



Antwerp Zoo
Foundation®

Rewriting our future



‘When a dream
becomes a mission’



The Antwerp Zoo Foundation not only dreams about its mission –
it puts it into practice! What does AZF want to create?
A harmonious world, in which a green and climate-resistant
economy, human well-being, and biodiversity go hand in hand and
support one another.

A world which former balance has been restored.
In which endangered species can enjoy their reclaimed habitats once again in large numbers. In which people, animals, and nature live together in harmony without jeopardising one another's existence in any way.

AZF has already contributed to rewriting the future through a successful bonobo project in Congo. Through the okapi project, the team hopes to prove once again that its **multidisciplinary approach** is capable of bearing fruit in the long term.

AZF also works on **preserving the biodiversity of the planet** in its own country. Thanks to a **concerted effort**, the nature reserve De Zegge was able to **grow into a flourishing and safe habitat for rare breeding birds such as the Eurasian bittern**.

Is that too good to be true? The Antwerp Zoo Foundation (AZF) does not believe so, even though time is running out. **AZF aims to transform this hopeful vision of the future into reality.** How? By diverging from the beaten path, and through an unconventional approach to nature conservation. **Sustainable, comprehensive,** and, above all: with our feet planted firmly in the mud, **shoulder to shoulder with the local population.** Thanks to their many years of **experience, scientific research,** and their **love for animals,** the experts at AZF make a difference there where their contribution matters most.



The Foundation cherishes a clear-cut ambition: a sustainable future in which people, animals, and nature live together in harmony as a single entity. AZF not only dreams of such a future; it helps rewrite it in an authentic, committed, respectful, and targeted manner.



Not only do the infra-red cameras produce magical photographs; they are indispensable in nature conservation projects. They detect body heat, which allows researchers to better localise and observe the animals.

‘What connects us is our shared vision on nature conservation. This is what Antwerp Zoo Foundation is founded on.’



Dries Herpoelaert,
General Manager Antwerp ZOO Society



Jef Dupain,
Director Antwerp Zoo Foundation

Antwerp Zoo Foundation is the product of the passion, vision, and goals shared by its founders.

How was the idea behind Antwerp Zoo Foundation born?

Dries Herpoelaert: ‘As a zoo and as the Antwerp ZOO Society (Koninklijke Maatschappij voor Dierkunde van Antwerpen, KMDA), we consider it our duty to demonstrate and reduce the impact of human-kind on nature. Our mission is to work in a sustainable fashion with a great focus on biodiversity. In situ conservation can play an important part in this. We had been looking for an authentic and scientifically founded way to approach nature conservation from a different, unique angle for some time. That was the beginning of Antwerp Zoo Foundation.’

Jef, how did you become involved with the project?

Jef Dupain: ‘I had already collaborated with the Zoological Director, Linda Van Elsacker, in the past. In 2018, she asked me to join her for

a debate on conservation, together with Dries Herpoelaert. What would a contemporary foundation with a clear vision and all-round approach look like? We were on the same page immediately. I then drew up a strategy to breathe life into this idea, and our initiative was subsequently given the green light.’

What is the vision of AZF?

Jef Dupain: ‘In contrast to the traditional vision on conservation, we do not isolate endangered animals. Instead, we facilitate their connection to people and nature. That harmonious, sustainable balance comprises the foundation for the vision of the future that we, as Antwerp Zoo Foundation, wish to rewrite: unique and progressive.’

This is not the first time that the KMDA takes on a pioneering role.

Dries Herpoelaert: ‘That’s true. It is embedded in our DNA. In 1919, visitors to Antwerp ZOO were able to catch their first glimpse of an okapi. Our experts at ZOO Planckendael have been studying bonobos since 1992. Scientific research has been of paramount importance to us from the very beginning. Our renowned in-house science and research centre collects an exceptional amount of information about the animal kingdom. All those projects and the work we perform internationally on behalf of foundations such as EAZA (European Association of Zoos and Aquariums) demonstrate that we are much more than a zoo that sells admission tickets.’

‘We are convinced that long-term engagement will produce the best results.’

Dries Herpoelaert

What prompted AZF to focus on the okapi, the bonobo, and the Eurasian bittern?

Jef Dupain: ‘The KMDA is highly committed to the well-being of both the bonobo and the okapi. Not only do we share an extensive history; we are also responsible for the breeding programme of these species and the keeper of their studbooks. If a zoo wants to breed okapis, they will need to apply to us for permission and assistance. The nature reserve De Zegge has been under the KMDA’s management ever since 1952. This incredibly valuable piece of Belgian marshland is unfortunately suffering from drought. The ensuing water shortage poses a threat to the peat, resulting in its inability to retain carbon. Not only is this detrimental to the climate; this drought is also disastrous for biodiversity and rare breeding birds such as the Eurasian bittern. Although we appointed this species the ambassador of this area, our aim is, of course, to offer all the unique flora and fauna in De Zegge a promising future.’



‘We do not isolate endangered animals. Instead, we facilitate their connection to people and nature.’

Jef Dupain

Three inspiring and ambitious projects. What are the biggest challenges you are facing?

Dries Herpoelaert: ‘We are convinced that long-term engagement will produce the best results, in which ‘long-term’ is defined as a period of at least fifteen years. This is new, because most traditional nature conservation projects last five to seven years. After that, a project tends to fizzle out and only few results are actually obtained. This is not what we want. We want to live up to our promises and make a genuinely sustainable difference. However, achieving this requires ongoing financial support.’

