for avoiding secondary catches of otter or other species; ensure the further development of a management plan for fish stocks covering all species, as requested in the previous resolution on the renewal of the European Diploma

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2015:

Angling in De Wieden is possible on a very small scale. There are now only 3 fishing companies active in De Wieden and that number will be reduced further in the future. There are no longer professional fishermen active in De Weerribben, although there is some angling in restricted places.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2016:

Angling in the Wieden is possible but is done on a very small scale only. There are still only 3 fishing companies active in the Wieden and that will be reduced even further in the future. See answer to recommendation 2. There are no longer professional fishermen active in the Weerribben, although there is some angling in restricted places.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2017:

Angling in the Wieden is possible but on a very small scale. There are only 3 fishing companies active in the Wieden and that will be reduced further in the future. See answer to recommendation 2. There

are no longer professional fishermen active in the Weerribben, although there is some angling in restricted places.

Expert observations and comments:

Despite progress made in controlling fishing activities in de WWNP, the limitation of the impact of fishing by defining a maximum number of licenses or limiting the catch has not yet been realized. If professional fishery is by now finished, the problem of potential secondary catches of otter or other species appears to be solved.

Ensuring the further development of a management plan for fish stocks covering all species, as requested in the previous resolution on the renewal of the European Diploma remains to be covered.

Recommendation 4

Carefully observe the development of boating on the Kalenberger Gracht and set limits (for example a maximum number and/or size of boats) or provide for measures in case of increasing numbers of larger boats

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2015:

There is no increase in large boats. In 2016, together with the municipality, we want to start with a new monitoring system.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2016:

There is no increase in large boats.

Unfortunately, no new monitoring system is yet available. The Municipality first wants to complete the planning and the new organisational format of the National Park.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2017:

No changes.

Expert observations and comments and advice:

The earlier observations on limited boating intensity in 2015-2017 were confirmed and experienced during the visit in 2018. Monitoring of trends in boating activity remains to be important given the primordial importance of the level of disturbance for fauna and general public experience in the area. Hence, the intention to more systematic monitoring in cooperation with the municipality needs to be implemented. Given the general ecological principle that rare events of severe disturbance are far more relevant than average levels of disturbance, measures to limit the number of boats in peak periods would best be taken into consideration.

Recommendation 5

Continue with the designation of adjoining areas as extensions of, or buffer zones to, the protected areas, especially to the north (Rottige Meenthe) and south-east (Staphorster Veld), and create a connection between the two separate parts of De Wieden Nature Reserve between the Zuideindiger Wiede and the Bovenwiede

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2015:

In 2016, we will assess the grassland management with the farmers who are doing this work at the moment. The main objective is grassland that is rich in herbage and fauna. With the healthy development of herbage and fauna, the grasslands from Zuideindiger Wiede to the Boven Wiede will be a better corridor for the wide range of flora and fauna. The State and the province of Overijssel have delegated the tasks in regard to the National Parks to the municipality of Steenwijkerland. A core team in which the various interested parties and organisations responsible for the management of the Parks are represented, is considering the position of the New-Style National Park. This means that the implementation of the wildlife corridor to the Rottige Meenthe has now come to a standstill. However, it will be included in the proposals of the core team, which will present its plans to the Municipal Council in June 2016.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2016:

The construction of the buffer zones depends on the adoption of the N2000 Management Plan. The Management Plan is expected to be adopted in January 2017, after which the preparations for the buffer zones will commence. The WWNP (Weerribben-Wieden National Park) core team has recommended that the National Park be viewed in a broader context in connection with its

surroundings. The main emphasis here should be on the balance between ecology and economy. The economic spin-off of the National Park is expected to work for a larger area and to decrease the pressure on well-known hotspots.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2017:

Following the adoption of the N2000 Management Plan, the province of Overijssel organised meetings this autumn to explain its plans to the residents. It is not yet clear when these will be carried out. Within the terms of the PAS, the province of Overijssel will work on the connection between Rottige Meenthe and the development of Noordmanen, which must be completed by 2023.

In the zone between the Bovenwiede and the Zuideindigerwiede, a few farmers are encouraging herb and fauna-rich grassland to create a type of corridor between these two areas. They are still working hard on this.

Expert observations and comments:

The following is stated in the N2000 management plan on the necessity of a connection between Rottige Meenthe in the province of Friesland and the Weerribben, north of the latter: "In the short term, it is necessary to set up connection zones between the Rottige Meenthe and Weerribben (measure F-1). The connecting zones are arranged in such a way that they are suitable as habitat of the Large Copper. For the connection Rottige Meenthe-Weerribben a width of 250 meters is foreseen."

