



## Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar Year Report 2023



*Although 2023 witnessed a dry spring, the trees and shrubs were able to recover thanks to the rather cool but mostly rainy summer and autumn. These weather conditions had an impact on visitor numbers but still, sales of season tickets saw another fine increase.*

*The magnificent Magnolia photo exhibition held in the Artois Pavilion was a smashing success, so it will deservedly be extended beyond the 2024 Magnolia season.*

*With the completion of the construction activities in Marche-en-Famenne, we were able to officially open the site in May 2023. Although the collection plants are still young, the new arboretum already had a nice number of enthusiastic visitors.*

## THE COLLECTIONS

The **living collection of woody plants** in the Arboretum currently (as of 27 December 2023) contains 5,253 specimens representing 2,303 different taxa (versus 17,259 specimens and 4,987 taxa on the whole of the estate). These numbers include the 225 new accessions on the estate during 2023 of which 42 (or almost 20% ) are of documented wild origin.

Around 70 **woody plants were removed** from the collection as part of an ongoing effort to improve the aesthetic value, interest and health of the living collection. This is slightly less than last year but this figure does not include the Corsican pines that were subject to a significant thinning in 2023. Some 150 young *Pinus nigra* subsp. *laricio* were planted in the Vijverbos in 2007 with the aim of providing shelter for the young but important *Rhododendron* collection and for improving the soil. Sixteen years later, these trees had already grown considerably and an initial thinning was needed to provide the understory with the necessary light and space. Of course, enough pines remain because a continuous canopy in this part of the arboretum is and will be extremely important but even so, an additional thinning will be necessary next year where the *Rhododendron* of subsection *Taliensia* are planted. Wood samples of the important specimens (rare and/or wild origin) are kept in our own xylarium but are also shared with the Tervuren Wood Collection of the Royal Museum for Central Africa.

During the winter, the yew hedge that marks the boundary between the Marnefbos and the private Park of Wespelaar was pruned back severely. This results in extra light and space in the Marnefbos and the hedge will surely grow

back. However, the wind now also has free play especially because the neighbouring double beech avenue in the Park was cut the previous year. More than 40 per cent of those trees were dead due to ageing and successive droughts causing severe decline and dangerous situations. For the time being, the impact of the few storms has been relatively limited: some evergreen, tall holly trees (*Ilex*) were blown over and some old pedunculate oaks (*Quercus robur*) lost a few heavy branches. Wait and see what happens in the years to come.



**Photo 1. The young pines were thinned in 2023 but still provide enough shade in summer for a group of visitors.**

February 2023 was the driest February in 37 years but fortunately the weather turned and March-May were rather wet and cool. Not necessarily the best weather for our visitors but in terms of flowering and growth, this was **probably one of the best springs ever**. And the lower temperatures allowed us to enjoy the flower displays and fresh spring foliage for a longer period. Impossible to list all the eye-catchers here but noticeable and unusual was the massive flowering this year on *Ilex*, *Styrax*, *Pterostyrax* and the flowering ashes such as *Fraxinus sieboldiana* or *F. floribunda*. Followed in June by *Tilia*, *Kalmia*, and the previously dominated but recently freed x *Chitalpa tashkentensis*. Our extensive collection of American *Stewartia* flowers more abundantly every year with very picture-worthy flowers.





Photo 2. One specimen of *Stewartia malacodendron* showed a beautiful streak of red in the otherwise pure white flowers.

One specimen of *Stewartia malacodendron* showed a beautiful streak of red in the otherwise pure white flowers. In August, we had a good amount of flowering for the first time on *Tilia endochrysea*. This species is extremely rare in cultivation and stands apart from other members of the genus because the peduncle is joined to the floral bract only at its base.



Photo 3. In August, we had a good amount of flowering for the first time on *Tilia endochrysea*.

The summer remained remarkably wet and was followed by a first ever recorded heat wave in September and the warmest October month ever measured. This resulted in very **late autumn colouring** but we were unable to keep the Arboretum open longer for our visitors because of the extremely wet soil

conditions. Partly because of this, the planting season got off to a very late start.

