

**RUIS  
BROUSSE**

**A manual for  
the Sonian Forest**

**A project by  
The National Poet  
Dirk Elst  
Horizon+  
Kristof Morel**

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## COLOPHON

Published by Poëziecentrum vzw

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Stained glass windows © Kristof Morel

Translation Els Moors © David Colmer

Translation Dirk Elst and Project Horizon+ © Production

Design: Poëziecentrum

Printing: Provincie Vlaams-Brabant

With the support of Toerisme Vlaams-Brabant, Dienst Economie provincie Vlaams-Brabant, het Agentschap Natuur & Bos and Natuurinvest.

*Rujsbrousse. A manual for the Sonian Forest* is a project by The National Poet, Poëziecentrum and Project Horizon+. With the support of Toerisme Vlaams-Brabant, Dienst Economie provincie Vlaams-Brabant, het Agentschap Natuur & Bos and Natuurinvest.

BELGIQUE  
POÈTE  
NATIONAL(ER) DICHTER  
DES  
VADERLANDS  
BELGIEN  
BELGIE



NATUURINVEST

The National Poet is a project by Poëziecentrum, VONK & Zonen, Maison de la Poésie de Namur, Maison de la Poésie d'Amay, fiEstival maelstrÖm, Midis de la Poésie, Poème 2, Jeugd & Poëzie and Passa Porta. Courtesy of De Nationale Loterij and her players. With the support of het Cultureel samenwerkingsakkoord Vlaamse Gemeenschap en Franse Gemeenschap.

Horizon+ is an intense collaboration between the province of Flemish Brabant, the Flemish government, the Dijleland Regional Landscape and the municipalities of Overijse, Hoeilaart, Sint-Genesius-Rode and Tervuren, with the support of the Department of the Environment. These partners will work intensively over the next years to improve connectivity with the Sonian Forest.

deep beyond measure  
immeasurably high  
and long and wide

I feel I am  
straying in the breadth  
blown back

by the wind  
to a beginning  
not finding anything

that was not already  
reaching for life  
elsewhere

splintered by  
pure light  
blind

I have  
no images  
resting

in all that flows  
indivisibly  
through the world

The union with God which a spiritual man experiences when this union reveals itself to the spirit as unfathomable, is immeasurably deep, immeasurably high, immeasurably long and immeasurably wide – in this same revelation the spirit realizes that in love it has sunk away from itself into the depths and that it has transcended itself into the heights and that it has outrun itself in length. And it feels it has strayed in width and dwells in a knowing that is unknown, and it feels it has flown away from itself through the clinging sensation of union into unity and through all dying into the living being of God.

*From: The complete Ruusbroec. Volume 1 English translation. Brepols, 2014. ISBN 9782503549651. Vertaling: Helen Rolfson, Andre Lefevere, Phayre Crowley en Kees Schepers*

H

TRANSFORMATION OF THE  
GATEWAYS AND SURROUNDINGS

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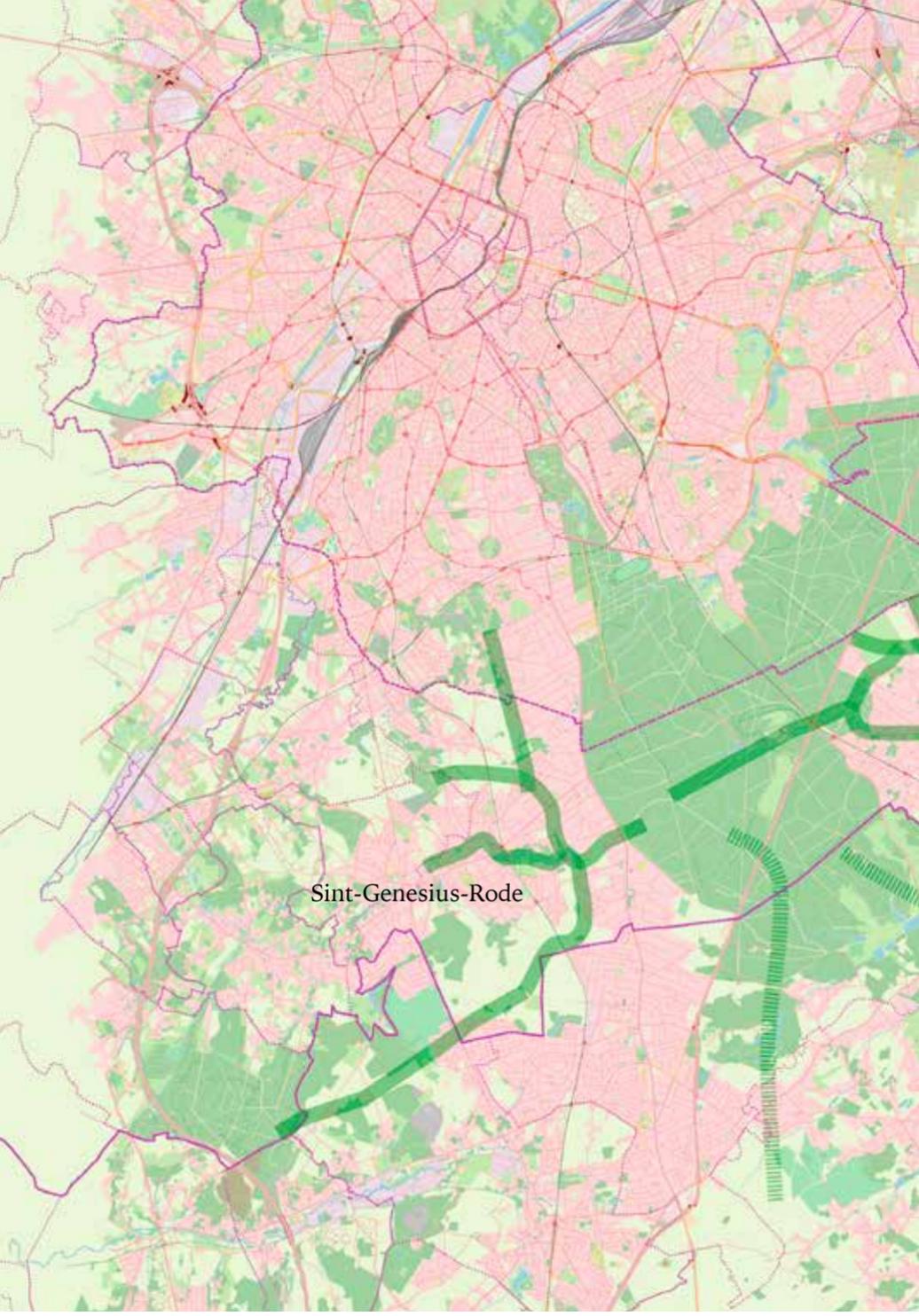
Everything is in a constant state of change: the people, the animals, the plants, but also the sum of all of these parts: our landscape. Human beings are the most dynamic of all the organisms. Our species is developing and progressing very fast and changing the landscape as we do. Green and open spaces increasingly have to make way for roads and buildings. In Belgium, with its urbanised and fragmented landscape, contiguous nature reserves are few and far between. The Sonian Forest, a majestic green lung in the heart of our country, is a gift that we must cherish to preserve its grandeur. To do this, we should not consider human beings and nature as separate entities, but rather ensure that they can coexist in harmony. That is precisely the challenge that the Horizon+ project has set itself.