From the comments in 2017, we conclude that the connections are not yet realized. Hence, this remains an important point of attention for the near future. Given the definition of a measure in the N2000 management plan, we conclude that taking the measure is agreed upon and obligatory.

As far as the connection between Bovenwiede and Zuideindiger wijde, nothing specific is mentioned in the N2000 management plan. This recommendation should therefore be taken into consideration again, and eventually explained why little is undertaken to realize a physical connection. During the stay in August, this area was not visited nor commented upon.

Recommendation 6

Review contracts with business owners and landowners with regard to habitat management, and especially the duration of these contracts, to ensure that management can be directed by the responsible authorities and to prevent long-term and irredeemable contracts through which the reserve authorities have limited leverage.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2015:

Natuurmonumenten still has many regular contracts with reedland owners, as soon as we can cancel them we will do so, and switch to more flexible lease contracts. This will mean that we will be able to react more quickly to changes. Staatsbosbeheer has worked hard this year to harmonise all currently-existing contracts with the Nature and Landscape subsidy arrangement (SNL).

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2016:

In 2016, agreement was reached with the reed sector and the Province of Overijssel on changes in the Provincial Nature and Landscape subsidy (SNL). With the new subsidy scheme, the threatening problem of VAT levying for reed growers was averted. Staatsbosbeheer supervises the management which is carried out by the tenants. The Province pays 80% of the management fee directly to the reedland tenants.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2017:

In 2016, an agreement was reached with the reed sector and the Province of Overijssel on changes in the Provincial Nature and Landscape subsidy (SNL). With the new subsidy scheme, the threatening problem of VAT levying for reed growers was averted. Staatsbosbeheer supervises the management which is carried out by the tenants. The Province pays 80% of the management fee directly to the reedland tenants.

In 2017, Natuurmonumenten started a natural farming course for its tenants and a number of farmers have already completed the first stage of this course. The course will be extended in 2018 to include other farmers (tenants) as well as the next stages of the study.

Expert observations and comments:

According to the annual reports, both organisations put large effort into arranging future reedland

management by private owners in an as flexible as possible way. The province of Overijssel obviously gave a lot of attention to this issue. It can only be recommended to maintain and possibly enhance this approach. The initiative of Natuurmonumenten mentioned in the 2017 report is of potential great value, given the goal of having local farmers actually involved in the reedland management.

Recommendation 7

Observe possible threats that may occur due to the intensification of agriculture, changes in water management or construction of wind farms

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2015:

We are monitoring closely every intensification of farming, water management or anything similar in and around the Weerribben-Wieden National Park.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2016:

No changes

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2017:

Comment not related to the recommendation 7, concerning the flight route over Weerribben-Wieden National Park.

In 2015, the Dutch government decided to expand Lelystad Airport, which needs to be operational for tourist flights in 2019. The new airport will have flights approaching from all over the world, including flight routes above the province of Overijssel. The final approach routes have now been published. At most places in the Kop van Overijssel, Salland and the Vechtdal areas, the planes will be flying above Overijssel at an altitude of 6,000 feet (1,500-1,800 metres).

For the WWNP this means that one of the routes will fly over the National Park. And there will be a type of holding stack¹ above the National Park, where aeroplanes will continue to circle until they receive permission to land at Lelystad Airport. We do not exactly know what this means in terms of emissions above the area and the resulting disruption to people and animals.

Many concerned residents have signed a petition opposing these low approach routes. On behalf of its members,

Expert observations and comments:

As far as the possible threats of intensive farming and accompanying ammonia pollution, the PAS measures defined in the N2000 management plan (chapter 6.1 in the management plan) should help avoid pollution events through intensive farming to happen.

The 2015 governmental decision on the flight routes is now more threatening the WWNP, not only for potential pollution, but also on expectable disturbance. This is for the moment the major issue for the WWNP, that needs to be carefully studied and remediated. Avoidance of low flight path and holding stacks above the WWNP is not compatible with the nature values of the area and should hence be avoided. It must be considered a condition for the renewal of the EDPA.

Recommendation 8

Secure adequate funds to convert the Ossenzijl information centre, at least in part, into an educational centre geared towards young people

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2015:

In the coming winter season, the programmes in De Weerribben Visitors' Centre (Ossenzijl) will be changed in order to focus more on education.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2016:

The Visitors' Centre in Ossenzijl (Staatsbosbeheer) had more educational programmes available for young people. The Nature-theme afternoons, the IVN (Nature Volunteer Organisation) table and the Gnome trail are very successful. The educational programme will be expanded in the coming years. The nature trail will be renovated in 2017.