This year we started with a different **mowing regime** in part of the Magnolia meadow. Instead of mowing on a weekly basis, we only mowed once in early summer. This creates a much more natural effect and the diversity in management makes for a direct increase in biodiversity. In addition, the grass was removed after mowing in order to create a more flower-rich meadow in those areas over time. The result after one year is already an aesthetic success that was greatly appreciated by the visitors.



Photo 4. Autumn colouring got started very late in 2023.

The flowering of *Rhododendron* in May, one of the Arboretums target genera, was truly breath-taking. Brexit has meant that importing plants from the U.K. has become very difficult, even impossible. We are therefore always looking for other ways to expand our collection and a close collaboration with the Dutch nursery Esveld has already led to some remarkable results. Our collection of *R. kiusianum* and *R. nakaharae* selections and hybrids increased by 22 taxa and 109 specimens thanks to a generous donation. Esveld will also propagate some of our very rare species and cultivars so that we always have spare specimens, some examples include *R. faberi*, *R. uvariifolium* and the cultivar 'Yangtze Bend', *R. pudorosum*, wild origin *R. niveum*, *floccigerum*, *thomsonii* and

*horlickianum*, and some excellent selections such as *R.* 'Titmess Park', 'Naomi Exbury', 'Lodauric Iceberg', 'Viking Silver' and 'Glendoick Silver'.



Photo 5. *Clematis finetiana* was in full flower on the day that Roy Lancaster visited the Arboretum.

In October, we welcomed a visit from **Roy Lancaster**. Roy is a British plantsman, gardener, author and broadcaster and one of the most highly regarded and distinguished horticulturalists of the Anglo-Saxon world. It was a beautiful day and Roy enthusiastically shared his botanical knowledge and the many adventures he had during his many plant explorations in often inhospitable areas. One plant that was in full bloom especially for him, so to speak, was the wild collected evergreen *Clematis finetiana*. Roy also suggested naming one of our seedlings of *Mahonia x savilliana* for its exceptional fruiting, healthy habit and

beautiful colouring. The cultivar name 'Diamant' was suggested and we immediately set to work propagating this new selection.

**Plant pests and pathogens** present a significant risk to global plant health and this threat is ever rising. Sentinel plants within botanic gardens and arboreta can play a vital role in providing information on future and/or known threats. Within the V.B.T.A. (The Belgian Association of Botanic Gardens and Arboreta) some Belgian collections decided to join the Targeted Surveillance Program within the IPSN (International Plant Sentinel Network). Arboretum Wespelaar joined this surveillance program and became an official member of the IPSN as well, an international network with now 90 member gardens. This gives us extra resources on pests and pathogens such as diagnostic guides, posters on target organisms, etc. This also means that we will provide information on future or known plant threats. In 2023 we performed several surveys: on Beech Leaf Disease (BLD), oak pests caused by some borers, Pine Tortoise Scale and Rose rosette virus. We made a selection of sentinel plants (6 beeches, 7 oaks, 5 pines and 5 roses) and monitored those in spring and in summer. Apart from some minor infections no alarming pests were signalled in the collection. To make sure, we sent material of four of our sentinel beeches to ILVO (Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) for further examination but no BLD was constated. We also sent material of an English oak to ILVO because it shows signs of a *Phytophthora ramorum* infection but this proved to be false alarm although the tree is clearly declining.

Having a perfectly labelled and correctly identified collection is one of the main objectives of the Arboretum. Since 2014 we

have significantly increased our efforts and our team continues this **major inventory round** at the Arboretum and the dendrological collections of the surrounding private estates of *Herkenrode*, the *Park of Wespelaar*, the *Potager de Wespelaar* and *Bosveld*. This important and valuable work continued in 2023 and a total of 162 beds have been thoroughly inventoried. During this inventory, each plant is localised within a certain bed, its health status is assessed, the identity is verified if possible and/or as needed (with extra attention this year to the following groups: arborescent Fabaceae, *Carpinus*, *Paulownia*, *Rhododendron*, *Meliosma*, *Cyclamen* and *Iris*), and the label is placed on a healthy branch clearly visible for our collaborators and visitors. The perennials are also inventoried per bed, but usually this is done in two stages: once in (early) spring in order to identify bulbs and spring flowers and a second time in the summer period when many perennials and grasses are at their peak. Inventory of flowerbeds was very limited in 2023 and a new, improved effort will be needed in 2024 in order to keep our perennial collection database up-to-date.



