

'BIODIVERSITY IN BELGIUM' – PRESENT AND FUTURE

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The term biodiversity encompasses the diversity and variance of animals, plants, fungi and micro-organisms, and the life communities they form. Knowledge on biodiversity is thus of uttermost importance for nature conservation, agriculture, food availability, health care, etc. Biodiversity is a, too often overlooked, key player in ecology and economy, and has multiple social and cultural implications.

Nevertheless, questions on the number of observed and expected species, the nature and impact of threats, the (un)balanced knowledge of the different groups, alien species, extirpation, etc. remain too often unanswered, also in Belgium.

The book 'Biodiversity in Belgium' tries to answer these and many other questions thanks to information provided by Belgian and foreign experts. This publication constitutes the first detailed overview of the animal, plant and fungal groups present in Belgium. It also addresses the most important and protected ecosystems in our country as well as the specific biodiversity occurring in the regions and North Sea. Concerning the last, the overview of marine biodiversity, existing threats and impacts has been thoroughly compiled and some legislative protection frameworks are briefly mentioned.

Just a small sample from the conclusions: about 36,300 species of micro-organisms, plants, fungi and animals are known in Belgium; not less than one-third (!) of our biodiversity is still unknown and only 4% is well studied; more than half of our plant and animal species are threatened in any way, some have already lost the battle; changes in land use, resulting in the destruction and fragmentation of habitats, remain the most important threat, together with pollution and overexploitation, while the alien species phenomenon is a rather recent and quickly rising 'star' in this disastrous ranking.

To be able to present an even more detailed and complete inventory of the Belgian biodiversity in the near future, additional information and suggestions from scientists and naturalists are strongly encouraged.

Reference

Peeters M., A. Franklin and J.L. Van Goethem. 2003. Biodiversity in Belgium. Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Brussels. 416p.