

Property of Wagnée at B-5334 Florée

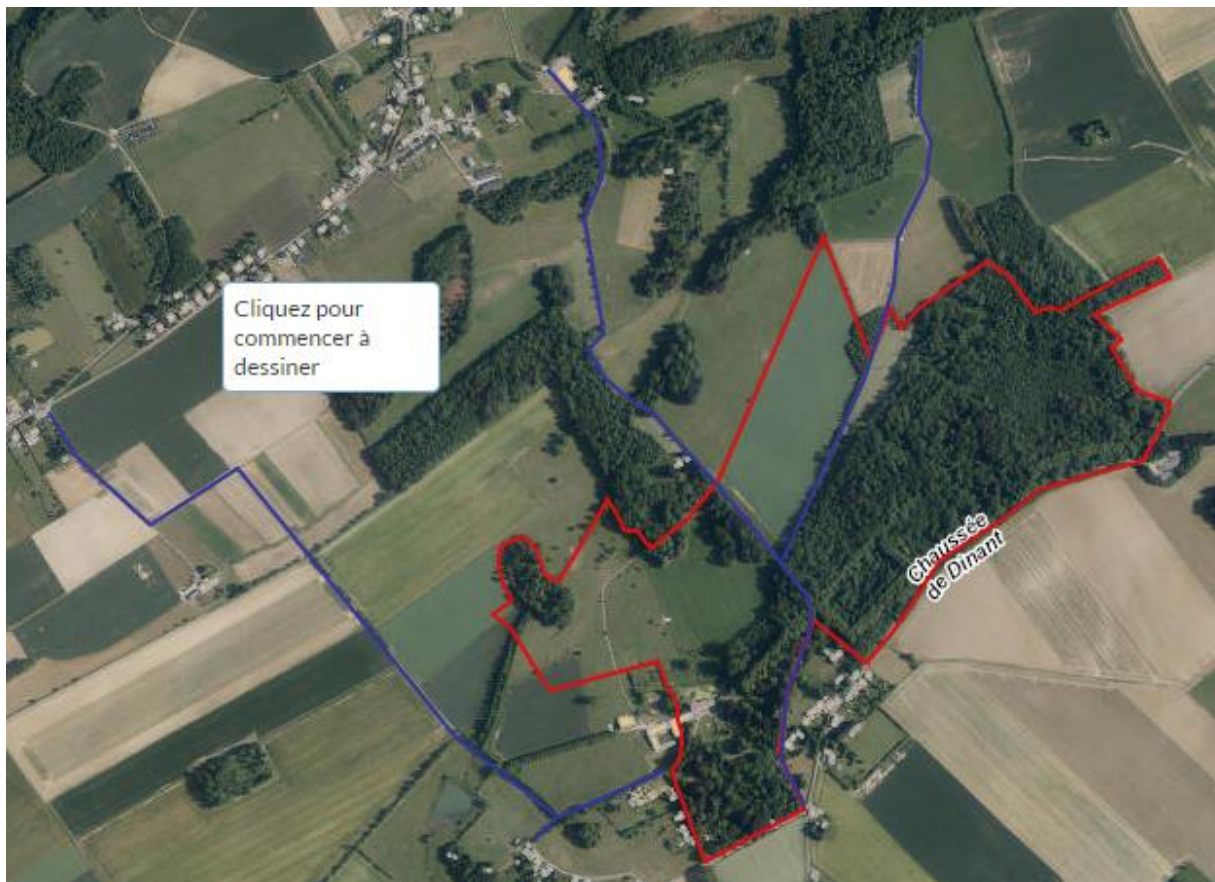
Verified Conservation Area proposal (11/2016)

I. Overview of the area

Location and map

Belgium, Province of Namur, Commune of Assesse, village of Florée. Coordinates X = 199814, Y = 118631 (Lambert belge 72). 65 ha.

In red: limits of the VCA. In blue: public ways.



Regional landscape

The area is located in Southern Belgium in the Condroz Region characterized by smooth hills (altitude 150 m in the valleys, 350 m maximum on the top of the hills) covered with cultivated lands on the plateaux, meadows and mostly broad-leaved woods (roughly 1/3 each) on the slopes. The underground is composed of sandstone on the summits and of limestone in the valleys.

On the Wagnée proposed VCA

The property of Wagnée is a typical piece of land of the Condroz Region: it covers 60 ha of cultivated land, meadows and woods on a gentle slope facing north. It lies on the top of a river basin. Several springs (at least four on the area) give rise to two small rivers that form the Samson River further downstream, a tributary of the Meuse River. The underground is mostly composed of sandstone. The

soil is of good quality for agriculture and forest. It is mainly silty with a small proportion of clay with scattered patches of sand. The most humid soils are covered with meadows or woods.