Photo 6. *Fraxinus americana* 'Bash Bish Falls' was registered as a new cultivar in 2023. It was selected for its magnificent autumn colours.

In 2023 **three new cultivars were registered**. *Fraxinus americana* 'Bash Bish Falls' was selected for its magnificent early, buttercup-yellow to buff orange autumn colouring. It is named after the Bash Bish Falls State Park in Massachusetts (USA) where Philippe DE SPOELBERCH collected seeds in 1989. *Magnolia* 'Joli Pompon' already got its name in 2004, but was officially registered in 2023. The cultivar name refers to the numerous enlarged pinkish stamens that create a 'joli pompon' or beautiful pompom effect in the centre of the flower. Another *Magnolia* now registered is *Magnolia x wieseneri* 'Charm and Fragrance'. It is more of a large shrub than a tree with sweet-scented, creamy white flowers that contrast beautifully with the numerous (up to 150!) burgundy to old pink coloured stamens. Because the large, bowl-shaped flowers appear late in the season (May-June), they escape late spring frosts but the leaves and young twigs can be frost tender.

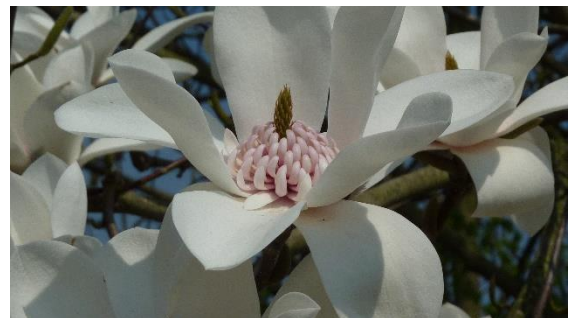


Photo 7. *Magnolia* 'Joli Pompon' already got its name in 2004, but was officially registered in 2023.

## VISITORS

2021 will be remembered by many as the corona-year. The pandemic caused an unprecedented peak in visitor numbers at all nature-related organisations: botanic gardens, arboreta, public parks or nature reserves all



experienced a spectacular increase in visitor numbers. Now that the pandemic is finally over and people are allowed to spend their free time as before, the figures are back to normal. Unfortunately, the often bad weather conditions (a very rainy summer and autumn) have nevertheless had an impact on visitor numbers and we see a drop from 10,815 visitors in 2022 to 10,027 in 2023.

The number of individual visitors reached to 7,647 (vs. 8,339 in 2022) while the number of groups amounts to 82 (vs. 91 in 2022). A more important indicator, of course, is the number of season tickets sold. It is notable that despite a decline in absolute visitor numbers, we still witness a clear increase in season ticket sales: from 568 in 2022 to 591 in 2023.



Arboretum Wespelaar has an exceptional dendrological collection and therefore attracts a significant number of **specialised visitors** every year. Colleagues from Belgium (e.g. Board of Directors of Plantentuin Meise) and abroad (e.g. Emily Coffey – Vice President of Conservation & Research at Atlanta BG, Alexandre Antonelli – Director of Science at Kew BG, Simon Milne – Regius Keeper at Edinburgh BG or Jean-Christophe Vié – Director General of Fondation Franklinia) came to visit the collections and also specialised

dendrological groups such as the German Rhododendron Society, European Tree Workers, EYG (Excellent Young Gardeners, Germany) enjoyed a tailor-made guided tour. Well-known dendrologists also visited, above we already mentioned Roy Lancaster but a couple of other names may also be mentioned: Chris Lane (Witch Hazel Nursery), Catherine and Philippe Quesnel (Jardin du Mesnil), Sylvain and Geraldine Parrot (Grand Parc de Versailles). We were obviously very honoured and privileged by the visit of Her Majesty Queen Mathilde and, a few weeks later, the visit of the garden team of the park of the Royal Palace in Laeken.