Three projects, one vision

What distinguishes AZF from other conservation projects? The all-encompassing perspective: a focus on harmonisation rather than isolation. AZF adopts a broader, locally-oriented approach to achieve the right balance between fauna, flora and economics. Therefore close collaboration between AZF, local authorities, and the indigenous population is indispensable for a sustainable future.

All of these parties involved in AZF's projects stand shoulder to shoulder to achieve the same goal: a region that is able to flourish in all its facets. It is through projects like these that AZF, acting as an ambassador for endangered species, helps build the world of tomorrow.

The three projects of AZF:

**Lomako Bonobo
(Congo)**



**De Zegge
(Geel, Belgium)**



**Back to Buta Okapi
(Congo)**



One plan – many flourishing regions

1 Identifying hotspots: AZF identifies the core habitats of the endangered species that it protects or wants to see protected. AZF wishes to safeguard the purity and intactness of these habitats in the interest of the uninhibited and unbridled development and survival of biodiversity. This will give the hotspot a chance to develop into a 'paradise'.

2 Sketching a living landscape: AZF defines the perimeter surrounding the core territories (i.e. hotspots). Here, the foundation sets up economic projects in conjunction with local authorities and the indigenous population with a view to making them more future-proof.

3 Investigating land use: Working shoulder to shoulder with the local community, AZF conducts the necessary research. Which plots of land are located within the perimeter around the hotspots? What are they currently used for? What are the economic prospects? AZF facilitates the formal recognition of this land use and the official allocation of this land in terms of spatial planning.

4 Feet in the mud: AZF visits the territory in question, bringing its many years of expertise with it. The aim of the Foundation is to make the difference here: working shoulder to shoulder, with its feet literally in the mud, with the local population and authorities.

The unique strength of AZF? A versatile and scientifically founded approach. Using a single six-step plan, AZF contributes to the sustainable, harmonious future of three projects, realised at both local and international level.

5 Creating cohabitation: AZF, the local authorities and population collaborate with one another so that people and animals can live in harmony in the living landscape. After all, AZF makes it interesting for all these individuals and organisations to live and work together in these areas by developing economic activities in the periphery. As a result, hotspots are no longer a necessary source of food or income and these areas are left alone, allowing the animals that are thus protected to live here without any threat of extinction.

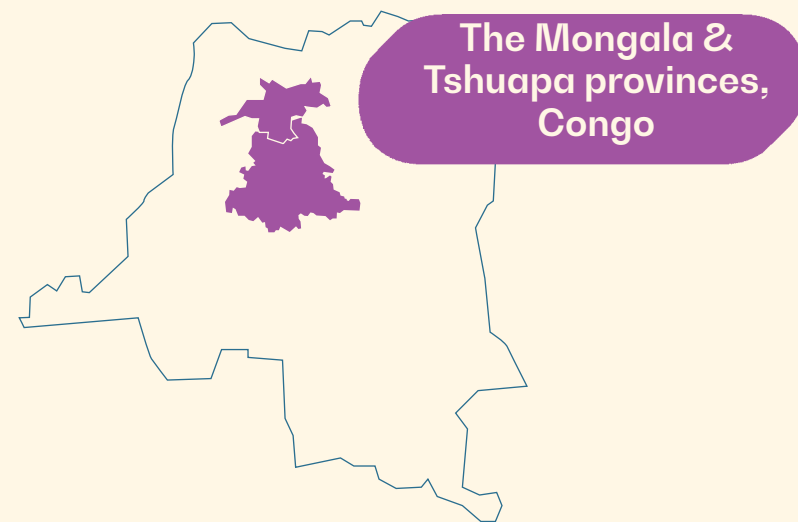
6 Future-proofing: AZF shares its knowledge and tools with local players and teams. When a conservation project is ripe and sufficiently embedded for independent development, these people and organisations will be able to continue with the project on their own.

AZF's step-by-step plan perfectly illustrates the philosophy based on which AZF aims to make a difference: an all-round approach that offers a new perspective on the protection of endangered animals and which is geared towards long-term success. AZF understands that such a lasting transformation takes time. The approach is clear: each project on which AZF embarks will require a commitment of at least fifteen years.

‘The protection
of bonobos and the
creation of a
sustainable economy
go hand in hand.’



Lomako Bonobo Conservation Project



ENDANGERED SPECIES

The bonobo

Why was the bonobo chosen?

Humankind shares 98 per cent of its DNA with the bonobo. Keeping this in mind, it should hardly come as a surprise that AZF takes such a heart-felt interest in the fortune of this intelligent primate. The situation as it stands today unfortunately looks everything but rosy: deforestation and the bush meat trade pose a substantial threat to the very survival of these inspiring animals and their habitat.

Scientifically founded and unprecedented

AZF is doing everything in its power to improve the lives of bonobos, a cause to which many scientists contribute. This is demonstrated by the bonobo experts of the Antwerp ZOO Centre for Research and Conservation (ACRC), the centre for scientific research of parent company KMDA. They

have been studying those species ever since the 1990s, which is also when the very first nature conservation project in Congo was initiated. This project comprises the solid foundation on which AZF is still building today, and will ensure that future generations will still be able to enjoy these amazing great apes and their valuable habitat.