Ever more people like to get away from the hustle and bustle of towns and cities by visiting nature areas. But this unwittingly puts pressure on the local fauna and flora. It is precisely to relieve and control this pressure on the forest that Horizon+ aims to develop gateways in the four Flemish Sonian municipalities: Overijse, Hoeilaart, Sint-Genesius-Rode and Tervuren. The gateways can be seen as a fusion of the urban fabric with the natural environment of the Sonian Forest. By receiving most of the visitors in and around the gateways where they

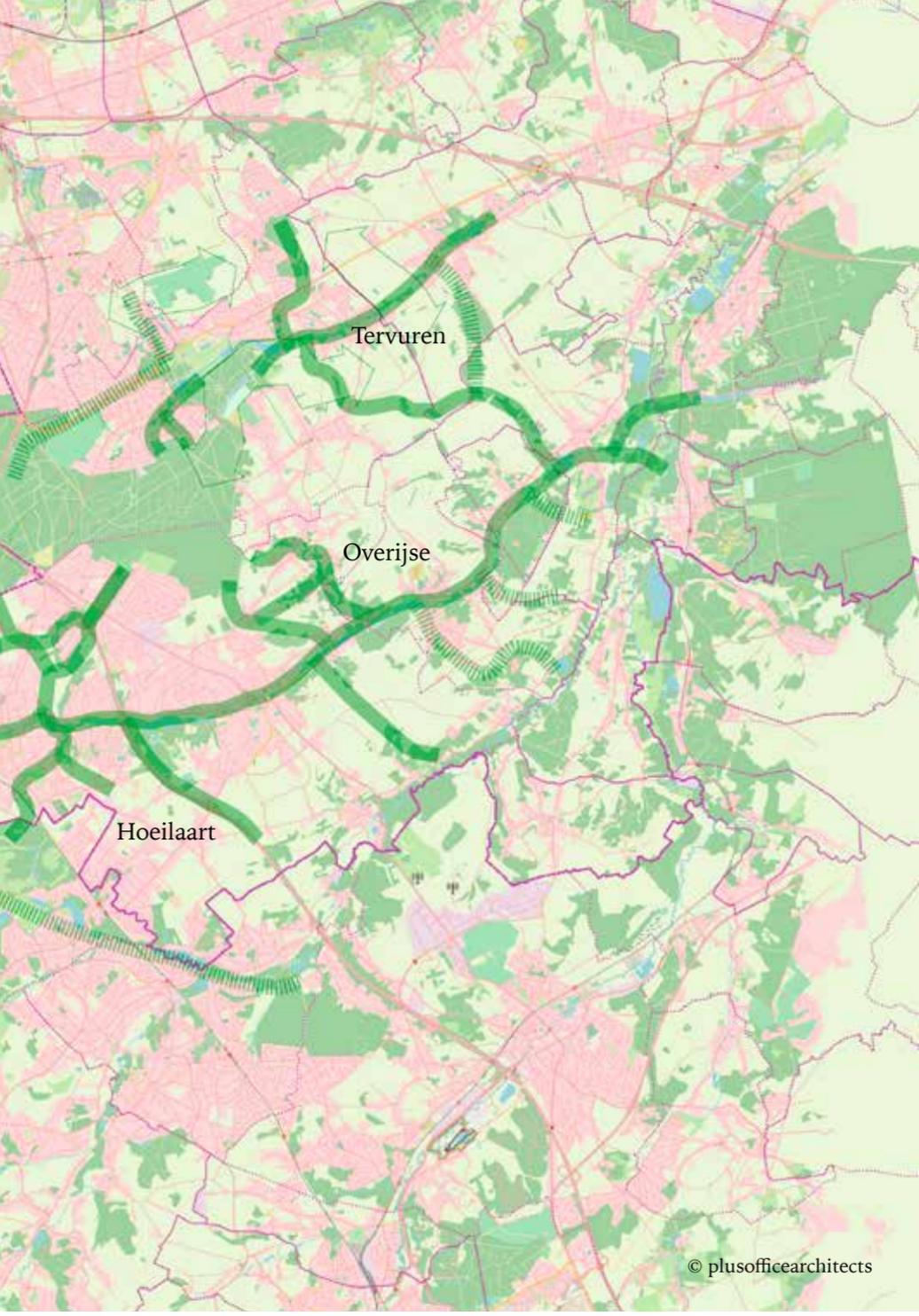
can relax in a natural setting, we can reduce the pressure on nature. This will allow us to strengthen the central area of the forest while drawing nature into the urban landscape. The gateways will be transformed with an emphasis on the combination of nature and recreation. For the gateways to function well, location and accessibility are key, and they must offer the necessary facilities and activities. By combining a playful design with a natural layout, the gateways will be a fantastic experience.

