



Species protection in Flanders : European hamster

XXIXth International hamster workshop

AGENTSCHAP
NATUUR & BOS



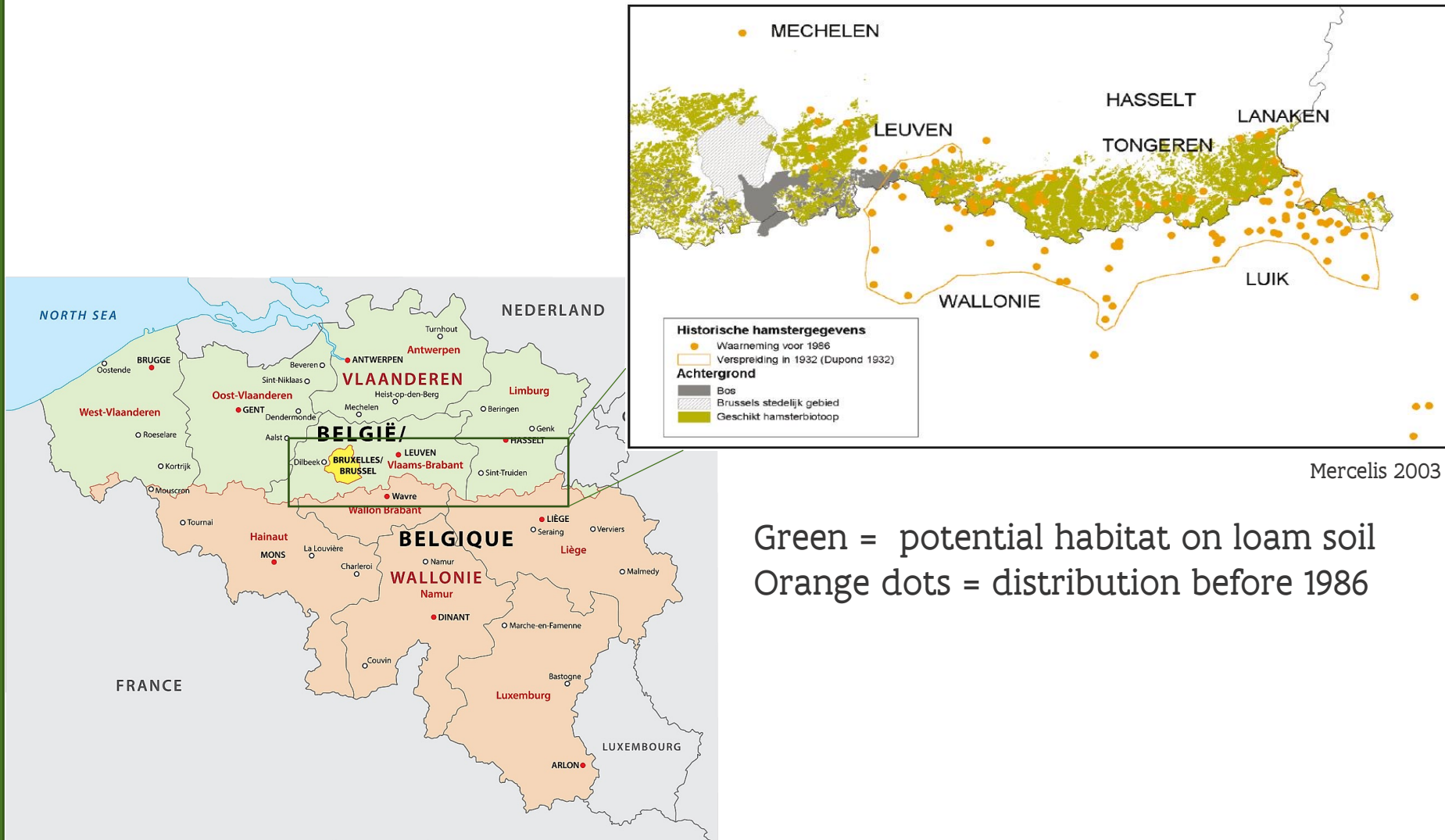
Legal framework species protection

- ▶ Flemish Species decree 1995
 - Legal framework species protection
- ▶ Species action/protection programs
 - Instrument for improving the conservation status of species
 - enables focused deployment of instruments, people and resources

Species action plan

- ▶ Based on “Background report”
 - Stakeholder involvement
- ▶ Description of species, distribution, ecology, biology,...
- ▶ Goals
- ▶ Action program linked to instruments
 - Financial instruments included SAP
 - Mobilization other instruments
 - × Nature protection and restoration funds
 - × CAP
 - × Decree land development
- ▶ 5 years (ministerial decree)