In 2023 our **website** had 21.432 users (vs. 25.345 in 2022) and 81.439 pageviews (vs. 91.726 in 2022). However, the 2023 figures are incomplete due to a nearly two-month gap because of switching of analysis software. Apart from the homepage and “contact and visit” page, the most visited pages in 2023 were the Beltrees database page, the database of woody plants in Arboretum Wespelaar and the database of images linked to the identification keys.



Photo 8. *Sorbus japonica* as an example of one of the high-resolution scans available on the Arboretum's website.

There are now no less than 47 vegetative **identification keys** for selected woody plant genera and species in cultivation in Western Europe, composed by Jan De Langhe, available on our website. Moreover, there are more than 53.000 high-definition images (6.083 taxa) consultable on the website, making this more and more an inexhaustible source of information and beauty. The genera *Fraxinus*, *Hypericum*, *Magnolia*, *Podocarpus*, *Rhododendron*, *Quercus* sect. *Cyclobalanopsis* and *Sorbus*, and the family Fabaceae received special attention in 2023. More and more of these images are also used on the TSO (Trees and Shrubs Online) website.

Our **Facebook** page currently has 3.406 followers (3.154 in 2022). During opening season, new pictures from plants of the collection are added once every week or every two weeks, so that followers can see what is flowering or happening at that time. The pictures are grouped by month. Our top three of most liked albums were the Album "October" (730 likes), "April" (398 likes) and "July" (374 likes). Other appreciated posts included a photograph of *Carya glabra* (170 likes), a post about our V.B.T.A. Gardeners Day activity (134 likes) and a new *Prunus sargentii* 'Jacqueline' cover photo (83 likes).

Our **Instagram** page currently has 2.294 followers (versus 2.030 in 2022). Every post in 2023 had in between 6 and 283 likes (129 on average). The most popular posts in 2023 were a series of drone photographs of the Artois Pond in October (283 likes), a selection of *Hamamelis* photographs in January (256 likes) and a selection of *Magnolia* photographs in April (242 likes). New posts are added once every week or every two weeks, containing a selection of photographs of plants flowering at that time. The scientific plant name is always

mentioned, which is much appreciated by the followers.

In April 2020, we opened a **YouTube** channel. This was especially useful during the lockdown in 2020, when we wanted our visitors to be able to enjoy the flowering Magnolias and Rhododendrons at the Arboretum. We currently do not post much anymore on YouTube and focus more on Facebook and Instagram so our number of followers has not risen much: 52 followers (versus 49 in 2022). We have 3.378 views in total of all our videos (versus 2.972 in 2022).

In 2023 we opened a **LinkedIn** account. Our LinkedIn page currently has 279 followers. The most engaging post was one where we promoted the Arboretum de Marche.

## DATABASES

All our collections (woody and perennial plants, propagation, herbarium, bonsai collection, wood samples, cones and fruit, books, journals and reprints) are kept in a database management system which is updated on a daily basis. It is easy to extract and distribute information from this comprehensive database. The catalogue of woody and perennial plants can be downloaded from the Arboretum Wespelaar website and the woody plants information is at the same time available in an on-line searchable database. In 2016 we started linking photos to the individual specimens which can be consulted in the on-line database. The past eight years almost 11,000 pictures were linked. This is an important project which will continue and expand in the years to come.