1992: The Antwerp ZOO Centre for Research and Conservation studies the behaviour of bonobos at ZOO Planckendael.

1994: Jef Dupain visits the Lomako Forest in Congo. The cornerstone for a harmonious future is laid.

2000: ZOO Planckendael opens the first research centre in Iyema in the southern part of the Lomako Forest in Congo.

2006: A 3,625 km² area in the Lomako Forest is officially acknowledged as a protected area.

2008: ZOO Planckendael leaves Iyema due to the relentless threat of war in that part of Congo.

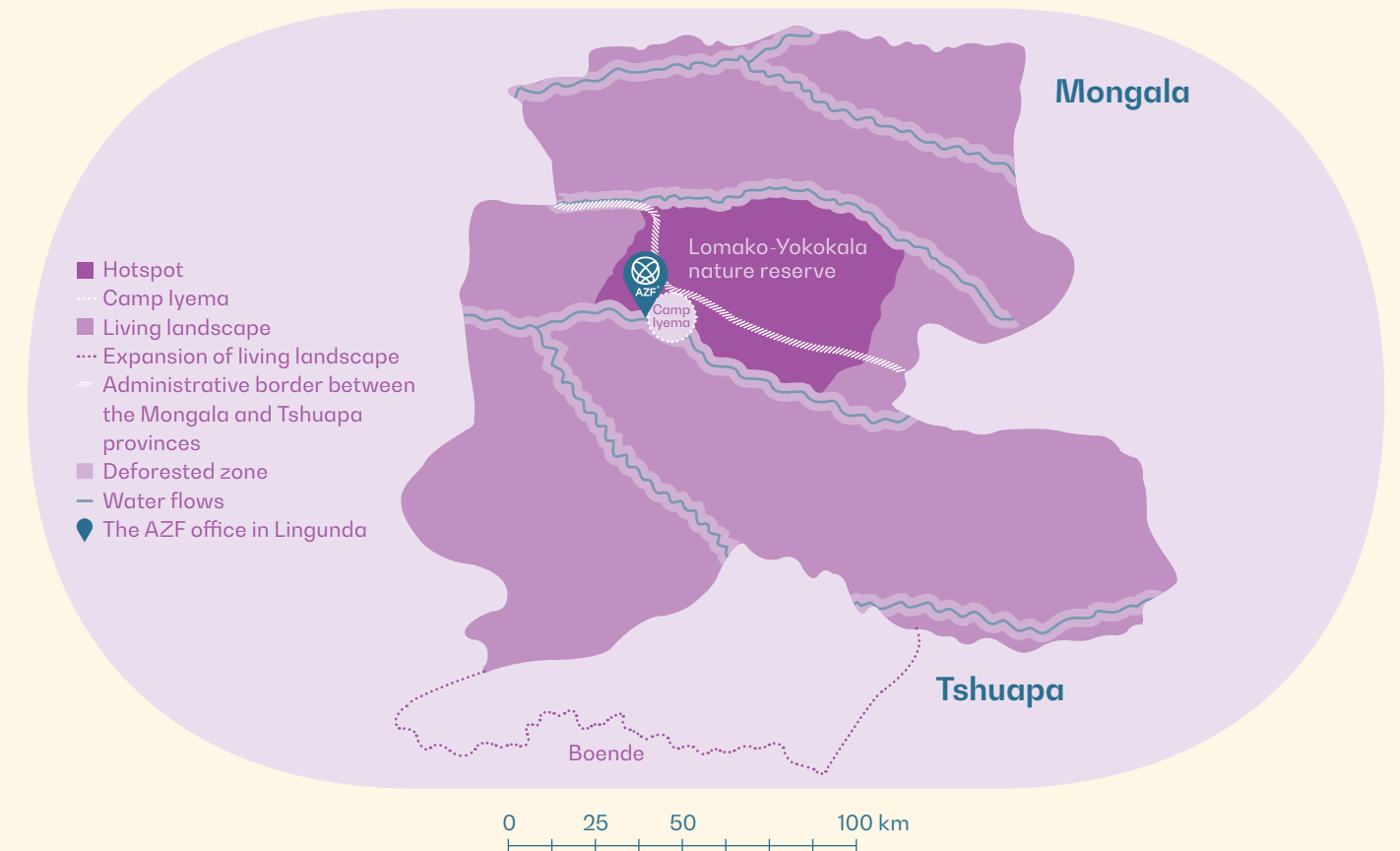
2018: AZF breathes new life into the Lomako Bonobo Conservation Project in Congo and relaunches Camp Iyema.

From isolation to innovation

1 Hotspot The protected Lomako Yokokala nature reserve, spanning almost 4,000 km², is home to the bonobo. Approximately 1,000 of these great apes share this reserve with forest elephants, bongos, leopards, and many other animals.

2 Living landscape The Lomako-Yokokala nature reserve is part of the Marina-Lopori-Wamba Landscape, which is located in the middle of the Congo River basin. This landscape is marked by extreme poverty in the Tshuapa and Mongala provinces. Lack of proper infrastructure prevents goods from reaching the nearby town of Boende and therefore the markets located even further away.