¹ Holding stacks work as waiting room for an aircraft before landing. The aircraft is in the "waiting room" the air traffic controller efficiently organises the landing directions and runway. For this reason, there can be several aircraft separated vertically by 1,000 feet or more at the same time in holding stack.

Weerribben-Wieden Annual report comments 2017:

The nature trail near the Weerribben Visitor Centre in Ossenzijl has been renovated this year and made accessible to wheelchair users. The educational part of it will be completed next spring. In collaboration with the IVN Nature Volunteer Organisation, various educational programmes have been carried out in the National Park this year with the focus on primary school pupils. There are also ongoing talks to renew the Weerribben Outdoor Centre in Ossenzijl. Initially, a new start will be attempted with existing entrepreneurs. The Centre will serve as a gateway to the National Park.

In the Wieden Visitor Centre the slatted path has been renovated. This slatted path was repaired by a group of volunteers from Natuurmonumenten, who have been working on it throughout the entire year. It is now easily accessible to wheelchair users, for example, so that they can also enjoy the experience of the Wieden.

The active Junior Rangers group of the Weerribben-Wieden National Park celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. These young people in the age group of 12 to 18 help with maintenance, the monitoring of plants and animals, and with educational and nature events.

In addition to this group of youngsters, there are also 2 youth nature clubs active in the National Park where children aged 7 to 12 can participate.

Expert observations and comments:

Both visitor's centres were visited during the field stay. Both were impressive in their infrastructure and originality. The Wieden Visitor's Centre has a lot to offer given the historical houses. It has a small size but this seems most appropriate given the nature of the WWNP, being a silence area, where too intensive concentration of ecotourism would best be avoided. The Ossenzijl SBB visitor's Centre deserves further attention on renovation.

A major issue is that almost all information is in Dutch, making the centres less attractive to an international public. Combined with the advice that the WWNP would be better promoted as an EDPA, stressing the network of EDPA-areas in Europe and the huge added value of this network. Now you do not experience the WWNP as part of a larger high level, high quality network of pristine European nature areas.

Much might be improved on this issue if the Council would also pay more attention on its website and other communication channels to better promote, visualize the strength of the network and the added value to be part of it. Nowadays the EDPA website is not very appealing, most certainly not on the potential network quality of the 73 EDPA's.

In the WWNP attention has been paid to visualize the recognition as an EDPA on information boards and in the centres, but more attention can be paid to this.

6. EXPERT ADVICE ON ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Remaining conditions

The sole condition put forward in the renewal documents of 2015 can be considered to be met with. Nonetheless, further follow-up of PAS-measures remains an important task.

6.2 New conditions

The on-going local up to national discussions on the destination of Lelystad Airport (LA) is a major concern for the nature values of the WWNP, and hence for the renewal of the EDPA. A condition for renewal would be that low flight paths and holding tracks above the WWNP are excluded from the airport regulations.

LA is planned to open for tourist flights in 2020 (the official Dutch governmental website <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/luchtvaart/ontwikkeling-lelystad-airport> states: "In 2020, Lelystad Airport will be open for holiday flights within Europe and other destinations around the Mediterranean Sea. Lelystad Airport, together with Eindhoven Airport, takes over part of the air traffic from Schiphol. This creates space for business travel and intercontinental flights at Schiphol that are of great importance for the competitive position of the Netherlands and thus for our prosperity").

Despite the relative great distance of the WWNP from LA (shortest distance of LA is ca. 44 km (distance Muggenbeet – LA-flight traffic control tower)), the main concern for the WWNP is the

present intention to use very long low flight paths (expected flight height above the WWNP, approx. 1800 m) and the destination of the airspace above the WWNP as a holding stack for planes that need to wait for landing at LA. Both conditions will result in an increase of the disturbance and air pollution levels in the WWNP. Both variables are of the utmost importance for the nature values of the area. Air and water quality are important trumps of the NP, decrease of their quality has potential impact on fauna and flora. The general tranquillity of the area is another great trump, very much needed by several fauna elements (birds, mammals), and highly appreciated by local inhabitants and visitors of the NP.

There remains further uncertainty on the final destination of LA. To mention only a few: will it remain an airport for limited tourist flights with relatively small planes (less polluting, less noise), or will it grow into an international airport with international and/or freight flights, what's the final purpose as far as the number of flights and diurnal flight timing is concerned?