**Photo 9. The Botanical Collections homepage where the databases of 16 participating botanical gardens and arboreta are consultable on a single platform.**

The woody plant information is shared – by means of a yearly upload of our data – with two other **on-line searchable databases**. In 2003 nine Belgian gardens made their database of living plants accessible via one website: PLANTCOL. In May 2023, the successor to this platform saw the light of day: botanicalcollections.be. This online platform brings together the living plant collection data of 25 Belgian gardens and arboreta. All these gardens together hold no less than 83,000 specimens belonging to 25,000 different taxa, well documented, and therefore invaluable for research, horticulture, garden tourism and the preservation of plant species for the future. The second online database we share our data with is PLANTSEARCH of Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) which is a global database of living plants with over 1,100 contributing institutions. PlantSearch then provides us with a list of **taxa that are included in the IUCN Red List**. We use the most recently published Red Lists received via BGCI to update our list. The 2023 update resulted in one extra taxon (*Juglans cinerea*: long present in our collection but only recently indicated as endangered) in the category ‘endangered’. Sadly, we also lost some important threatened species. In the category critically endangered we lost *Rhododendron mianningense*. In the category endangered we lost *Chamaecyparis formosensis* (not hardy),

*Picea engelmannii* subsp. *mexicana* (all accessions were declining gradually) and *Rhododendron myrtifolium*. In the category vulnerable we lost *Rhododendron martinianum*, *R. parvulatum* and *R. sherriffii*. This was compensated by the adding of new vulnerable taxa such as *Abies squamata*, *Aesculus wangii*, *Heptacodium miconioides* and *Prumnopitys andina*. Plants longer present in the collection but recently assessed as vulnerable include *Cedrus brevifolia*, *Cupressus gigantea*, *Gymnocladus dioica* and *Tilia callidonta*.

In the Arboretum inventory we find one species in the category ‘extinct in the wild’ (EW): a taxon known to only survive in cultivation or as a naturalized population well outside of its past range (*Franklinia alatamaha*); 14 species in the category ‘critically endangered’ (CR): a taxon that meets any of the criteria for Critically Endangered and is therefore facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild (for example *Acer pentaphyllum*); 37 species in the category ‘endangered’ (EN): a taxon that meets any of the criteria for Endangered and is therefore considered to be facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild (for example: *Fitzroya cupressoides*, *Picea martinezii*); 79 species in the category ‘vulnerable’ (VU): a taxon that meets any of the criteria for Vulnerable and is therefore considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild (for example *Davidia involucreata* var. *vilmoriniana*, *Pseudotsuga sinensis*).





Photo 10. Arboretum Wespelaar is globally the only garden that grows the threatened *Quercus hintoniorum* according to the BGCI PlantSearch database.

Arboretum Wespelaar is globally the only garden that grows threatened *Ilex brachyphylla*, *Quercus hintoniorum*, *Carpinus faginea* and *Taxus chinensis* according to the BGCI PlantSearch database and there is only one other collection that lists *Magnolia sinostellata*, only two other collections with *Magnolia decidua* and 3 other collections with *Carpinus eximia*.

The figures for the entire estate are as follows: one species extinct in the wild (*Franklinia alata* of course); 19 CR-species (*Betula lenta* f. *uber*, *Fraxinus americana* and *Rhododendron amesiae* as examples of taxa outside the arboretum); 45 EN-species (*Abies fraseri*, *Cedrus atlantica*, *Magnolia lotungensis* and *Rhododendron mallotum* and *Zelkova abelicea* as examples of taxa outside the arboretum); and 109 VU-species. The complete list of endangered species growing at Arboretum Wespelaar and the surrounding estates is available upon request.

The Arboretum **library** has a steady growth of items and we now have 3,638 accessions, mostly books (2,709) but also journals, maps, reprints, cd's, and DVD's.

In the context of sustainability and cost reduction, especially with energy prices soaring since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it was decided to **install 38 solar panels** on the roof of the technical building. This will reduce our consumption of electricity.

## EDUCATION

We are often highly recommended for our **guided tours**. It is of course important to keep the botanical and horticultural knowledge of our dedicated guides at a high standard and for that reason a class is organized on a monthly basis. Some of the subjects that we studied in 2023 were nomenclature of cultivars, winter characteristics of trees and shrubs, the 2023 new plantings, flower analysis, trees in the Fabaceae family, morphology and typology of fruits, propagation of woody plants, edible plants.

One of the more effective ways to **share dendrological expertise and horticultural practice** is the organisation of lectures and study days. A good example are the annual winter meetings organised by the Arboretum for the Belgian Dendrological Society. Three interesting topics were covered: the right tree for every garden, the trees of California and the dendrological study tour to Ireland. Another annually recurring activity is the one we organise for our staff and volunteers. This time we visited the sister arboretum in Marche-en-Famenne.