‘We keep a close eye on the bonobo population from Camp Iyema.’ Jef Dupain



3 Land use In conjunction with the indigenous population, AZF explores the possibility of developing non-invasive commercial activities that are in harmony with the bonobos and their forest. AZF aims to:

- allocate agricultural forestland for the production of coffee, cocoa, and rubber;
- encourage private entrepreneurship with non-invasive activities such as the catching and/or production and subsequent sale of caterpillars, honey, or fish;
- facilitate small-scale bonobo tourism.

4 Feet in the mud The AZF team in Camp Iyema keeps a close eye on the bonobo population in the territory. They take stock of the bonobo families and observe them in order to recognise the relationships within the group and identify newcomers. AZF's ten bonobo guides, led by one coordinator, prepare the environment and the animals for scientific research. They keep an eye on the families and track their movements in order to find them again. AZF also finances the park rangers, who ensure the safety of the area by protecting the animals and the researchers from poachers, illegal loggers, and forest contractors.


5 Cohabitation The new use of the land in this area allows the indigenous population to farm the land without a negative impact on the habitat of the bonobos. This new economic activity contributes to the survival of the species.

6 Future-proofing AZF cooperates with the indigenous population and local authorities in a respectful manner and trains teams. Working together, they are preparing the area for a sustainable future. AZF aims to involve the surrounding communities more closely in drawing up the management plans needed for this. By promoting the participation of women in the local economy, AZF develops and supports economic initiatives at the local level. AZF is also creating a green corridor between the Lomako Nature Reserve and the city of Boende, with the intention of rebuilding a living economic landscape along this axis. What is done by AZF today determines what the future will look like.

‘I am present all day long, from my first cup of coffee in the morning until my last glass of palm wine in the evening.’ Jef Dupain

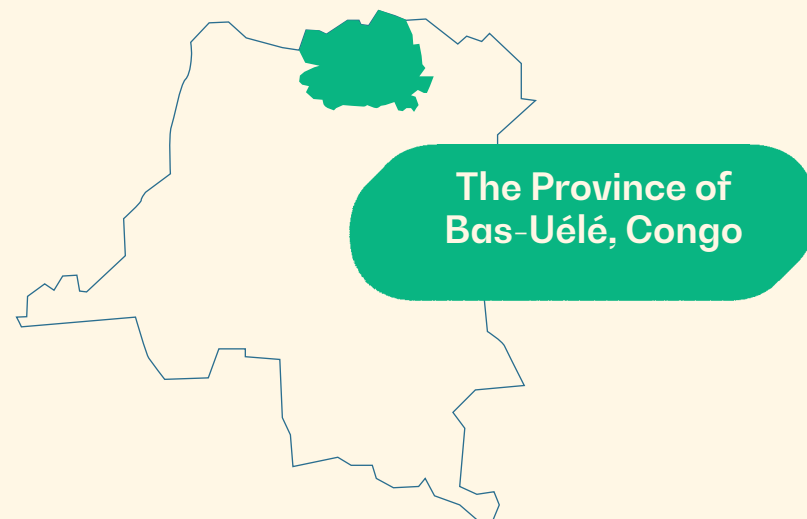


The unique assets of Antwerp Zoo Foundation? AZF is always physically present where its projects are carried out and is more than prepared to roll up its own sleeves in the interest of its projects. It coordinates projects on site, under the leadership of its experts, working shoulder to shoulder with the local population, rather than from thousands of kilometres away. Being present where it really matters: that's what truly makes the difference.

A photograph of two deer in a field of vibrant pink flowers. The deer in the foreground is shown in profile, looking towards the right. The deer in the background is slightly out of focus, looking towards the camera. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

‘We want to give
this elegant and
mysterious species
a safe, permanent
home.’