View of the area (2015)

Area manager

The person responsible for the management of the area is its owner. He can be contacted by e-mail: j.vanderstegen@skynet.be.

II. Biodiversity baseline on the Wagnée proposed VCA, threats and pressures

Land management and land use

The area is part of a large piece of land surrounding an old house that was bought by a successful tradesman in 1768 and then split several times between its heirs. The last division dates back to 2006. The property has benefited from a rather constant management where agriculture, forestry, landscape and hunting have traditionally played an important role. Though, the landscape has evolved a lot for the last two centuries. Major changes occurred in the XIXth century where several small woods were planted (often with hybrid poplars, spruces, larches) and some meadows were drained. Some of those small meadows were later afforested (late XIXth or early XXth century). Only a part of the woods were mapped as woodland on the Count de Ferraris' map (1760's).

The area has not suffered from the most common detrimental activities to biodiversity in the Condroz Region for the last decades, namely hedge removing, drainage, land consolidation, relief modification. Nevertheless agricultural practices have evolved a lot since the 70's and their intensification (use of pesticides, mechanisation) are probably the main driver of biodiversity loss at Wagnée.

Another issue is that small and scattered areas cannot prevent the loss of species (e.g. Grey partridge) requiring large diversified areas (connectivity issue).

A last major problem comes from water pollution by sewage water and diffuse agricultural pollution. In the 80s, trouts were present in the small river and were still fished. They have disappeared since the late 80s when sewers were installed to collect waste waters of the hamlet of Florée without any water treatment plant. One pipe ends on the VCA, another few hundred meters away (upstream). Paradoxically, one Km downstream after the end of the sewers a water abstraction site for human consumption was built in the same period and the river's bed was rendered water-proof to avoid any contamination of the water table. Springs are polluted by agricultural activities and also probably domestic waste water (not collected in sewers) as revealed by an analysis of the large pond's water of

2016 (nitrite 1 mg/l NO₂⁻, between 10 and 25 mg/ NO₃⁻ and 0,25 mg/l PO₄³⁻, pH 7 – water analysis of the “large pond”).

Invasive alien species is not a major issue except on the pond that is colonized by *Lemna minuta*. The Canada Goose and the Egyptian Goose are more and more present. They were unknown 20 years ago.

There has been no major land use change (afforestation) since the 50's except that several hectares of meadows were converted into cultivated land in the 80's and a small poplar wood was restored in a meadow (as it was before the plantation).

Hunting

Till 1977 (very severe winter), the partridge was present in small number while hares and wild pheasants were numerous. The mean annual bag between 1965 and 1978 on 250 ha of woods and agricultural land (of which the 60 ha of the VCA) was 46 hares (min. 3, max. 97), 27 cocks (min. 8 and max. 46) and 12 hens (min. 0 and max. 35). Regular hunting stopped after 1978 further to that steep game population drop. Besides winter conditions and agricultural practices, one could ask whether that game population decline is not related to the disappearance of the rabbit. The rabbit was a pest species until the 50's. It caused severe damage to the vegetation (crops, seedlings in woods, barks during snowy winters) and was the most hunted species. It was also probably a major prey for crows, foxes, weasels, stone martens and polecats. The later species were regularly trapped and less numerous than today (at least foxes and crows). The myxomatosis appeared in the 50's or 60's and had a dramatic impact on rabbits' population.

Thrushes were also a very much appreciated game species for which hedges are an essential habitat. Thrush hunting was definitively forbidden in the 70s. It contributed to an acceleration of hedges' removal in agricultural areas in the Condroz Region, though not in Wagnée.

While small game declined, large game (roe deer and later in the 90's wild boar) increased. Nowadays hunting relies almost exclusively on large game. Only several wild boars, roe deers, foxes and very few wood pigeons and mallards are shot annually. Wild boars probably have a significant impact on ground nesting species (disturbance, predation) as well as crows, magpies and foxes (very common).

Legal protection measures

The Wagnée proposed VCA is not concerned by any nature conservation scheme. The closest Natura 2000 (BE 35005 Vallée du Samson - [Site Bassin du Samson](#)) site is 2 Km far. According to the legal land use planning, part of the property is of landscape interest.