In April, the director gave a special interest lecture on the Arboretum's *Rhododendron* collection for the Dutch Rhododendron Society.

In the Artois Pavilion, the existing photo exhibition on the history of the Arboretum was replaced by a **Magnolia exhibition**. 53 high-quality photographs in 20 frames provide a beautiful and captivating display in the new pavilion. In addition, visitors receive a leaflet with further information about what is on display. This text is offered in three languages (Dutch, French and English) and can also be consulted on our website.



**Photo 11.** The *Magnolia* photo exhibition in the Artois Pavilion attracted many visitors.

Sixteen **students and seven trainees** worked in the Arboretum in 2023 and we wish to thank them for their help and assistance and for bringing new ideas and youthful vivacity to the Arboretum.

#### INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

We are frequently consulted by scientific institutions or botanical collections with regards to the plants we are growing. After evaluation of the request, we share information, observations, seeds, leaf material or cuttings for scientific research.



**Photo 12.** We shared material of *Corylus fargesii*, with its uniquely beautiful peeling bark, with the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

A total of ten such international collaborations were set up in 2023 focusing on different plant groups such as *Acer*, *Corylus chinensis* and *C. fargesii*, *Fagus crenata*, *Franklinia*, *Lindera*, *Magnolia*, *Maytenus*, *Stewartia* and *Tripterygium*. These projects were shared with research institutions in Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, South Korea, Sweden, the U.K., Ukraine and the USA. The subjects were very diverse and included horticulture, propagation techniques, molecular biology and phylogeny, conservation of threatened tree species, biochemistry, species distribution patterns, palynology and surveys for pests and diseases.

The full list with detailed information is available upon request.

National and international partnerships can also be very practical in nature. In 2023, for instance, we shared a large amount of **plant surpluses** with 12 other botanical gardens in Belgium, all members of the V.B.T.A. In specific detail, this involved surpluses of *Acer maximowiczianum*, *Lindera obtusiloba*, *Quercus castaneifolia*, *Fraxinus rhynchophylla*, *Prunus lusitanica* and *Stewartia ovata*. Some 50 other trees and shrubs of various taxa were also shared with the Garden of Ninfa, the world's most romantic garden, in central Italy. This was in order to further diversify their collection with taxa that are often not or very difficult to find or obtain.

#### SERVICES TO THIRD PARTIES

Acquiring, compiling, and sharing dendrological knowledge and expertise is one of the main goals in the mission statement of Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar. One of our important recurring beneficiaries is the **Belgian Dendrological Society (BDB)**: the director of the Arboretum is a member of the Board of directors of the society and of the editorial committee of the society's Yearbook; since 2016 he is also publisher of the BDB Yearbook. For BDB members we organised a successful and well-attended dendrological excursion to the Park of Woluwe in Brussels and to three public parks in the city of Mechelen, as well as a presentation on the trees of California.

A member of the Arboretum Wespelaar team provides for the secretariat of the BDB and Arboretum Wespelaar also remains the driving force behind the database of remarkable **Trees of Belgium (BELTREES)**. This database contains today 36,850 living measured trees with 3,048 new accessions or updates in 2023, an all-time record! This year we again organized two

meetings (region of Flanders, and Wallonia plus Brussels) with several of the most important contributors to the database in order to encourage and increase the number of yearly measurements. In 2017 we also started linking available photos to the BELTREES accessions. In the past seven years, 8,680 photos were linked and uploaded. These photos can be accessed on the website of Arboretum Wespelaar.