In addition to the development of gateways, Horizon+ will also create nature connections that will fan out through the surrounding municipalities, like green foothills from the forest. In this way, different nature areas will be better connected, both to each other and to the core of the forest. For many plants and animals, these connections are of undeniable importance. Many species face highly fragmented habitats. The nature connections are necessary for these plants and animals to find their way to each other and ensure their survival. Horizon+ is aiming for robust, multifunctional green belts that combine diverse landscape functions. Particular attention will be paid to our Flemish Brabant ‘cherished neighbours’. These are species that depend on specific habitats and that could use some support. We have

selected four cherished neighbours (“koesterburen” in Dutch), one from each of the Sonian municipalities. You can learn about them in the manual.



Sint-Genesius-Rode



Tervuren

Overijse

Hoeilaart

D

RUSBROUSSE,  
WHERE THE LIGHT WAS HEARD

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Five o'clock in the morning. Once again, the sound of traffic is the first thing the microphone picks up when I set out with the recorder at the ready from Groenendaal Castle. I listen to my breathing. Els is ticking in the alarm code next to the castle's door. We would hear the birds wake up, and with them the whole forest. Then the show would really begin, they had told us several weeks ago after we had spent a night in a valley (Het Keteldelleke) nestled in the wood on the side of the hill, sitting on the bed of leaves, waiting for wild animals who would be so congenial as to pass by our microphone. We were acoustic paparazzi who had ventured into the wild, or at least what was left of it. **T**hat night, we heard a fox rustling around in the dry leaves. It could also have been a water vole. In any case, some animal or other circled around us. Its path sketched an impression of the distances, the proportions, the slopes, in short, the scale of the valley; in the dark I had forgotten what it looked like during the day, as if it had died and I was searching in my wallet for an old passport photo. It must have fallen out, I mumbled, with my heart in my mouth and sorrow bearing down on my shoulders. Now that I could no longer compare her spirit, which I conjured up every day, to the photo in which she was at her most beautiful and smiling at me, I also had to let go of the feeling of missing her. I first saw Het Keteldelleke as she sunbathed like a golden-brown past under the crowns of the tall trees in the fragrance of autumn with all its colours even though it was summer and even though the sun never truly broke through the leafy roof but rather left patches on the ground like the moonlight that night. **T**o put it another way: at night, the valley looked just as enchanted as during the day even though we hardly got a glimpse of her face that night. But we heard her. And if a fox walks across a slope at night and you listen well, then what you hear is more likely a sketch of the slope than of the fox. Yet we heard the beast approaching the microphone and suddenly it sounded very close, so close that Els hurriedly decided to put out her cigarette in the cap from a beer bottle which she held close to her chest with an unsteady hand as if the fox had been transformed into a giant hound from hell. He stood there, ready to punish her. The river Styx flowed below us. It was an arid stream. The path up from the Underworld was simply called Het Palissadepad. We held our breath and drank our beer. The wind was in the right direction. It pushed the sound of the racing traffic behind the crest of the hill. It was the first (and last) time that I listened in my headphones to something that could pass for silence. **T**hen owl flew through the emptiness between the trees. It hooted and was answered from the opposite corner of the valley. The moonlight shone through a gap in the crowns. A cloud passed before the white disc, like a breath in the ice-cold air. On the ground, to the left and right, quite a few rodents became agitated. They were

raw titbits. It grew colder and we shivered. The howling continued unabated. **I**t's the neighbours, whispered Els, complaining about all this noise at night. She took another gulp from her bottle of beer. I glanced sideways and saw her cigarette glow into life. In the headphones I heard the fox walking away from us: unmoved but curious and with its snout to the ground, I imagined.

This valley has a fine natural echo, I whispered to Els.

A long silence fell, in which I asked myself why I had not thought earlier of staying silent in both word and thought.

Was that the peeping of a mouse just before it was taken by one of the owls and was now being fought over?

I think a minor bloodbath is taking place, said Els and took another loud mouthful.



or the rest of the night we listened (once more) to the whistling wind, to our breathing, to the creaking of an old beech that leaned on another, which also swayed in the way but refused to leave the other's side. We fell silent from the rumbling in our stomach, from the crescendo of two or three aircraft, from our footsteps on the dry ground, from our sipping from the beer bottle and an Adam's apple clicking in the throat. We became irritated by the ever-present noise of traffic, which skirted the full 360 degrees of the circumference of the wood, in which, if you put your mind to it, you could hear the sound of the sea. The sea offers comfort, the traffic does the very opposite. **Y**ou look at a small wooden chapel, where a candle is burning. It stands hidden under a tree. It stands next to a bridge across an ancient pond. You watch two geese land on the surface. A kingfisher waits patiently on a twig hanging low over the water. You move closer. The geese stretch their necks as they ruffle their feathers. It seems as if they want to take to the air again. They cackle. Then you see how they settle down comfortably on the surface of the water. They float without a sound to the middle of the pond. You take another look at the chapel. You imagine yourself a painter and look at what could become a still-life. The nascent painting makes a noise. Several benches face each other. Pilgrims still come here. I imagine that if they are to pray, they turn down the volume of the soundtrack using the slider at the bottom of the picture. The kingfisher holds a fish in its beak. It gulps and the fish in its beak slides down its throat until even the small tail disappears. **T**hen I point the microphone at the ground. Just for a change, I listen to my left big toe moving around, up and down, in the nose of my sneaker. If you make the banality of things loud enough, I thought at that moment, someone

will always hear a deeper meaning in them. In this way, you can enlarge the most insignificant details into a real event which suddenly turns out to create more excitement, more narrative impact, than the whole of which those details are a part, like running a magnifying glass over them. Beauty is in the details, says the cliché, just like the future or, for my part, freedom. And why not? By revealing details and bringing them to the fore, you may perhaps elevate the beauty, the freedom or the future out of the whole. You can, no matter what, place them on a new time line, close to each other or far apart, depending on how they attract, reject or simply ignore each other. That seems to me a nice way of recording history. **I** could use the recordings in the field as musical footnotes to the poetry of Els. The various footnotes would then together form a wordless poem, a report, a composition and an audio play. I would record the wood and take it home with me. We are two singers and the wood is the third musician, our rhythm section. There is no measure to our ambition.

