Opportunities for ground and meadow birds in Brabant

CAP-funded non-productive investments to increase the number of meadow birds in the Netherlands

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Brabant, The Netherlands Programming period: 2014-2020 Priority: P4 - Ecosystems management Focus Area: Biodiversity restoration, preservation & enhancement Measures: MO4 - Investments in physical assets Funding: Total budget 282 728 (EUR) **RDP** support 267 855 (EUR) Private/own funds 14 873 (EUR) Timeframe: 2019 to 2021 Project promoter: EplanA Email: evm@eplana.nl Website: anbbrabant.nl/2020/09/21/e-400-000-subsidie-voor-niet-productieve-investeringen

Summary

CAP funds were used to implement non-productive investments in the south of the Netherlands to improve meadow bird conservation. This involved the creation and improvement of wetlands, the creation of beaver habitats and the installation of electric fences. Two drones were also purchased to map the location of nests without disturbing the birds. These non-productive investments were implemented by local farmer collectives.

Project results

Thanks to the wetland works, more and different types of meadow birds are attracted to the area. Over time, their population will increase.

Key lessons and recommendations

The farmers and their collectives are very eager to improve conservation on agricultural land.



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- > Non-productive investments, such as creating beaver habitats and protecting birds using electrical fences, are a particularly important use of CAP agri-environment-climate subsidies.
- Some costs, such as the wiring for pumps and training for the drone pilots, were not covered by this subsidy. The applicants were obliged to find alternative sources of funding for these.

Context

Many farmers in the Netherlands voluntarily participate in membership-based collectives (NGOs) that support the conservation of meadow birds. These collectives make use of agri-environmental scheme subsidies from the Dutch Rural Development Programme (RDP) to pay farmers for the management of agricultural nature conservation and to compensate the income forgone due to the commitments undertaken. Non-productive investments are also financed by the RDP to improve meadow bird conservation.

Most of the areas involved in this project had seen an increase in numbers and species of meadow and ground birds. However, the number of insects in these areas was in decline. The population of insects is important for birds to feed their young.

To properly protect birds, it is important to find their nests and mark them so that the grass can be mowed without disturbing the birds. Finding nests is a time-consuming activity carried out by volunteers. The use of drones with heat cameras can simplify the process, increasing its precision and efficiency.

Once mapped, the nests are monitored to establish how many eggs hatch. With up to 69% of the eggs either failing to hatch or being



eaten by predators, it was felt that electrical fencing would give the birds a better chance of successfully raising their young.

This subsidy request was put forward by a consortium of four collectives, in order to simplify the application procedure and share the administrative burden.

Objectives

The aim of this project was to establish new wetlands and to improve the management of the existing ones to protect bird populations.

Activities

Four non-productive investments were implemented in the framework of this project:

- > 33.7 ha of meadow bird wetlands were created on agricultural lands using water pumps to provide soft soils with plenty of food for birds.
- > The management of 83.2 ha of wetlands was improved.
- 4.5 ha of beaver habitats were created to provide additional sources of food for farmland birds.
- > 12.4 km of electrical fences were installed around wetlands on which there are high levels of predation.
- > Two drones were purchased to map the location of nests without disturbing the birds during the breeding season.



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Main results

Thanks to these interventions, more and different types of meadow birds are attracted to the area where they can now find more insects to feed on and can nest undisturbed, protected from natural predators. It is expected that, over time, their population will increase exponentially.

Key lessons and recommendations

- > Non-productive investments, such as creating beaver habitats and protecting birds using electrical fences, are a particularly important use of CAP agri-environment-climate subsidies.
- The farmers and their collectives are very eager to improve conservation on agricultural land. Making use of CAP subsidies for non-productive investments builds on this enthusiasm and contributes to better farming practices.
- Requesting CAP subsidies was complicated and time-consuming. The applicants stated that, hereinafter, they will only apply for large amounts of CAP support to make it cost-effective. This will unfortunately result in missed opportunities for improvements that could be achieved through smaller projects.
- Some costs, such as the wiring for pumps and training for the drone pilots, were not covered by this subsidy. The applicants were obliged to find alternative sources of funding for these.
- > The contractor who dug the pools for meadow birds had to be paid after the money from the subsidy was received. This represented a major financial risk for the contractor.

Additional information:

n/a