Back to Buta Okapi Project



ENDANGERED SPECIES
The okapi

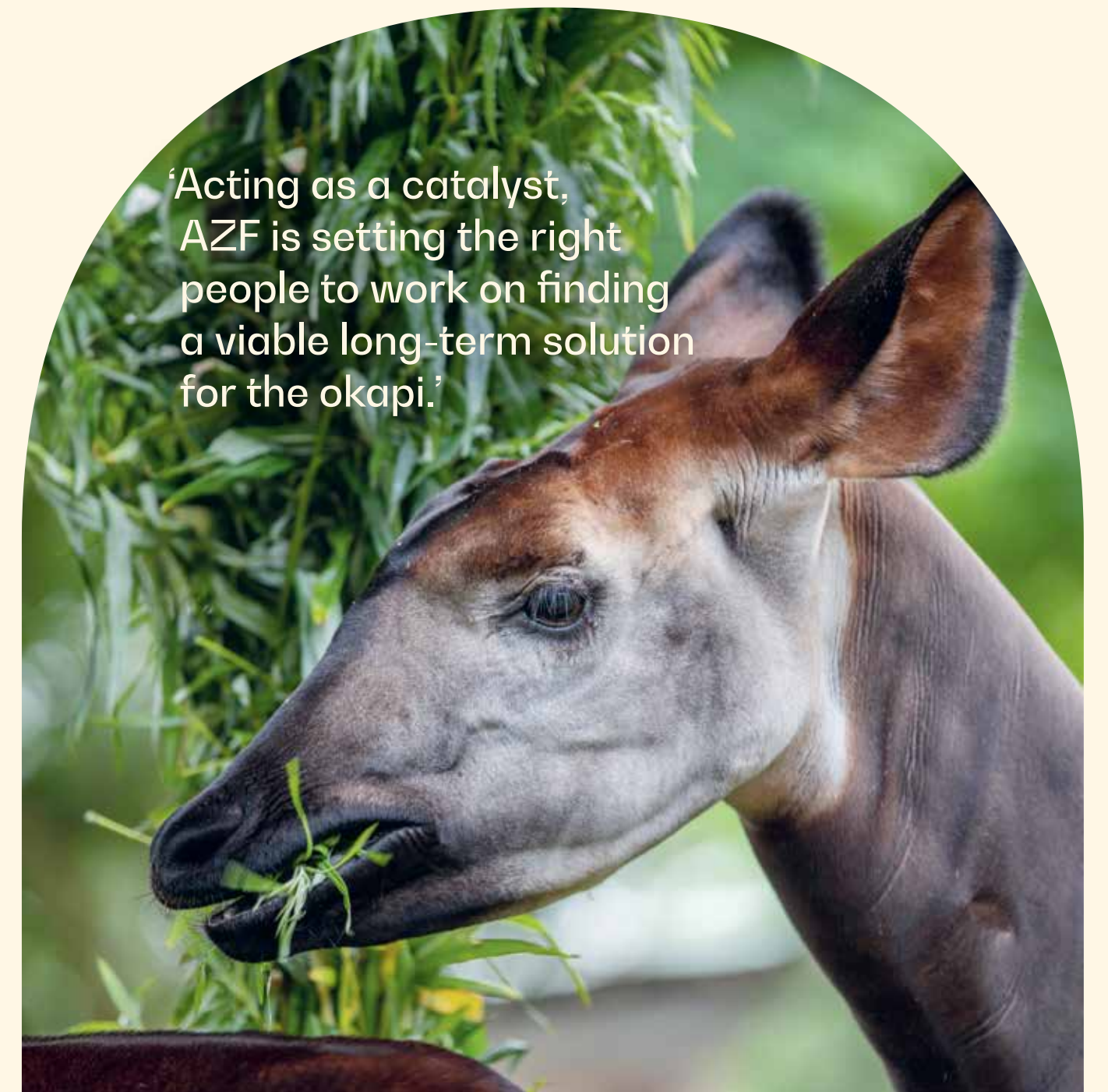
Why was the okapi chosen?

Our story starts with the arrival of the first okapi at Antwerp ZOO in 1919. The animal was named 'Buta' after the capital of the Province of Bas-Uélé, where the okapi occurs in the wild. This is why both the location and the species are so meaningful to the Antwerp Zoo Foundation. Nevertheless, hunting and deforestation have been diminishing the okapi's chances of survival. The Foundation is currently writing a rosier script for the okapi in which a green economy and the AZF approach play a leading role.

Dear to us for a century

More than a century after the arrival of the very first okapi at Antwerp ZOO, AZF is making every possible effort to give this elegant and mysterious animal a safe and

permanent home. To achieve this, AZF is relying on the same progressive vision as in its bonobo project and its unparalleled knowledge of the species.



'Acting as a catalyst,
AZF is setting the right
people to work on finding
a viable long-term solution
for the okapi.'

‘Zoos are extremely eager to add an okapi to their collection. As a studbook keeper, we are extremely proud to keep and protect these beautiful animals in our own, unique manner.’ Dries Herpoelaert



1919: The very first okapi (‘Buta’ from Congo) arrives at Antwerp ZOO.

1928: A second okapi (‘Tele’) becomes a resident of Antwerp ZOO.

1954: Antwerp ZOO successfully breeds the first okapi in captivity.

1977: The KMDA becomes the European studbook keeper of the okapi.

1985: The European okapi breeding programme, coordinated by the KMDA, is initiated.

Going in search together

1 Hotspot A hotspot for okapis has not been accurately identified yet. Okapis are timid animals. They live in a densely vegetated forest estimated to cover around 300,000 km². This makes it difficult to locate them. AZF employees spent many months traversing the forest in search of these animals. With the aid of the local population and using observation and GPS trackers, they were able to identify the hotspots in a dense forest of 500 km². AZF is actively engaged in defining these hotspots more accurately and concretely.

2 Living landscape In collaboration with local authorities, AZF is defining the scope of operations around the hotspot. Its primary focus is on the protection of the okapi, on the one hand, and on the spatial planning of the demarcated area, on the other. AZF and the local population decide in mutual consultation which areas they will reallocate as communal forests and which areas will be used as agricultural land, among other things. (AZF calls a land use agreement such as this a 'Plan Simple D'Aménagement de Terre' (PSAT)). This is done with the utmost respect for local customs and traditions, in which AZF clarifies the ownership of land together with the local authorities. This strengthens the indigenous population's sense of responsibility towards these areas. In mutual consultation with them and the government, AZF subsequently decides how this land will be used.



'People engaged in commercial activities no longer need to chop down forests.'

Jef Dupain

3 Land use AZF gives existing land a new purpose. The communal forest, in particular, plays a crucial role here: it reconciles the conservation of the okapi with a sustainable economy. As the local population can trade in the products they find in the forest, such as honey and caterpillars, there is no longer any need for them to chop down forests.

‘The local inhabitants are always the starting point, in which AZF takes into account local traditions but also pays attention to the participation of women.’