You really should... that night Els had interrupted herself with a cough.  
You really should, she repeated sarcastically. Again she left her sentence unfinished.

Yes, and? What should I do? I responded, extremely on my guard.

Listen well, she said as if the answer was just as charged as that of the wind.  
A real audio play, she continued sarcastically. She drank from the bottle of beer.  
Yes, I replied, and allowed a short silence to increase the tension and drive away the boredom.

The next time, I started again. The next time I'll bring a shotgun microphone with me. Then I can, eh... then I will be better able to record the wind. That'll work, I assume. I mean in our audio play, I said with the bottle of beer at my lips.

**T**hat night, it soon became too cold to wait there until morning. Today we have our second chance. This morning we would be hearing the wood sing. Then we would go to the lime tree where the mystic Jan van Ruusbroec had sat in the sun. He jotted down what could be seen and heard in the light. **W**e had just walked across the lawn next to the pond. A family of geese had recently taken to the water. The gander was on sentry duty, We walked to the first tree you encounter when you walk into the wood. **N**o, the noise-maker is there, not there... yes, a bit farther, yes there, says Els. She points to the tip of the twig above my head. My headphones clamp over my ears. The volume of the world is turned to ten. I stretch out my arm as far as possible above me and aim the microphone at the spot where the singer opens his beak to the purple clouds in the sky. I think I saw his tongue vibrating. It is already getting light. The sun is nowhere to be seen. **W**hat are we standing here for, I see

Els think after a while, but I am still standing below the end of the branch. Perhaps a little too long. Indeed, the song bird seems to muddle along like a street musician who tortures his violin in order to reach as quickly as possible the final bars of the song. A drawling code to get things over with. I close my eyes. My heart is in my mouth. The sound of that pump mixes in with that of the passing traffic. Yet the forest still pretends it can be itself at all times. Even when it wears the mask of a park. That is pure make-up. It only does it to remain a forest, I presume, and quite a few worlds have been lost on presumptions, I immediately tack on in my mind. I decide not to open my eyes ever again. Els is walking a dozen yards in front of me, I guess. The microphone picks up a short repetitive whistle. I quicken my pace and grip the microphone firmly. The whistle remains as far away as ever. My breathing becomes heavy. I briefly think of turning down the volume of the world, but then change my mind. Els is standing at the end of the path, which runs down below in a bend, I think. I aim the microphone and indeed: I can hear how the path descends. Has she reached the lime tree?



walk with my eyes closed to the place where I think the path makes a loop. And as I walk, I try again to capture that mysterious whistling with my microphone. All this time it had acted, without my knowing it, as my compass. It was easy then: I had had my eyes open. Now, with my eyes closed, I firmly grip the microphone as if it were a GPS. It must have looked ridiculous. I think I am walking on the path again. A blackbird flies from tree to tree, singing. Several trucks thunder by. I imagine myself on the hard shoulder and I turn the microphone towards the sound of the wood. An acorn falls to the ground and an airplane drones through the air, slowly from right to left. To my left, I hear Els calling from the distance. I turn left and stumble over the gently undulating slope with the alertness of a nervous cat with fleas who braces herself and tries to brake by throwing all her weight onto her front legs. What am I walking towards? I pick up speed. I didn't mean to do it. Because then I stumble and have to let go of the microphone. I fall with my chin in the sand. A bush broke my fall. I hold the recorder firmly above my head. As I fall, I hear a loud feedback. The microphone must be lying somewhere in the undergrowth. I push the headphones back into place. The loud sound of a propeller approaches. It hangs for a while, threateningly in front of the microphone. It sounds like a helicopter. My heart beats louder. The sound of the rotor turning on its axle disappears into the distance. On the left, something walks through the grass. The beast hisses. There is sand in my mouth. It grates between my teeth. I suddenly hear a loud and deep cackle. It sounds as if some sort of turkey is pecking at the microphone.

A mosquito flies past the microphone. Then the beast ominously clicks its tongue. I pick myself up and crawl on hands and knees to the place where I hope to find the microphone. All this time, the turkey-like beast continues to cackle ominously into the microphone. Els must be standing by the lime tree by now, while here I am, making myself ridiculous in front of the whole universe. And under that lime tree, by the way, Ruusbroec heard God's love. And if it were up to him, it could remain there, and flow through you like an eternal stream of blood, if, at least, you found the strength after your passage to listen through the sublunary and to leave the sublunary just a little less sublunary than initially foreseen by the god within yourself. Becoming one with yourself has more to do with your surroundings than with yourself. Oh well, I firmly grasp the microphone again, stand up and return, with closed eyes through the undergrowth to the path. The large bird is still close behind. The voice of Els draws closer. She calls my name and laughs.

You look a complete mess, she says. Did you bring a friend with you?

She takes my arm and puts me in my place.

That's where the brothers found the lime tree after a long search, she said with little conviction. I point the microphone at the place right in front of me. The blackbird is still flying from tree to tree. His song encircles us.

You can see it, she says, on those posts with yellow markings. I point the microphone a little lower.

I'm keeping my eyes closed, I explain.

Yes that's obvious, she replied. You've got dry leaves in your hair and there's sand on your chin. Els is frowning, I think. In any case, I can hear her sighs.

You aren't really going to tell me that you want to record the sound of the posts, she asks. At that moment, it seems as if the microphone has read my mind as I brush the sand from my trousers. The volume is set at ten. Behind us, several trucks thunder by.

Els glances sideways at me and sniffs the air as if to say she has never seen anything this grotesque. I shrug like a kid who doesn't know when to stop. The turkey-like beast walks between us. His arrival seems to please Els.

So this is where Ruusbroec heard the light, I ask. After he fled from Brussels and its machinations.

I hear Els lighting a cigarette and how she eagerly inhales the first cloud of smoke.

This is where he wrote and his pen-pusher copied everything on a washstand.