Combining these arguments, it is advised that the Dutch government would decide not to start Lelystadt Airport before a solution for the long low flight path is found, and that it is ascertained that flight movements above the WWNP is kept at the lowest possible level with only high flight routes and no holding tracks above the NP. It is to be considered as a condition for renewal of the EDPA.

6.2 Existing recommendations

Several of the recommendations given at the last renewal remain in focus for the next period. For descriptions, see chapter Recommendations, 2015.

6.3 New recommendations

New recommendation 1

We recommend that both visiting centres would be made more attractive to foreign visitors by introducing at least English, preferably also German and French texts to all exhibitions. Giving more visibility to the EDPA status would be of added value.

New recommendation 2

Use the EDPA logo more prominently and use links to the websites to visualize the link with other EDPA-areas in Europe; consider introduction of the EDPA network through video or other exhibitions and social media in the visitor's centres.

Note for the Council of Europe:

This approach would be very much helped if the Council pays more attention to advertising the network of EDPA's; the Council website, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/european-diploma-for-protected-areas>, is presently limited in that respect. The EDPA sites should be much more profiled as a (the) European network of pristine sites with European significance. Initiatives could also be taken to stimulate member state actively to apply for an EDPA when the ecosystems present in those member states are of European importance. The total of areas would ideally be representative of pristine examples of Europe's ecosystems and biodiversity hot spots in all biogeographical regions of Europe.

New recommendation 3

Given the on-going discussion in the Netherlands on a new approach and definition of National Parks with distinction between National Parks of world Class up to Regional Parks, it is recommended that the present National Park Weerribben-Wieden would apply or be designated as a National Park of World Class, once this NP approach has been installed (it appears that, given the differences in criteria used for receiving the present status of National Parks and the ones used for New National Parks that existing NP's should re-apply, or be re-designated).

Interesting to know is that the advice of the Commissie Realisatie Natuurverkiezing (2018) mentions that judging the qualification of National Park of national and international importance would best be done by representatives of Unesco, with the perspective to be recognized as Unesco World Heritage Area. The advice doesn't mention the relevance at the European scale for judging the status of New National Park of World Class, nor the existing recognition of some of the Dutch National Parks in the Netherlands by the Council of Europe as EDPA's.

The new criteria for National Park recognition would be (Commissie Realisatie Natuurverkiezing, 2018):

1. A National Park uses as much as possible natural boundaries. The spatial requirements for the sustainable survival of habitats, species, natural processes or phenomena of the area that is to be protected determine the boundaries. It should be clear how the size of the area contributes to the quality of nature.
2. Together, the area is as complete a landscape-ecological system as possible. A landscape-ecological system often covers areas of 10,000 to 100,000 hectares.
3. A National Park can be extended further on the basis of landscape or cultural-historical logically chosen spatial units.
4. The National Park offers the possibility of developing and restoring natural processes in large parts of the area, so that the landscape-ecological system is restored and made robust in such a way that natural values can continue to exist. The National Park is aware of or develops a properly functioning system of abiotic (such as the effects of wind and water, sedimentation, erosion, infiltration, seepage and inundation) and biotic factors (influence of animals and vegetation on the landscape) and the mutual relations between them. The space for (recovery) of processes lead to resilient nature that contributes to an increase in biodiversity.
5. The landscape and cultural-historical values are connected with the natural values (in the natural cores and the landscape zone) in such a way that the ontogenesis is preserved, recognizable and experienced. Geological and geomorphological values that are directly related to the history of the area are visible.

Given these (suggested) criteria, one should keep in mind that the threat of low flight paths and a holding stack for airplanes heading for Lelystad Airport above the WWNP might be in conflict with criterion 4.

Given the present status of the Weerribben-Wieden as a National Park, and the existing recognition at the international level through its European Diploma of Protected Area, it is recommended to apply for the New National Park status in the Netherlands, once the procedures to do so have been installed.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In general, it can be concluded that the local authorities and managers of the WWNP did a great job in fulfilling the conditions and recommendation put forward at the last renewal (2015). Some of the recommendations remain to be kept in focus, given their long-term goals. These concern persevered monitoring, sustainable use, and cooperative management of several habitats in the NP (e.g. reedlands). During the visit, I experienced great cooperation between the two responsible organisations Staatsbosbeheer and Natuurmonumenten, it can be considered exemplary for other National Parks dealing with shared responsibilities.

Major suggested condition for renewal of the EDPA is the postponement of the opening of Lelystad Airport for tourist flights or any other flights for as long as long low flight paths are not excluded from the LA regulations and holding stacks above the WWNP are not excluded.

The present plans for LA on the two issues are not compatible with the nature values of the WWNP and the reasons why the National Park received its EDPA.

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