

**THE FLANDERS BIRD ATLAS PROJECT: ORGANISATION, WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS AND FIRST RESULTS**

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The last complete inventory of the Flemish breeding birds goes back to the 1970s. Meanwhile, much has changed, so it is time for a new atlas. The Flanders bird atlas project is a joint project of the Institute of Nature Conservation, the Flemish government, the major nature societies in Flanders and the different provinces. The inventory started with the 2000 breeding season and will last until 2002. After that final season, the atlas will be written. Flanders is divided in squares of 5x5km (UTM-grid), the scale for the inventory. Within every square lies a fixed pattern of eight 1x1km squares. The inventory of these smaller units yields data on the relative abundance of species within the 5x5km square. A regional network comprising 38 volunteers takes care of the finer-scale coordination. These people are very important because they are the closest link to the individual birdwatchers. Their role is mainly to stimulate other people to complete the inventory and to make sure that all the forms are filled in correctly and are sent to the Institute in time. In all, over a thousand volunteers are now cooperating. The first results are based upon inventories of 230 squares, about 1/3 of Flanders' surface. As in other countries, due to intensified agriculture, many 'agricultural species' like Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) and Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) have suffered declining numbers and range contraction. On the other hand, many raptor species seem to be doing relatively well, like for example, the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) which has not bred in Flanders for a very long time, but recently has returned in small but increasing numbers. Also, many introductions of so-called 'exotic' species are doing very well, for example Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) and Ring-necked Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*). These and many other introduced species have known a population boom during the last years.

More information (also in English) can be found at : <http://www.instnat.be/broedvogels/>