Pen-pusher? I ask.

Yes, in those days, every professional writer had a pen-pusher.

So a pen-pusher, I replied.

Indeed, a pen-pusher, Els repeats and blows out the smoke from her cigarette.

Yesterday we visited the ruins of the Ruusbroec priory. It has partly become a storage place, for people such as mowers. Metaphors suddenly start swimming around in my head. The rear area could pass for a sacred spot. At least, if you ignored the corrugated sheet roofing and the rest of the jumble. Spirituality and untamed nature. Where do you still encounter that? Since I've been keeping my eyes closed, I have booked a trip with my mental travel agency. Low cost without anyone having to be screwed to keep things cheap.

I think I heard a stag beetle, I say to Els, as if the one had anything to do with the other. Suddenly I feel the sun on my face.

They sing loudly. Day and night, she says to nobody in particular.

Who are you talking about? I ask.

When the convent goes to the rectory, then go...

What are you talking about?

Together with the other rich brothers who receive an annuity, they continue unperturbed. From their family or spiritual daughters to a separate room.

What?

To feast there on fine food. In the headphones, her voice sounds as if it is in a chapel. The blackbird interrupts his song. I open my eyes and see a pheasant sitting between us. It looks expectantly at us. The volume of the world is still set at ten.

The poor brothers must go to the refectory and are given ordinary grub, I hear Els say. But when I look at her, I see that her lips have not moved. Gruel, two herrings and watered beer, I hear someone quip. I doubt whether it is really Els's voice. No, it is... I think I am proverbially punch drunk.

Dirk, are you okay? Asks Els. You're acting odd.

Gruel, two herrings and watered beer, I mumble. The pheasant struts to the posts with yellow markings. It squats down like a purring cat on the floor of leaves and looks expectantly at us.

Gruel, two herrings and watered beer, I repeat as if it is stronger than myself. Els shakes her head in confusion. She runs her fingers through her blonde hair and for the first time this morning begins to smile.

Why did you call out, I ask.

What?

Why did you call out? I repeat it, emphasising each syllable.

Perhaps you should turn off all that stuff, she answers curtly and she points with her chin at the microphone and headphones, which have been on my head all the time.

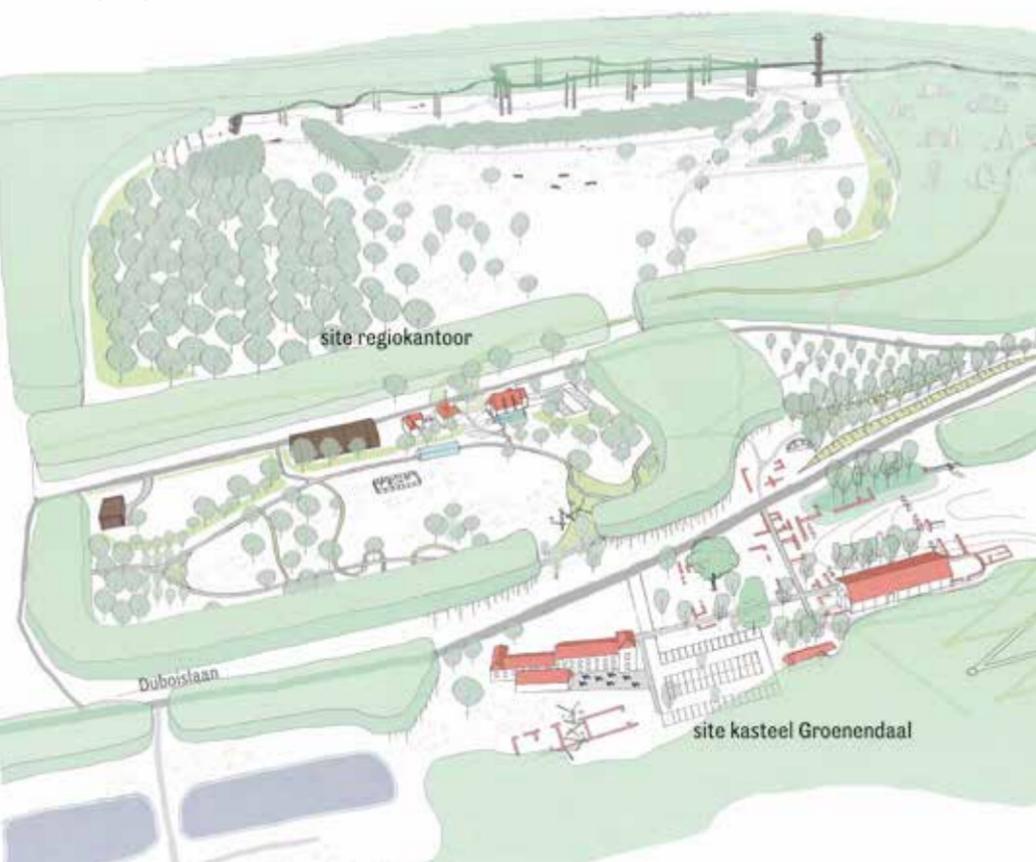
You're right. Enough is enough, I answer. It's becoming pathetic.



We walk out of the wood and again pass the pond near the castle. The pheasant cheerfully struts along behind us. Something rustles in the undergrowth. We walk across the lawn. By the pond, chicks waddle in a line behind mother goose. Again I hear that mysterious whistle. What on earth is it? I wonder whether I should switch on the microphone again. Els walks back to the castle without glancing back. One of the geese walks towards me, craning its neck. The pheasant follows me closely. I listen to the soft whistle that quietly dies away in the murmur of the wind and the passing traffic. When I entered the wood with the microphone at the ready, it was one of my anchor points, a frame of reference, like the whistled signals from a shepherd to his dogs. Only now do I see what it is. It is Els's jeans: during the hike, the legs would rub together just above the knee and this would sometimes cause a whistle. The goose strikes and I back away. It hisses ominously. Shoo! Piss off! The pheasant races across the lawn like a hurdler. It disappears into the undergrowth.