Strong decline



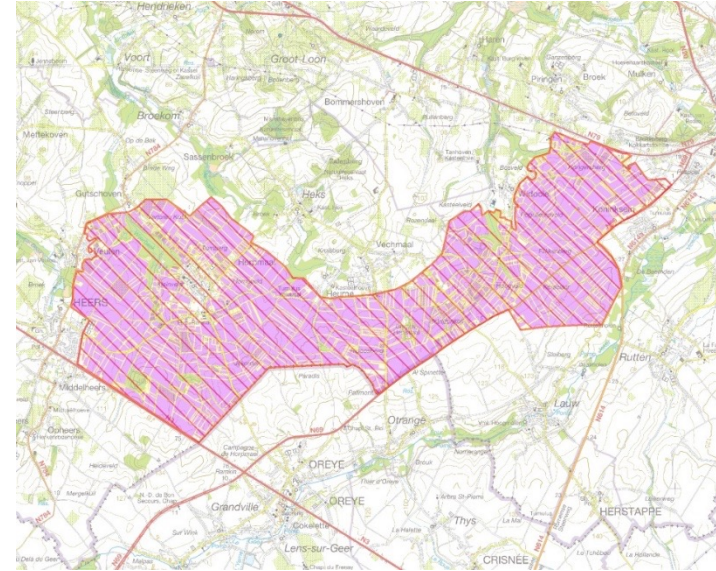
Mercelis 2003

Green = potential habitat on loam soil
Orange dots = distribution before 1986

First SAP European hamster

- ▶ 2015 - 2020
- ▶ Baseline 2015
 - 1 population left
 - <30 individuals
 - Total area = 1987 ha
 - ca 25 ha “hamster friendly measurements”

- ▶ Main aim
 - Reinforcement population
 - Increase and quality improvement of habitat
 - Sensibilisation



Actions included in SAP 1

- ▶ Coordination

- ▶ Optimisation existing agri-environment schemes
- ▶ Conclude agri-environment schemes without economically profitable main crop
- ▶ Development of an efficient and effective hamster management
- ▶ Creation of high quality habitat
- ▶ Sustainability of hamster management

- ▶ Breeding program
- ▶ Reintroduction program
- ▶ Predator control plan
- ▶ Monitoring

- ▶ Sensibilisation and communication
- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Evaluation



Follow-up SAP needed

- ▶ Based on evaluation SAP
- ▶ Actions in SAP 1 came short to make a difference
- ▶ Anno 2022: situation still very unfavourable

- ▶ Negative trend
- ▶ IUCN Red List adapted in 2020 = critically endangered



SWOT

► Strengths

1. Symbolic species, protected by European and Flemish law
2. SAP = instrument of the Species Decree
3. Mobilization of instruments
4. Awareness and willingness to help
5. Actions also positive for the ecosystem and other species
6. Small-scale landscape

► Weakness

1. Outside Natura 2000 areas
2. Information exchange
3. Law enforcement gaps
4. Measurements based on goodwill and non-committal
5. Sustainability
6. No hamster specific agri-environmental schemes
7. Flexibility AE schemes
8. High number of landowners
9. Knowledge gaps:
 - Reproduction success
 - Survival

SWOT

► Opportunities

1. Evaluation results first SAP as baseline for new SAP
 - Need for a more ambitious plan clear
 - better assessments of the conditions and gaps
2. Different financial instruments available
3. EU biodiversity strategy, CAP and Farm to Fork
4. Programmatic approach to nitrogen problem
5. European collaboration

► Threats

1. Loss of habitat and quality of habitat due to intensification of agriculture
 - larger plots
 - faster rotation crops
 - more use of pesticides
2. Fragmentation
3. Predation (mammals, birds)
4. Low nutritional value in the area
5. Climate (heavy rainfalls or too dry summer periods)
6. Long process to draft a new SAP
7. No long-term solution
8. New AE schemes seems less attractive to farmers

Challenges and solutions

- ▶ **Challenges = multiple**
- ▶ **How to boost collaboration and more involvement?**
- ▶ **Need for better follow-up and support structure, such as**
 - Local point of contact with farmers
 - Communication and (international) cooperation
 - General coordination hamster (including breeding campaigns)
 - General coordination area operation
- ▶ **Better communication and community building?**

Challenges and solutions

- ▶ **How to work towards a long-term solution**
- ▶ **Need for an area-oriented approach**
 - More land under HFM in mosaic/network, higher % coverage during active period
 - × Reduce mortality
 - × Suitable places for burrows
 - Right measurements in the right place
- ▶ **Need for easy deployable instruments**
- ▶ **Need for support farmers**
 - Financially
 - Administrative
 - Business model,...
- ▶ **Find tailored made solutions**
- ▶ **Need for more research and monitoring**



**Thanks for your
attention!**