Jef Dupain

4 Feet in the mud The team of ten experts is literally going ‘back to Buta’, where it works shoulder to shoulder with the local population on creating a habitable environment for both people and animals. Entrepreneurs who trade or produce without endangering the okapis’ forest can count on the support of AZF. AZF distributes seeds to farmers to grow or strengthen (new) crops. It also buys harvested crops to make local farming economically viable. AZF helps villages on-site to develop a shared vision of the future. The local inhabitants are always

the starting point, in which AZF takes into account local traditions in relation to the distribution of power but also pays special attention to the participation of women. The AZF team works with a local development committee elected by the villagers and led by the village chief.

5 Cohabitation The okapi and the local population live in harmony in the communal forests. The property rights also enhance the involvement of the community. In a later stage, small-scale okapi tourism can provide additional income.

6 Future-proofing AZF trains the local population in and around Buta with the aim of safeguarding its sustainable approach in the long term. It provides young Congolese with support to study at local universities, in which AZF’s philosophy plays an important role. By involving the village chief and the local authorities as closely as possible in this project, AZF acts as a catalyst in engaging the right people to collaborate on a sustainable long-term solution. The ultimate aim is to create a territory where cohesion between people, animals, and nature is paramount.





‘Countless endangered
bird species feel at
home in De Zegge.
They need a safe
habitat.’

De Zegge



ENDANGERED SPECIES

The Eurasian bittern

Why was de zegge chosen?

The nature reserve De Zegge is a vulnerable paradise for rare species of flora and fauna and one of the very few places in Belgium to contain a unique marsh habitat with peatlands. A bog like this is so important because it retains carbon, thus serving as a beacon in the battle against global warming. De Zegge is, however, under tremendous pressure because its water balance has come under threat. According

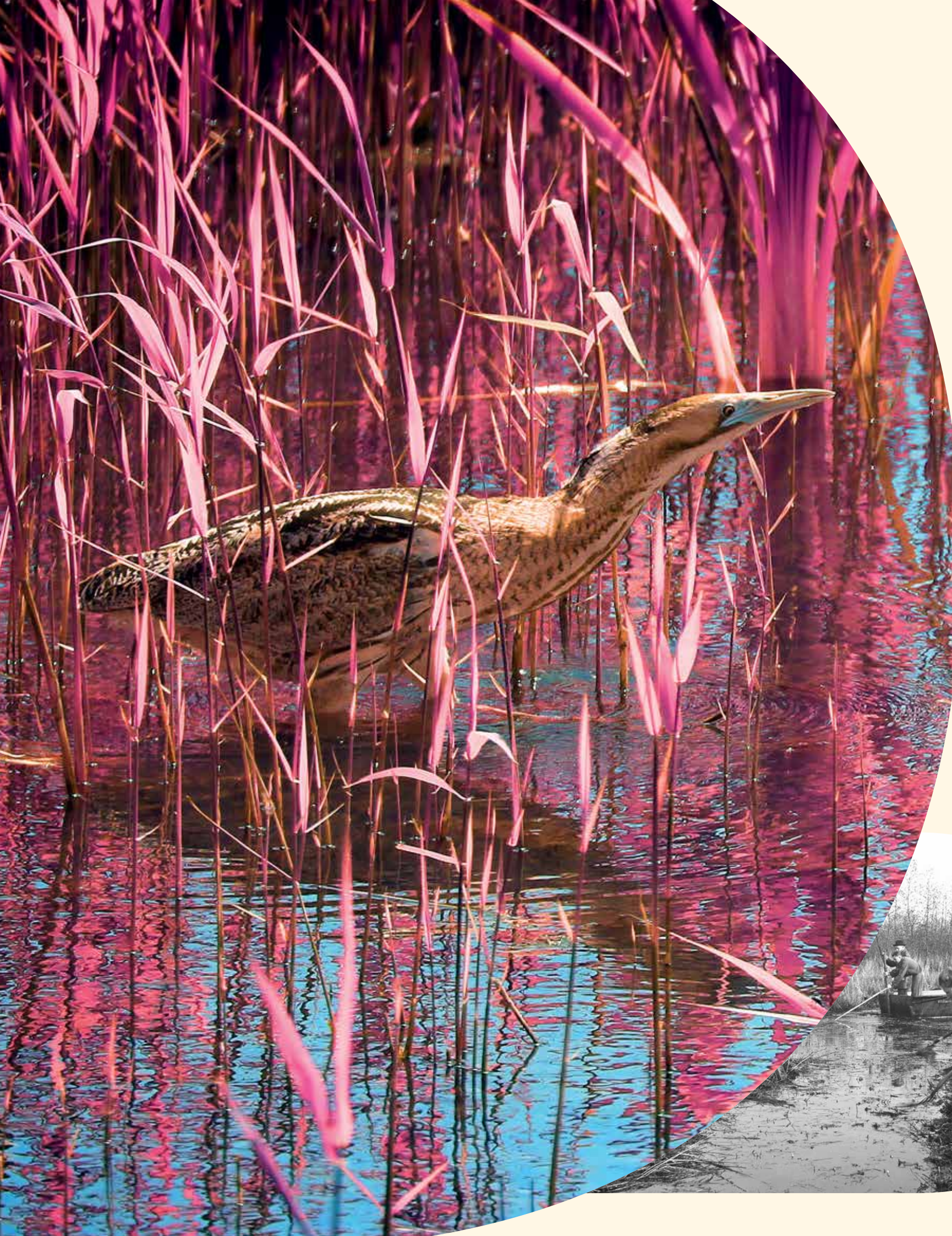
to AZF, this needs to change. The Foundation aims to combat the desiccation of this area to create a safe habitat for various animals such as the Eurasian bittern, the brown harrier, the spotted crane, the grass snake, and the Eurasian water shrew. AZF also aims to work towards a harmonious future for people, animals, and nature – not only abroad, but also in its own country.