DISCOVER THE RADIO PLAY AT [WWW.ZONIENWOUD.BE/HORIZONPLUS](http://WWW.ZONIENWOUD.BE/HORIZONPLUS)



**Groenendaal Gateway is the largest and most centrally located gateway.**

The Forest Museum, the old priory and the arboretum are the most important components of this site, but there is barely any cohesion between them. For this reason, the Horizon+ team has developed a master plan to connect these fragmented elements via a treetop walk and the so-called arboretum walk. The treetop walk is an integrated, accessible high-altitude trail along the crests of the majestic beech trees that characterise the forest. The arboretum walk consists of a platform path which, like the treetop walk, will start at the Forest Museum and will link various heritage elements of the site together. Of all the heritage elements, the priory is the most important. This will be made more visible again and turned into an experience for visitors.



© BUUR



The centre of Jezus-Eik in Overijse is very close to the edge of the Sonian Forest. An ideal starting point to develop a gateway to strengthen both the centre of Jezus-Eik and the forest.

However, there is currently no tangible relationship between the two.

We will invite the forest into the centre and let it merge with the public green spaces around Jezus-Eik parish church and the parsonage. The experiential value will be strengthened and the terrace of the cultural centre, De Bosuil, will also be transformed. Furthermore, this site will be extended through a belt of playground equipment in the forest in the direction of the ice cream parlour, De Woudpoort.





Gateway Groenendaal - Hoeilaart - Apatura iris (Purple emperor)



Gateway Middenhut - Sint-Genesius-Rode - Alytes obstetricans (Midwife toad)

# TEMPORARY ART ROUTE 42 KM KRISTOF MOREL 10/2018 UNTIL 05/2019



Gateway Tervuren - Alcedo atthis (Kingfisher)



Gateway Jezus-Eik - Overijse - Lucanus cervus  
(Stag Beetle)

## Koesteroute Zoniënwoud

-  Spaans-Huisdreef, 3080 Tervuren
-  fietsknooppunt
-  fietsroute
-  fietsroute (autovrij)
-  fietsroute (onverhard / semi-verhard)
-  fietsroute (onverhard / semi-verhard, outorij)
-  fietsvriendelijk verblijf
-  verblijf voor groepen
-  fietscamping
-  fietsverhuur
-  publiek fietsoplaadpunt
-  kerk
-  kapel
-  museum
-  begraafplaats
-  kasteel
-  bezoekerscentrum
-  watermolen
-  matige helling (2% - 5%)
-  steile helling (5% - 10%)
-  uitzichtspunt
-  café / restaurant
-  fietsverhuur
-  picknicktafel
-  spoorweg met station
-  natuurdomein
-  toeristisch informatiepunt
-  kunstwerken

© Thérèse Vlaams-Brabant

-  Hutbe Durnberg, Hoellaart
-  B&B Hippo-Droom, Groenendaal
-  Bed&Seuna 't Houten Huisje, Hoellaart
-  Tussen Kalle en Veld, Hoellaart
-  B&B Park7, Huldenberg
-  Hotel Panorama, Overijse
-  Hotel Rastelli, Tervuren
-  African Heritage, Tervuren
-  Vrijheidscentrum Kamp Kwadraat, Overijse
-  Camping Druivenland, Overijse



**Alseberg**

Bezoekerscentrum  
De Lzmaak



0 km 2 km

**SINT-GENESIUS-RODE**



De fietskaart Vlaams-Brabant, 2000 km fietsplezier, te koop aan 7 euro in de toeristische infokentoren, boekhandels en [www.toerismevlaamsbrabant.be/publicaties](http://www.toerismevlaamsbrabant.be/publicaties)

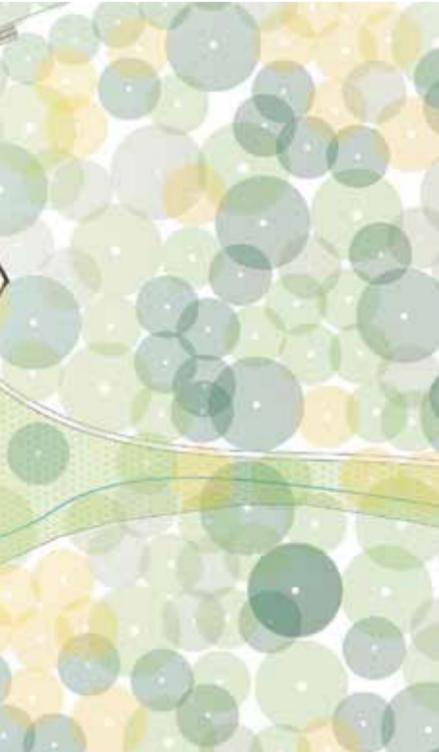


© Horizon+



**Middenhut Gateway is situated at the old forester's house in Sint Michielsdreef. This forester's house will be given a new role as a catering business.**

A large terrace area around it is planned, with views of a biodiverse grassland with brush and shrubbery. In addition to the grassland, where you can have a picnic, there will be a woody area where children can play to their heart's content. A play area for young children will also be set up closer to the restaurant. The current car park will provide space for a fully developed welcome area with a shelter and a starting point for riders, cyclists and hikers. There will be a large bicycle shed and a new car park with space for 100 cars. Furthermore, to prevent this gateway from being isolated we will connect it to the centre of Middenhut through a large green structure.



© TeamvanMeer!



Tervuren Gateway will link the town centre and Tervuren Park.

The municipality has already made major investments to expand the town hall and the Warandepoort into a beautiful complex with numerous public functions. The heritage elements of the former ducal palace and Saint Hubertus Chapel will be the trump cards bringing nature and culture together on this site. Here too, we will go beyond a mere starting point. We will build an attractive green walk that leads you from Tervuren Park through the town and deep into the forest.





