

LIFE DUNIAS kick-off workshop was a hit

From 18 to 21 May the [LIFE DUNIAS](#) team went to Koksijde to immerse itself in the world of invasive alien species (IAS) in the coastal dunes, together with some international dune experts.



Thursday morning we went straight into it with one quality presentation after another. We listened to voices from Belgium, Wales, the Netherlands, Spain, France, the UK and Ireland. After listening, it was time for the real thing: a horizon scan. Tim, Bram and Sam (INBO) developed a methodology based on scientific studies that had to deliver a horizon scan tailored to DUNIAS. In good spirits, groups were divided and lists were scrutinised. This titanic work would continue on Friday.



In between, we could enjoy the delicious cuisine and hospitality of the [Soll Cress](#) hotel in Koksijde. Manager Sofie and cook Lolo did not shy away from any challenge. Every meal was home-made and completely vegetarian. A unique experience for the hotel that was very much appreciated by our participants.



On Thursday evening, a trip to the Westhoek nature reserve in De Panne was on the programme. We went looking for Konrad, the natterjack toad, our brand new DUNIAS mascot. Guide Sam told us about how the area has been managed over the years. A wonderful example of dune management. Our 'super life' man was on standby (see photos) and the 'bow and admire' movement was observed by all participants. Numerous plants and animals were spotted, such as round-leaved wintergreen and the early marsh-orchid.



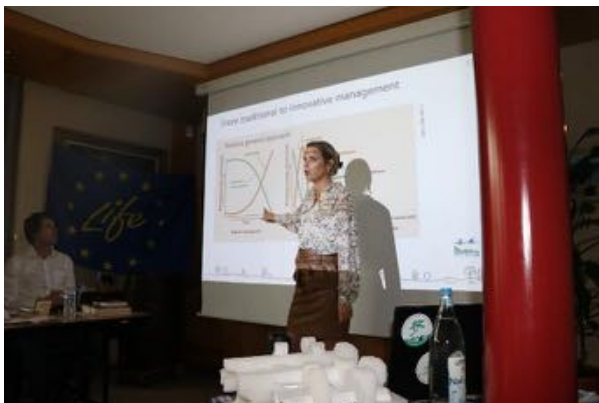


On Friday morning, we flew straight into the action. The three groups, 'sandies', 'shrubies' and 'salties', diligently went on quoting the species on the gigantic list. The slogan 'ain't no party like a spreadsheet party' summarises this work very well. A special thanks to all participants is really in order here! From warden to biologist: everyone brought their own insights and so we came to a realistic list that will be used diligently in the future. Further completion and publication can be expected in the coming months.





Just when we thought it could not get any more interesting, a series of presentations followed on how to tackle invasive plants in practice. Several techniques were presented and the inspiration was buzzing. No doubt the participants will find each other to make the most of this exchange of knowledge.





On Saturday, a real Bioblitz in the Westhoek Reserve was on the programme. All over Europe activities were organised on this 'Natura 2000 day', and in Flanders several Bioblitzes took place. We focused mainly on invasive plants in our own DUNIAS challenge 'exotics in the dunes', which can be found in the ObsIdentify app until 31 July. Rosa Rugosa, Oregon grape, red currant, South African ragwort and various species of cotoneaster were easily identified by our participants: they were equipped with smartphones, flora books, magnifying glasses, binoculars and heads full of knowledge. A lot was exchanged and everyone learned something new about the beautiful dunes.







The LIFE DUNIAS team thanks all participants and helpers for all their input!
The next five years will surely be a challenge, but this start gives us the necessary courage to enthusiastically get started!

Foto's van: Bram D'hondt, Tim Adriaens, Wouter Van Landuyt, Luc Geelen, Reinhardt Strubbe, Sander Crael, Debby Deconinck

Author: Debby Deconinck