

# Green accents increase workers' wellbeing

On 20 September 2018, Peter Baeten, Deputy Director-General at SCK•CEN, signed the Green Deal 'Business & Biodiversity'. By signing this Green Deal, the research centre makes the commitment to have an eco-friendlier management of its grounds. A win-win situation for nature and staff.

The SCK•CEN site covers 371 hectares. "That is 917 hectares of unique fauna and flora", says Staf Bosch, head groundskeeper at SCK•CEN. The strawberry spider, grey-backed mining bee, doodle bug and megarhyssa – which uses its long ovipositor to hunt for larvae of wood-boring wasps in the bark of birch trees – are thriving here. The common redstart nests here. Twittering siskins look for food on alder catkins. In spring, may lily blooms; this is a plant that can only be found in very old woodland. "Woods that have been in existence continuously since 1780", explains Staf. "As the temperature rises, other rare spring flowers sprout up here and there: spotted orchid, greater yellow rattle and marsh gentian. So, quite a few gems of nature can be discovered on our grounds." To keep vegetation in check, SCK•CEN uses Scottish highland cattle. "These impressive horned bovines take care of natural grazing of grassland, giving these spring flowers the opportunity to reveal themselves."

SCK•CEN has always been dedicated to a natural management of its grounds, but by signing the Green Deal 'Business & Biodiversity' on 20th September 2018, the research centre goes one step further. "The aim is to create a beautiful Kempen landscape by stimulating native fauna and flora in a natural manner and, as a result, increase biodiversity", says Staf. From now on, we leave nature even more to do its own thing, and this is also noticeable in a changed management approach. "Routine mowing and trimming make way for extensive nature management. Environmental management where human intervention is reduced. For example, before, we removed dead wood from our woodland and cut down broken trees. Now, they can stay, provided they are safe. Indeed, parts of the grounds are open for ramblers."



## Step by step

Rome wasn't built in a day, and this project too requires time. "We are very busy now developing a roadmap. An environmental management plan is submitted for a 27-year period. This means you need to know what you are dealing with and where you want it to go", explains Staf Bosch. SCK•CEN will therefore first carry out a baseline study and map out the current situation on the ground. "We check which plants are growing and which animals or insects are already living there. Then, a study will establish how we can increase biodiversity, with as many native and landscape-specific vegetation. We want to create an environment where humans and animals feel at home."

## THE SECOND LARGEST BUSINESS

This Green Deal is an initiative of former Flemish Minister for the Environment Joke Schauvliege, aimed at turning businesses and industries greener, with a view to the preservation of local fauna and flora. On 20th September 2018, SCK•CEN and 110 other companies signed the Green Deal. At that time, SCK•CEN and its 371 ha was the second largest business, after Brussels Airport, to accept the challenge. Meanwhile, more companies and organisations made the commitment.

Staf Bosch, manager of SCK•CEN's domain

To put this plan into practice, Central Technical Services (CTS) count on the input of different stakeholders. “A few motivated colleagues also set up a ‘Nature’ working group eighteen months ago. We will consult regularly with members of this working group about how to approach the Green Deal. All input is welcome.” In 2019, SCK•CEN will also develop a masterplan in which the research centre will be screening its complete infrastructure from a technical point of view – ranging from buildings and traffic to (nature) experience. “Our commitment is therefore not an empty promise; it is reinforced in our operational management.”



“ *Why not have walking meetings instead of gathering in a conference room for the umpteenth meeting?* ”



### Surplus for staff

One of the action points which certainly can't be left out is heather restoration. “Sheep are considered for grazing. We also want to transform coniferous woods gradually into mixed woodland”, explains Staf. SCK•CEN will also take the opportunity to make ‘small’ corners green. “Think of bug hotels, which we can build with our own wood store. And why not have walking meetings instead of gathering in a conference room for the umpteenth meeting? This initiative is therefore not only a good thing for nature, all staff and visitors will have the opportunity to enjoy all that green too.”

## Growth chart

### Planned and cost-effective spending

Setting objectives. Planning. It's essential for any organisation, for both project outcomes and financial results. In 2018, we all worked very hard to achieve this. With success! By being proactive, planning and budgeting, we were able to achieve more in 2018. The achievement level – financial growth chart – reached a better result than ever before. To carry on this growth and build a great future for SCK•CEN, this remains an important focus.

### Kathleen Overmeer

Institute Director  
General Services and Administration