PURPLE EMPEROR

KRISTOF MOREL

by the wild waters of the carwash  
the baleful dancer stands  
with a mouth full of yawning hunger  
waiting

for the big bang

as a fatal turtle  
cleaves the sky  
a butterfly floats on a gentle breeze  
stoked on tears

everything pale takes  
to its white heels  
in vain the male-  
chanted freedom

of a cooing dove  
the honey poachers  
at the lips  
of feral flowers

full-cheeked  
the profits  
promptly wave

the great paper catcher  
hurls the sun to the sun  
the moon to the moon

and the last human  
to the last  
skipping star



## APATURA IRIS KOESTERBUUR HOEILAART AND SINT-GENESIUS-RODE

The purple emperor is a beautiful, rare and relatively large butterfly that certainly does not betray its name.

The upper side of the male's wings turn from brown to a beautiful shiny dark blue depending on the way the light falls. The wings of the female do not have that characteristic and retain their dark brown colour. The green caterpillars of the purple emperor have two small horns on the top of their head which makes them look like snails.

During the last century, the species suffered a strong decline, perhaps due to the sacrifice of its favourite habitat for the benefit of a more intensive forest management. The butterfly thrives in damp deciduous forests with open spaces full of willows and well-developed hedgerows. With more intensive forest management, forests became more uniform, with fewer open spaces and less attention for the hedgerows along the edges of the forest. Conversion of forests into a more varied age structure and open spaces, including raising the water level, offers new chances for the purple emperor. The butterfly prefers willow bushes as host plant on which to deposit its eggs.

Unlike most butterflies, the purple emperor does not suck nectar but does extract minerals from humid soil, faeces, dead animals or even human perspiration. For the rest, the butterfly tends to hide away. The males live high in the trees, often in structurally rich humid forests, where they defend their territory and where they seek out striking trees which serve as a meeting place with females.

The females in turn search, after mating, for the perfect location for laying their eggs, on the under side of willow leaves. After a period of two weeks, the eggs develop into a caterpillar. In this first stage, the horns on the head are missing but they appear after the first shedding of the skin. The caterpillar lives for about 300 days and after shedding its skin several times, it turns into a beautiful chrysalis which looks very much like the under side of a willow leaf. After around 18 days, a beautiful butterfly appears. If you want to catch a glimpse of this butterfly you should look for humid forest paths where it could come to drink from faeces or puddles. The period of flight is from the end of June to the start of August.



MIDWIFE TOAD

KRISTOF MOREL

the sun has moved into the sun  
the moon is in the moon  
and like witch's brooms the skipping stars  
all sweep the traces from the beds

on which I fall unwittingly asleep

the world beats a sad stiff rhythm  
and flees from what its drumsticks do  
its ancient mouth yawns open  
hungry for what must devour us

it's not too late! the wind that sings  
its rage through boughs can blow  
the reeling butterfly free  
stoking my own slow wingbeat

in the fire of loneliness  
to keep me by its side



## ALYTES OBSTETRICANS *KOESTERBUUR OVERIJSE* AND SINT-GENESIUS-RODE

Let us transport you to  
the wondrous world of the  
midwife toad.

We're not really talking about midwives, because it is actually the males who take on the chore of breeding. You won't come across a midwife toad very often, unless you really set out to find one. In Belgium it is an endangered species and is rare, particularly in Flanders. It is fairly small (max. 5 cm), with a greyish-brown colour and a warty skin. The vertical pupil is also striking, in contrast to the common toad which has a horizontal pupil. They are mainly active at twilight and during the night.

Midwife toads are real sun worshippers, who prefer a bare, stony environment where small crevices under stones, upturned trees and fissures in the rock act as hiding places. In their natural environment they prefer forest edges and pastures, preferably with some sun-drenched slopes where the subsoil can warm up. Man-made landscapes also form an interesting habitat. Cemeteries, for example, sand and stone quarries, old farmhouses, ruins, and so on.

During breeding, the males produce a high, short whistle to attract the females. These whistles are repeated several times a minute. The males' call generally starts after sunset. The call can be heard from early April until late August. Several males calling at the same time give – because each male has its own whistle tone – the impression of a peal of bells. When a female and a male find each other, the male firmly grasps the female's flanks, which

causes the female to release her eggs so that the male can fertilize them.

The male then wraps the string of eggs around his rear legs and on his back. He carries around the eggs throughout the development (around three weeks) until they are ready to be deposited in the water. Within several hours, the tadpoles hatch from the eggs after which it takes four months for them to develop into a mature toad. During those four months, the tadpoles laze in the water; a pool, puddle, a cattle drinking trough, garden pond, etc. When they are fully grown toads, they spend the rest of their lives on land. Midwife toads can reach the age of 8.



KINGFISHER

KRISTOF MOREL

hear how a tired  
blackbird sings  
how the sound  
of thundering metal  
echoes between  
the brittle trees  
what is vulnerable  
is what vibrates  
on the strings of  
the first instrument  
I don't know what it is  
but with that single melody  
all my wildest dreams

are tamed



## ALCEDO ATTHIS *KOESTERBUUR* TERVUREN

The kingfisher is a striking appearance, with an unmistakable blue back, orange breast and white throat and side neck.

Females have an orange-red beak base, in males this is black. A familiar bird, but due to its shy behaviour you do not often catch sight of it. The kingfisher lives in a watery environment, where it specializes in catching small fish. You sometimes see it flashing low across the water in rapid, straight flight movements. Often, the kingfisher takes up its post between overhanging branches, peering down on the fish swimming in the water below it. Because of this way of life, the kingfisher needs clear and slow-flowing water, teeming with fish, and with enough trees and bushes in which to hide. The kingfisher prefers steep sandy or loamy natural banks or root systems of fallen trees along brooks, rivers and to a lesser extent ponds. It can nest here in vertical sand walls, in the root systems or in an artificial kingfisher wall. The kingfisher digs out a passage about 1 metre wide, with a round nesting hole at the end. It does this with its beak and uses its legs to sweep the excavated earth from the hole.