Engagement in our own country

Around 24 different species of flora grow in De Zegge that are on the red list of the Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO). Numerous endangered species of birds have also made this reserve their home.



'We believe that economic activities should never be at the expense of the environment. On the basis of a 'this and that' rather than a 'this or that' precept.' Jef Dupain



The late 1950s: The small-scale production activities that formerly characterised the Kempen landscape disappear on account of the industrialisation of agriculture. The Groot Geels Gebroekt area is reclaimed for large-scale agricultural use.

1952: The Antwerp ZOO Society (KMDA) succeeds in saving 50 hectares of what was originally the Groot Geels Gebroekt. This area formerly covered over 500 hectares of land.

1956: The last brown harrier hatches in De Zegge.

1958: De Zegge is officially recognised as a nature reserve.

1973: The large-scale 'Save De Zegge' solidarity campaign raises funds by selling stickers to prevent the further repurposing of the De Zegge area. Thanks to this unprecedented large-scale campaign, the nature reserve expands to twice its size.

In the next few decades: The KMDA dedicates itself to wetlands preservation to restore rare flora to the area and enlarge the habitat of the Eurasian bittern and the brown harrier.

2001: The Eurasian bittern returns as a breeding bird after an absence of 22 years.

2013: Many years of careful management have resulted in an outstanding biotope, where, in 1956, the first three young brown harriers in 57 years hatched and were able to successfully leave their nest.

2021: The first stork chick in 140 years hatches.