Flora and fauna

The following list of species gives an outlook of fauna species that can be met in Wagnée. It is regularly completed. Many observations are registered on [observations.be](#).

| Species living on or in the building and its annexes (walls) - 2015 | | | | Species present in the surroundings (not exhaustive!) -2015 | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Abeille sp. | Bee sp. | | | Bécasse des bois | Woodcock | <i>Scolopax rusticola</i> | |
| Bergeronnette grise | White Wagtail | <i>Motacilla alba</i> | Nesting | Blaireau | Badger | <i>Meles meles</i> | |
| Chauve-souris sp. | Bats sp. | | | Busard Saint-Martin | Hen harrier | <i>Circus cyaneus</i> | |
| Choucas des tours | Jackdaw | <i>Corvus monedula</i> | Nesting | Caille | Quail | <i>Coturnix coturnix</i> | Summer |
| Chouette effraie | Barn Owl | <i>Tyto alba</i> | Nesting | Canard chipeau | Gadwall | <i>Anas strepera</i> | Wintering |
| Crapaud accoucheur | Midwife toad | <i>Alytes obstetricans</i> | | Chevalier Culblanc | Green sandpiper | <i>Tringa ochropus</i> | Wintering |
| Etourneau sansonnet | Starling | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i> | Nesting | Chevalier guignette | Common sandpiper | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> | Passage |
| Faucon crécerelle | Common kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> | Nesting | Chevêche d'Athéna | Little Owl | <i>Athene noctua</i> | Resident |
| Gobemouche gris | Spotted flycatcher | <i>Muscicapa striata</i> | Nesting | Chouette hulotte | Tawny Owl | <i>Strix aluco</i> | Resident |
| Fouine | Beech Marten | <i>Martes foina</i> | | Coucou | Common Cuckoo | <i>Cuculus canorus</i> | |
| Hirondelle de fenêtre | Common House Martin | <i>Delichon urbica</i> | Nesting | Crapaud commun | Common toad | <i>Bufo bufo</i> | Nesting |
| Hirondelle rustique | Barn Swallow | <i>Hirundo rustica</i> | Nesting | Demi-deuil | Marbled White | <i>Melanargia galathea</i> | |
| Lérot | Garden Doormouse | <i>Eliomys quercinus</i> | | Ecaille chinée | Jersey tiger | <i>Euplagia quadripunctaria</i> | |
| Lézard vivipare | Common lizard | <i>Zootoca vivipara</i> | | Faucon hobereau | Hobby | <i>Falco subbuteo</i> | Nesting |
| Mésange bleue | Blue Tit | <i>Parus caeruleus</i> | Nesting | Grand mars changeant | Purple Emperor | <i>Apatura iris</i> | Wintering |
| Moineau domestique | House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> | Nesting | Grande aigrette | Great egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> | Wintering |
| Musaraigne | Shrew sp. | <i>Neomys sp.</i> | Nesting | Grand cormoran | Great cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> | |
| Pigeon colombin | Stock Dove | <i>Columba oenas</i> | Nesting | Grèbe castagneux | Little Grebe | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> | Winter |
| Pinson des arbres | Chaffinch | <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> | Nesting | Grenouille verte | | | |
| Rougequeue noir | Black Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus ochuros</i> | Nesting | Grenouille rousse | Common frog | <i>Rana temporaria</i> | |
| Troglodyte mignon | Winter Wren | <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> | | Hermine | Stoat | <i>Mustela herminea</i> | |
| Triton (sp.) | Newt | | | Martin pêcheur | Kingfisher | <i>Alcedo atthis</i> | |

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | | | | Milan royal | Red Kite | <i>Milvus milvus</i> | in spring, summer and autumn |
| Invasive species | | | | Moro Sphynx | Humming-bird Hawk-moth | <i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i> | |
| Ouette d'Egypte | Egyptian Goose | <i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i> | | Orvet | Slow Worm | <i>Anguis fragilis</i> | |
| Bernache du Canada | Greater Canada goose | <i>Branta canadensis</i> | | Pic épeiche | Great Spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos major</i> | Nesting |
| Renouée du Japon | Japanese Knotweed | <i>Reynoutria japonica</i> | | Pic épeichette | Little-spotted Woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos minor</i> | |
| | | | | Pic noir | Black Woodpecker | <i>Dryocopus martius</i> | Nesting |
| Species no more present | | | | Pic mar | Middle spotted woodpecker | <i>Dendrocopos medius</i> | |
| Tourterelle des bois | Turtle Dove | <i>Streptopelia turtur</i> | | Pic vert | European Green Woodpecker | <i>Picus viridis</i> | Nesting |
| Martinet | Swift | <i>Apus apus</i> | | Pie grièche écorcheur | Black-backed Shrike | <i>Lanius collurio</i> | Nesting |
| Perdrix | Grey Partridge | <i>Perdix perdix</i> | | Poule d'eau | Common Moorhen | <i>Galinula chloropus</i> | Nesting |
| Lapin | Rabbit | <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i> | | Putois | European polecat | <i>Putorius putorius</i> | |
| Truite fario | Trout | <i>Salmo</i> | | Sarcelle d'été | Northern pintail | <i>Anas querquedula</i> | |
| | | | | Râle d'eau | Water Rail | <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> | |
| | | | | Triton (sp.) | Newt | | |

The flora comprises the most common species of the Condroz region. Some species are worth mentioning and are listed in the below table.

