

WELCOME TO THE ZWIN DUNES AND ZWIN POLDERS IN KOKKE



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EUROPEAN FIRST-RATE NATURE

Due to the transition between sea, beach, forest and polder, this is a unique area in Belgium and Europe for many plants and animals.

It is home to European protected habitats with rare plant species, such as autumn gentian, knotted pearlwort and grass-of-Parnassus, as well as special ferns, including two types of adder's tongue. The rough dune grasslands are an excellent habitat for the brown argus and blue-winged grasshopper.

The Kleyne Vlakte is an important wintering area for many waders, birds of the heron family, gulls and ducks. We hope that with the restoration of the typical dune habitats in the Zwin Dunes and Polders the little egret, pied avocet,

crested newt



You have probably already heard of the Zwin, but do you also know the adjacent nature reserve of 222 ha? Together with its big brother the Zwin, the Flemish nature reserve Zwin Dunes and Zwin Polders (De Zwinduinen en -polders) is a continuous nature area in the Zwin area.

BACKGROUND

Until the late 19th century this area of dunes, forests and pastures was still in constant development under the influence of the sea. It resembled the current Zwin, with mudflats, salt marshes and channels, closed off on the seaward side by a belt of dunes. The Zwin Dunes and Polders were given their current shape when the International Dike was constructed in 1872-1873, which caused the area to be cut off from the sea.

Since then man has clearly left its traces in this area of young dunes. The Zwinbosjes did not come into existence naturally either, but have been laid out by man. They were mainly planted in the 1960s as small hunting preserves. Spontaneous afforestation was only possible here and there. The very first plantations of pine (maritime pine, *Pinus pinaster*) already date back to 1883, in the west of the area.

During WWI this dune area was of great strategic importance to the German occupying forces. In 1916, the construction of the battery Bremen was started. The creation of a golf course had a great impact on the landscape in the northwest of the area. Golf could be played here from the summer of 1929 onwards, albeit in the company of sheep, since the land continued to be used as a pasture. A horse racing track was built in 1929-1930. In this context, the Paardenmarktbeek was partially poured with concrete to serve as an obstacle. Until the 1960s, international jumping events were organised here on an annual basis.

In the early 1930s an aerodrome of 40 ha was constructed in the Kleyne Vlakte. At the beginning of WWII this land came into the hands of the Belgian Air Force. Following German air strikes in May 1940 the Germans conquered the aerodrome a few days later and extended it to the west up to 150 ha. During WWII an extensive network of concrete roads was built here as well.



little egret

common tern, European spoonbill, European honey buzzard, wood lark and bluethroat will find a suitable nesting place here. The short-eared owl, greater white-fronted goose and hen harrier are important hibernators.

The former sand extraction pits of Tobruk are essential to the European protected crested newt and we are looking forward to the return of the natterjack toad and common tree frog.

Since the large-scale restoration works, the forester and his team have been in charge of maintaining the restored nature. To this end, they are assisted by Koniks, Highland cattle, Shetland ponies, Flemish sheep and even real dune goats.

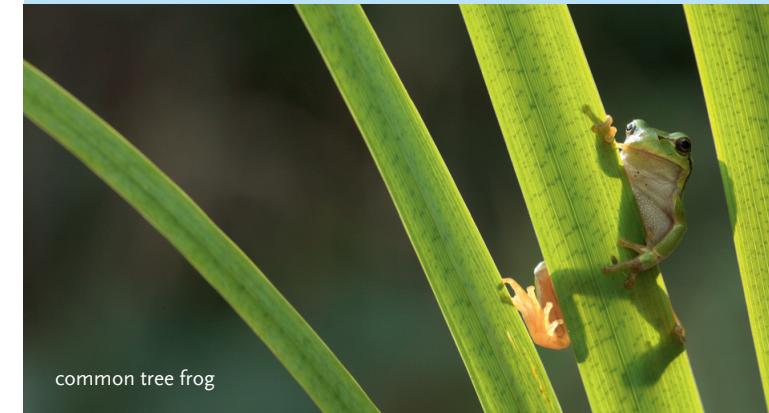


autumn gentian



In order to defend the aerodrome in the Kleyne Vlakte and the defence structures in the north of the Zwin Dunes and Polders, an anti-tank ditch was created to the west of the aerodrome in the early 1940s, which is still visible today. The pasture in the Kleyne Vlakte still reveals traces of this anti-tank ditch.

In 2002, the area was purchased by the Government of Flanders. After approval of the management plan, it underwent a true metamorphosis between 2004 and 2013 thanks to two European projects.



common tree frog

MORE INFORMATION

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brown argus



Highland cattle



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