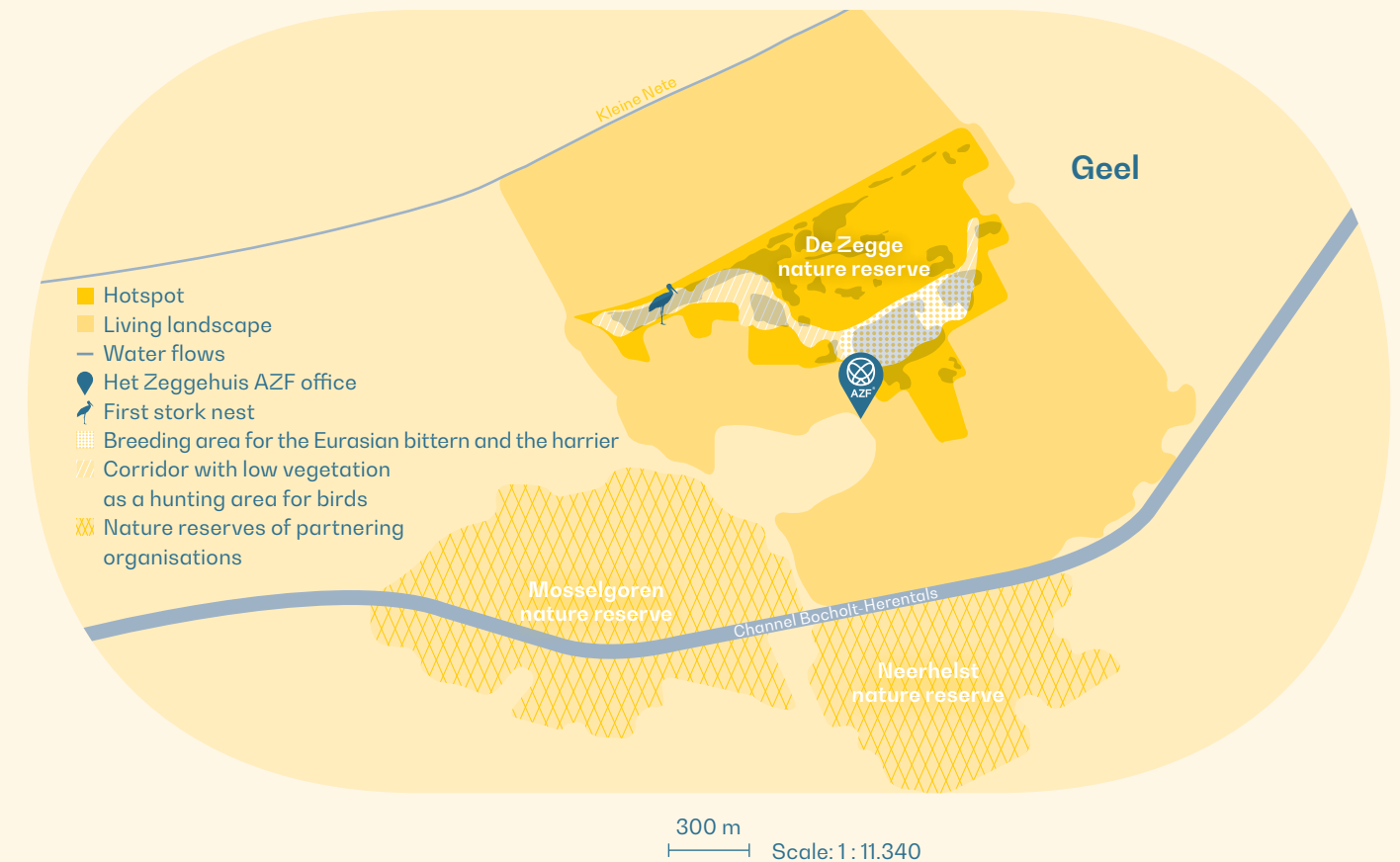


The restoration of paradise in De Zegge

1 Hotspot The nature reserve De Zegge in Geel covers 120 hectares. This hotspot is a paradise for birds, for whom this marshland is a perfect biotope. The corridors with their low vegetation make for efficient hunting, while its diversity ensures an abundance of prey. In 2021, AZF allocated an area covering 3.8 hectares specifically to the Eurasian bittern. Storks and other rare varieties of birds have also made this nature reserve their home.

2 Living landscape Not only the nature reserve is of crucial importance to the conservation of the indigenous flora and fauna; the surrounding agricultural land also has a significant impact on this marshland area – and vice versa. Because farmers in the periphery of this area pump the ground water up to the surface to drain their land, the marshland is being threatened with drought.

‘It is of crucial importance that the various parties cooperate with one another to safeguard the availability of enough water in this marshland area.’ Jef Dupain



3 Land use In collaboration with the government, AZF restore the wetlands in the periphery of De Zegge to give this unique reserve every chance of long-term survival. In the short term, AZF is working to preserve the existing marshland by managing the eco-hydrology to the best of its abilities. This means that it will manage and optimise the way in which water is pumped, moved, used, and consumed in De Zegge. In the long term, AZF wants to convince the farmers in the vicinity of De Zegge to adapt their culti-

vation methods in such a way to reduce the pressure on the area. AZF is encouraging them to focus on crops that can be grown successfully in wet conditions. This way, their fields can remain partially flooded and they will not have to drain them as profusely. By doing this, AZF wants to sustainably promote the coexistence of the nature reserve and agriculture in the periphery. This is the only way to save De Zegge, the hotspot, from desiccation.

4 Feet in the mud The AZF team, composed of four employees who are passionate about what they do, dedicates itself to the preservation of this beautiful piece of valuable nature day in day out.

5 Cohabitation It is of crucial importance that the various parties located in and around De Zegge cooperate with one another to safeguard the availability of enough water in this marshland area. Countless people are making a concerted effort to achieve this on a strategic and practical level. If farmers stop draining the land and adapt their crops to make them better suited to the former marshland, De Zegge will be able to retain enough groundwater. This will enable the nature reserve to harmoniously coexist with humankind and agricultural activity. Various authorities, both local and supra-local, are working to reallocate the landscape of which De Zegge is a part. Traditional agricultural activities are being reoriented. In some cases, the government is even choosing to buy the land from farmers so that they can relocate their agricultural activities. This will enable the land around De Zegge to be returned to nature.

Local residents also contribute to the preservation and management of De Zegge. Their sheep or cows graze in De Zegge, for example. Together with sympathisers from all over Flanders, they volunteer to carry out management work together with the AZF staff. They are working shoulder to shoulder to manually maintain the watercourses, the wood edges, the hay meadows, the reed beds, and much more.

6 Future-proofing Thanks to the concerted efforts taking place today, De Zegge is evolving into a valuable water reservoir and a permanent, harmonious paradise for rare plants and breeding birds. More nature, greater biodiversity, and a sustainable balance for current and future generations – that is what AZF aims to achieve here.



Why invest?

It is simply not possible for AZF to rewrite the future single-handedly. AZF needs continuous financial support in order to offer on-site support and live up to its long-standing commitments. Only then can the Foundation genuinely make a difference for people, animals, and nature.

Unique, comprehensive, all-round approach

AZF focuses not only on the endangered animal; it also considers its surrounding eco-system: animal, people, nature, and the economy.

Long-term engagement

AZF always adopts a concrete all-encompassing fifteen-year plan when embarking on a project.

Feet in the mud

It is only through its physical presence at its projects, by literally working with its feet in the mud, that AZF can truly make a difference.

Together with the local population

The human aspect plays a crucial role in how AZF operates. The involvement of and collaboration with the local population comprise the backbone of every conservation project.

Formal recognition and development strategy

Local government organisations are reviewing current legislation in close cooperation with AZF to meet the adopted targets. AZF advises on spatial planning, identifies the animals' hotspots, and trains local teams. The win/win situation envisioned by AZF is based on the understanding that an endangered species can only be protected if the environment benefits from this as well.

Transparency and matched funding

All funds received by AZF are allocated entirely to the project on behalf of which they were granted. No fees are reserved for expensive overhead structures or administration. The KMDA is always involved: in addition to contributions made by various donors, it also places its resources at the disposal of the project.

AZF aims to preserve all the beauty this planet has to offer for the enjoyment of future generations, so that they can continue to be amazed by all these beautiful places where humans and animals live together in harmony. This is how it was always meant to be, and this is how it should be again. AZF is working to rewrite our future.





‘Together we rewrite
the future.’

‘Join us in rewriting the future!’

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Colophon

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Antwerp Zoo
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