**Photo 13.** More than 70 gardeners from the various V.B.T.A. member gardens visited the Arboretum on September 28.

Two Arboretum Wespelaar staff members continue their function of secretary of the **Belgian Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (V.B.T.A.)**. On 28 September, we organised a Gardeners' Day at Wespelaar. More than 70 gardeners from various V.B.T.A. members came to visit us with the aim of getting to know and learn from each other in a friendly and informal way. The group was divided into smaller groups and different parts of the estate were visited and expertly commented by a specialist guide: propagation of woody plants, woodland plants and woodland gardening, a detailed look at the maple collection, perennials at Herkenrode, the Park of Wespelaar and the Wespelaar Kitchen Garden. The day was a great success and feedback was very positive. We hope that the contacts made will be maintained and that



the gardeners of the different gardens will now contact each other more quickly and easily if they have questions, problems or need advice.

The Director of the Arboretum is Chairman of the expert committee of **Fondation Franklinia** and Vice-President of the **Magnolia Society International** (MSI).

It is crucial that the Arboretum keeps good and solid contacts with the **local community**. It is therefore with pleasure that we continue to advise the local authority on the management, reconstruction, labelling and plantings of the public park in Haacht, the CPAS of Haacht, or individual trees on the grounds of the municipality. We are also active in the “Forestry Group Wespelaar” and offer advice for cutting, thinning and planting of new woodland.

#### ARBORETUM DE MARCHE-EN-FAMENNE

In 2018 we were able to purchase an interesting property on some 78 ha in Aye near Marche-en-Famenne. Intense dendrological development on 20 fenced ha will be combined with native and natural vegetation on larger tracts of the property but also there with interesting dendrological features. It goes without saying that this will be a long-term project. In 2023 the following was realised:

- All construction work is completed. The technical building, visitor centre, concierge house, guest rooms and outdoor terrace are all ready and furnished.
- The site was inaugurated on 20 May 2023 for everyone involved with the project to date. From Sunday 18 June, the Arboretum was opened to the public once a month, this on the third Sunday of each month

until 19 November. To keep the public duly informed, a dedicated website was created as well as an own Facebook and Instagram account. As in Wespelaar, visitors to Marche also receive a leaflet with the 10 highlights of the moment. This leaflet is available in both French and Dutch. About 400 people visited the Arboretum de Marche. 11 groups and several specialists or specific groups also visited, e.g. the city's College of Councillors, the Belgian Dendrological Society and the DDG Regionalgruppe Luxemburg-Eifel-Saarland.



**Photo 14.** The site at Marche-en-Famenne was inaugurated on 20 May 2023 for everyone involved with the project to date.

- In order to welcome the public to a site worthy of the name, planting and landscaping work had to continue. The green roof and the surroundings of the buildings were further planted with both shrubs and trees but also a wealth of perennials and grasses. These provide a continuous presence of colour, texture and flowers. The car park was also further planted and a large lawn was installed near the terrace. A staircase leads from the reception centre to the roof via a patio. Below this staircase are various levels and these were planted with some rarities and unusual species that should thrive in this more shady and humid yet well-protected environment. The collection of woody

plants also saw very significant growth in 2023 with the planting of about 840 specimens.



Photo 15. View towards the visitor centre, nicely planted with shrubs, perennials and grasses.

- The project is progressing and growing, and of course it was not possible to continue with just one person on site. At the beginning of May, a new employee joined the team. But all this is being done in close collaboration with the staff at Wespelaar, who are always ready to help and advise the staff at Marche when and where necessary.
- Our aim is to integrate the Arboretum into the natural setting. The Arboretum owes its richness to the diversity of its environments (woods, talus, slopes and hillsides, meadows, ponds, a streamlet, wetlands, etc.). To keep these areas open, it is important they are actively managed. This year, we experimented eco-pasturing with donkeys. As the collection continues to grow, it is becoming difficult for farmers

to use large machines, so certain areas are mown by the Arboretum staff. If possible, the product of the mowing is recycled by a farmer, who makes small bales. Anything that cannot be baled is exported so as not to enrich the environment. Wetlands also require special attention and are managed to prevent colonisation by woody plants.



Photo 16. In 2023 we experimented eco-pasturing with donkeys in some areas of the Arboretum.

- As soon as the site was closed to the public, winter work started: continued planting, forest management, felling of some large trees to valorise the unique landscape and view, construction of a second nursery, and construction of a road to allow for a more easy circulation.

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