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Colchique | | <i>Colchicum autumnale</i> |
| Géranium des prés | Meadow cranesbill | <i>Geranium pratensis</i> |
| Orme lisse | Elm | <i>Ulmus laevis</i> |

| | | |
|---------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Renouée bistorte | | <i>Bistorta officinalis</i> |
|---------------------|--|---------------------------------|



Pond (created in 2014)

Habitats and land use

Besides cultivated land and intensive meadows, the most interesting habitats on a biodiversity point of view are the following:

- Small ponds (less than 100 m²): 3 in a meadow, 1 on a cultivated land, 3 in the woods
- A large spring pond (0h33)
- Several (dry) grasslands (without any fertilisation since decades) (about 1ha50 in total)
- A wet meadow (0ha80)
- Broad-leaved woods (35 ha) of which some parts are afforested since centuries according to the de Ferrari's map and the presence of large oaks (340 cm for the largest)
- A old stone building and old walls.



Vegetation of the wet meadow (spring 2015)

III. Impact assessment

The listing of the property as a VCA is not likely to have any negative impact on a social, economic or environmental point of view.

Environmental impacts: The environmental impacts should by definition be positive. Listing the property as a VCA will reinforce the efforts made by its manager to protect the existing biodiversity and progressively improve it. It will not cause any radical change in the current management but it should provide a conducive framework for making progress and monitoring the situation. Positive results are mainly expected in terms of habitats and species but water quality of the river could also be improved by one of the planned management measure.

Economic impact: The manager needs to balance economic and ecological objectives to safeguard a sufficient level of income to be reinvested on the property (buildings included). Some measures could deliver on both aspects since a diversification of the sources of revenues is an objective.

Social impacts: There will not be any direct social impact but indirect impacts can be expected. Being listed on the VCA registry means being part of a network and enhances the possibility for exchanges with other interested people in the EU and the world. It is important to note that the property remains a private property that is not free of access except on public paths. Nevertheless interested people are welcome to take contact with its manager for a visit or any other issue.

Conservation actions

Restoration measures since 2005

- Creation of 4 ponds (with the support of the “*Groupe d’Action Locale des Tiges et Chavées*”)
- Plantation of apple, pear, plum and cherry trees in two old orchards (with the support of the “*Groupe d’Action Locale des Tiges et Chavées*”)
- Fencing river banks (before and beyond legal obligations)
- Plantation of scattered trees in the meadows and plantation of hedges
- Restoration of a small encroached meadow (400 m²)

On-going conservation actions

- Annual mowing of 1,5 ha of dry non-fertilized grassland without any fertilisation
- Annual grazing (15/07-01/08) of 0,80 ha of a humid non-fertilized meadow
- Keeping decaying and dead fruit trees in the meadows
- Keeping dead trees in the woods (standing or lying) (a.o. elms)
- Keeping ivy on standing trees
- Keeping big and old trees of all tree and bush species (trees: oak, beech, birch, hornbeam, poplar, spruce, etc. Bushes: *Evonymus europaeus*, *Sambucus nigra*, etc.). To be noted that big and old oaks draw a large amount of dead branches and contribute to dead wood biomass.
- Keeping most of the felt branches on the ground
- Conservation of ant-hills

Frequent practices detrimental to the biodiversity not carried out on the VCA

- Filling up natural depressions (karst depressions)
- Spraying below electric fences
- Spraying field edges after harvest

Planned or envisaged conservation actions in the coming years

- Restoration of an old meadow (0,5 ha)
- Creation of a large pond along the river
- Digging of a pond in a humid meadow
- Digging of several ponds in an ancient large pond filled up further to erosion problems (in the wood)

- Plantation of 300 m of hedges
- Plantation of fruit trees in the orchards
- Building of a shelter for walkers alongside a public path
- Conversion to organic agriculture

Information and awareness-raising measures

- Occasional guided visits
- Occasional nature discovery visits for the primary school of Florée (once per year)

Monitoring

- Setting up a more structured monitoring of species (in particular of dragonflies, butterflies and birds as far as possible).



Old alley (2015)

IV. Next step for registering the VCA

The management plan will not be different from what is written above. It will be audited in 2017 in view of registering the area as a VCA.

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