The kingfisher breeds from February to March some years raising up to three batches of eggs each generally containing 6-7 eggs. The brooding period lasts between 18 and 21 days. The food is small fish but also all sorts of water insects (dragonfly larvae, water beetle, straw worms), small amphibians and freshwater shrimps. The fish caught are taken to the perching place and are beaten to death

against a branch before being swallowed. Its name would suggest that it prefers cold temperatures but nothing could be farther from the truth. It is actually very sensitive for cold winter temperatures. The name was more likely derived from the German “Eisenvogel” which means “iron bird”, which would then refer to the metallic gloss of the feathers, The species is widely dispersed throughout Flanders. We can speak of a sedentary bird with several migration movements during periods of frost.



STAG BEETLE

KRISTOF MOREL

I'm searching for a slow silence  
as complex as the habitat  
of moorhen heron  
fish and duck and on a  
bank the last colours  
catch fire between  
the evening shadows

the summery purple  
and yellow of the tallest  
flowers the poisonous red  
of lords-and-ladies  
berries scattered here  
and there beside the path

nothing to find  
in this deserted place  
if only I could take back  
the sound of my tracks  
ease  
this waiting

if only I could unsee  
what I have written



## LUCANUS CERVUS *KOESTERBUUR* OVERIJSE AND SINT-GENESIUS-RODE

This is without a doubt the largest and most spectacular beetle in our country. The stag beetle can grow up to 9 cm in length.

Males can be recognized by their gigantic jaws, which, because of their bifurcation, take on the appearance of the antlers of a stag. Those antlers are used to compete with other males. They may look dangerous, but their jaws do not have enough strength to wound us. Females do not have such gigantic antlers but they are smaller and their jaws are more powerful. A female can use these jaws to gnaw through the bark of beeches or oaks in order to lick out the sap. This is more difficult for the males with their unwieldy antlers. They can sometimes be provided with food by the females or they search out overripe fruit which they happily devour. The stag beetle appears in many parts of Europe. In Belgium, these are primarily between Halle and Leuven, around Luik, Hoei, Voeren and the eastern part of Limburg. The larvae live in the dead wood of fallen trees, tree stumps and dead roots. Old railway sleepers in gardens also prove an ideal habitat. The beetle is then encountered in open forests and woods, in hollow paths, steep wooded slopes, trees along lanes, parks, orchards and gardens with old railway sleepers. And then preferably on sunny southern slopes.

The females only move small distances whereby their dispersal strongly depends on places with sufficient dead wood. For these reasons, the stag beetle is rare and needs special help to ensure its continued existence in Belgium.

## STAG BEETLE

Furthermore, this beetle does not only require special food, it also has a long development cycle of 4 to 8 years. When stag beetles reach maturity, they have but a short life: males live only a few weeks and females no longer than two months. During this short life span, reproduction is of paramount importance. The female exudes scents that can lure the males from afar. When the males finds a suitable female, mating starts. The female lays her eggs in or nearby underground decayed wood that acts as food for the larvae. The larvae live for around 3-to-5 years under the ground. During this period, they shed their skins several times and eventually make a chrysalis cradle where the larvae will pupate and spend the winter. Finally, a mature beetle will fly out of the chrysalis. If you want to see the stag beetle, you must be in the right place at the right time. Your best chance is on warm summer evenings in June and July. During the day, the beetle generally hides in the trees. It is best to set off several hours before twilight sets in, for that is when the males go in search of the females. Stag beetles are poor flyers. Their heavy antlers cause them to fly through the air in an almost vertical position, their wings making a humming sound.

As suitable habitats disappear, people have started constructing artificial “breeding mounds” to give the beetle a helping hand. This takes place in areas where the stag beetle is present or could perhaps appear. A breeding mound is a collection of hardwood tree stumps piled up in a heap together.



and as I wandered  
I moved my step  
I walked in me and with me  
my body walked on

everything I knew or said  
was prepared so that  
it would be mine  
in this being

the sun poured circles  
of light onto the ground  
where the shadows of leaves  
wove wakeful patterns

wide awake I dreamt  
my childhood as long as I  
could stay ahead of my step  
I would be the first of me to arrive

only when I grew tired  
forgetting myself did I discover  
the strength the fragility  
of what had been moving

without me



But the Horizon+ project seems to be missing one thing: involvement of and communication with the local residents and users of the Sonian Forest.

Because isn't it important to be aware of what is happening in your area?

We certainly think so! The solution is on its way under the wings of the Stag Beetle Project. The four Flemish Sonian municipalities and its inhabitants will combine forces to boost the project and make it even stronger. We will work together for more nature and a stronger connection with the Sonian Forest! The stag beetle serves as an attention-grabbing mascot. We will take you on fascinating walks and exciting information evenings. Who knows, we might even see a real stag beetle! Moreover, you will be able to follow it all via our Facebook page. Together we are building more biodiversity and a green, beautiful and healthy environment.

Do you want advice about nature in your neighbourhood? Or do you want to make your garden more environmentally friendly? Contact our project officers and we will be happy to help you: [hanna.stynen@rld.be](mailto:hanna.stynen@rld.be) and [sarah@pajot-zenne.be](mailto:sarah@pajot-zenne.be)



A manual for the Sonian forest is a project by The National Poet, Poëziecentrum and Project Horizon+. Els Moors, The National Poet, and writer/musician Dirk Elst immersed themselves in the Sonian Forest. Their experiences as well as the sounds they recorded are the main source of inspiration for Els' poems. The manual also presents some of the projects of Horizon+, such as the development of gateways into the forest and natural connections that strengthen the forest and the surrounding area. Special attention is paid to our 'cherished neighbours', i.e. animal species that are in need of extra care. These species have also been channelled into artworks by Kristof Morel. His works can be discovered in this manual and in large format in the Sonian Forest itself. You can discover these works for yourself by bike via the 'Koester route', which is detailed in the middle of this publication.





deep beyond measure  
immeasurably high  
and long and wide

I feel I am  
straying in the breadth  
blown back

by the wind  
to a beginning  
not finding anything

that was not already  
reaching for life  
elsewhere

splintered by  
pure light  
blind

I have  
no images  
resting

in all that flows  
indivisibly  
through the world

THIS PUBLICATION IS WORTH FIVE EUROS.

**HORIZON+**

**ZONIËNWOUD**

P O È Z I E C E N T R U M