

WELCOME TO DE WESTHOEK IN DE PANNE



Curious about the largest continuous dune area at the Flemish coast? Then visit the western end of our coast line. Pressed up between De Panne and the border with France, the impressive dune reserve De Westhoek overlooks the sea. This intact landscape allows hikers to admire a great variety of dunes. What is more, you may even find yourself face to face with large grazing animals in the lower belts of dune hollows.

A STRING OF DUNES

The Flemish nature reserve De Westhoek covers almost 350 hectares.

Together with the adjoining Calmeynbos and the Krakeelduinen (nearly 100 hectares), the Oosthoekduinen (nearly 100 hectares) and the French dunes of Le Perroquet (225 hectares), De Westhoek forms the largest dune massif of our coast. De Westhoek was already protected as a landscape in 1935. In 1957 the region was the very first Flemish nature area to obtain the status of State Nature Reserve. The nature reserve of De Westhoek belongs to the Duinen en Bossen van De Panne, the largest continuous dune area of the Flemish coast.



Common Rock-rose

PLENTY OF VARIATION

Never think of a dune as merely 'sand'. Lyme grass dunes, shifting dunes, parabolic dunes, grey and yellow dunes: one dune is definitely not the other. You will be amazed at the variety of age, shape and vegetation of the different dune areas. More or less parallel to the coast line, different 'belts' can be distinguished: the beach, the foredunes, the northern pan belt, the central mobile dune, the southern pan belt and the inner dunes.

The pans have meanwhile developed into a patchwork of arid and humid dune grasslands and rich fens with a unique vegetation. The large central shifting dune, also known as the Sahara, is an enormous mass of sand that has moved from the northwest to the southeast under the influence of the wind. Currently this mobile dune is transforming into a semi-covered dune, among other things as a result of the climate change and the decrease in the number of rabbits.



Konik horses

EUROPEAN FIRST-RATE NATURE!

More than 400 species of higher plants grow in De Westhoek. Many special species of moss, liverwort and lichen are also rampant in De Westhoek.

The lyme grass dunes are highly subject to the influences of the wind, the shifting sand and the pounding seawater. That is why these dunes are fairly bare on the windward side. Mainly pioneer species such as sand couch and sea rocket can be found there, which are not very demanding and are able to endure high salinity in the soil.

The floor of the humid dune pans is covered by a layer of thickets of creeping willow. Between these thickets, botanic showpieces such as Grass-of-Parnassus, Marsh Helleborine, Autumn Gentian and Round-leaved Wintergreen grow.

The older, arid dune slopes on the other hand are covered by a sea of flowers, including Common Rock-rose, burnet rose, common bird's-foot trefoil and broad leaved thyme.



Highland cattle



dune pansy



natterjack Toad



European Stonechat

Beaches and dunes are a real attraction for various birds such as the Northern Wheatear and the Crested Lark, and for migratory birds such as the Hen Harrier and the Redwing. Ornithologists will always find a great variety of birds in De Westhoek: the European Stonechat, the Common Chiffchaff and the Common Whitecoat are regular visitors.

In the spring, the dune ponds of De Westhoek are the perfect spawning ground for the natterjack toad and the crested newt, two species protected through European legislation.

MANAGEMENT

These past years, action has been taken to develop a new management plan for the region. In the coming years, a number of large restoration works will be carried out, on top of the maintenance management such as mowing. In this way, we want to restore the very rare shifting dune and ensure the conservation of the great variety of dune habitats. Particularly the moss dunes, the dune grasslands and dune valleys deserve special attention. In the grazing blocks, Konik horses and Scottish Highland cattle contribute to nature management.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Agency for Nature and Forests
Jacob van Maerlantgebouw
Koning Albert I-laan 1/2 bus 74, 8200 Brugge (Sint-Michiels)
Tel. 050 24 77 40
wvl.anb@vlaanderen.be - www.natuurenbos.be



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Responsible editor: Dirk Bogaert,
Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos Koning Albert II-laan 20 bus 8, 1000 Brussel

