

FIRST STONE CEREMONY ECODUCT GROENENDAAL

Animals cross Brussels Ring Road safely thanks to wildlife overpass

26 September 2016: The first stone ceremony of Ecoduct Groenendaal takes place in Hoeilaart today. This ceremony is an important step in LIFE+ OZON, a prestigious European project that reconnects the Sonian Forest. From 2017 on, many animal species will use the overpass to migrate from one side of the forest to the other. This is positive for both biodiversity and traffic safety in the region. The project is supported by EU-commissioner Karmenu Vella, former president of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and Flemish ministers Ben Weyts and Joke Schauvliege.

From fragmentation to defragmentation

The Sonian Forest is located southeast of Brussels. It contains approximately 5.000 hectares of European top nature of which 56% is located on Flemish territory, 38% on Brussels territory and 6% in Wallonia. It is a hotspot for tourists, receiving approximately 2 million visitors every year, and home to e.g. roe deer, wild boar and smaller animal species like martens, bats, crested newts and slow-worms. Large traffic axes like the railway Brussels-Luxembourg, the Ring road around Brussels (RO), the E411 and a number of local roads divide the forest into small parts. LIFE+ OZON focuses on the ecological defragmentation of the Sonian Forest and aims to reconnect the living areas of a number of animal species and to help prevent dangerous traffic situations that way. In order to achieve this, several constructions like a tree bridge, three ecotunnels and Ecoduct Groenendaal, OZON's masterpiece, will be created. Thanks to the OZON project, the animals will get a much larger radius of action. At the same time, the forest managers are adapting their management practices for instance by creating nature friendly forest edges and adjusting recreational zones.

First overpass across the Ring road around Brussels

Ecoduct Groenendaal will be the sixth overpass in Flanders, the second in the Sonian Forest, after the overpass across railway Brussels-Luxembourg on the Brussels administrative region. The construction is situated between Groenendaal (Hoeilaart) and Waterloo, at the former horse racetrack with its Royal Lodge. The preparatory works have started this spring and according to the latest schedule, it will be ready to use for animals in the summer of 2017. Ecoduct Groenendaal will be 60meters wide and will be furnished naturally, with trees, shrubs, pools, stumps, tree trunks etcetera, causing animals to use the overpass more easily. It will be an ecological responsible fauna passage and the impact on the surrounding forest area will be kept as small as possible. Wildlife grids along the Ring road around Brussels and the E411 will guide the animals to the ecoduct. The surrounding areas of the overpass is prohibited for recreationists, because disturbance can severely compromise the crossing of animals. Everyone that would like to visit the ecoduct can participate in guided tours to the ecoduct that will be organised on a yearly basis.

Working together works

OZON is part of the European LIFE+ programme, the financial instrument of the European Union that supports environment, nature protection and climate related projects. LIFE+ OZON has a budget of 10,3 million euros of which LIFE+ sponsors up to 3,36 million euros. The project partners provide the rest of the budget.

Apart from the Agency for Nature and Forests, the Agency Roads and Traffic, the Department Environment, Nature and Energy of the Flemish Government and Living Environment Brussels, the municipalities Hoeilaart, Overijse and Tervuren also provide part of the funds. The Department of Nature and Forests from the Walloon Government, the United Nations Environment Programme and municipality Sint-Genesius Rode support the project symbolically.

More information: <http://www.sonianforest.be/lifeozon/> ; www.werkenaantering.be ;

Patrick Huvenne, regional manager - 0476/898517, or Anouk Kuijsters, LIFE+ OZON - 0468/15.93.57.

