Spatial coherence of the Dutch National Ecological Network, 1990- 2012
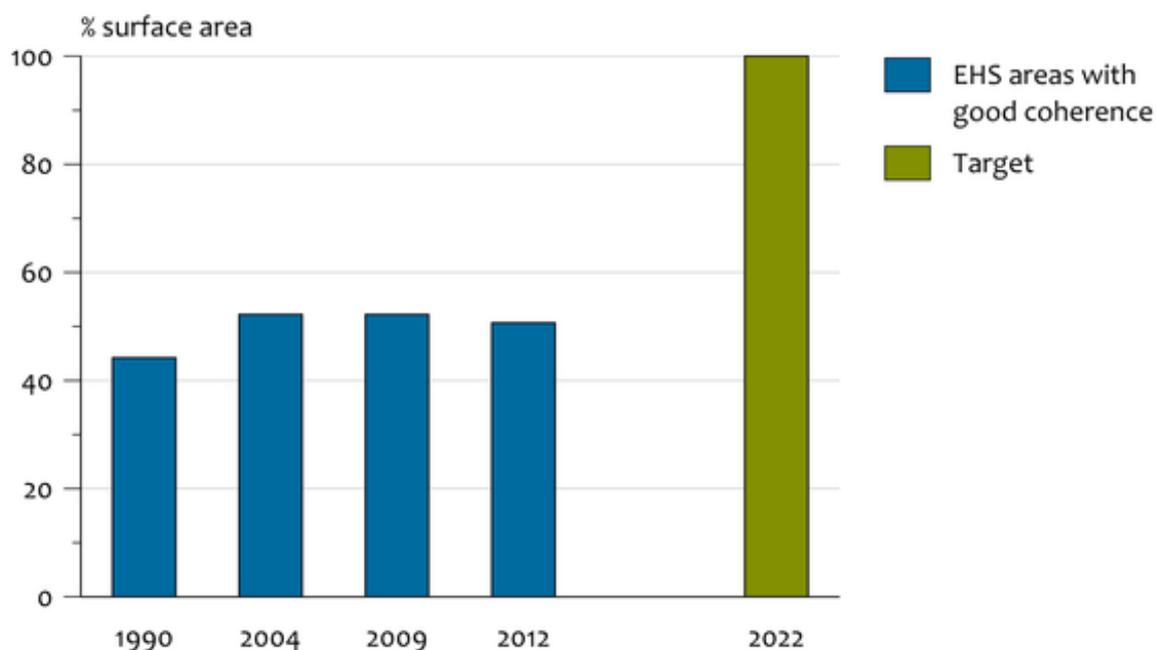
Indicator | 7 October 2014
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Although the area covered by the Dutch National Ecological Network (Ecologische Hoofdstructuur or EHS) has gradually increased since 1990, its spatial coherence has not improved to the same extent, and has even slightly decreased over the 2009 to 2012 period.

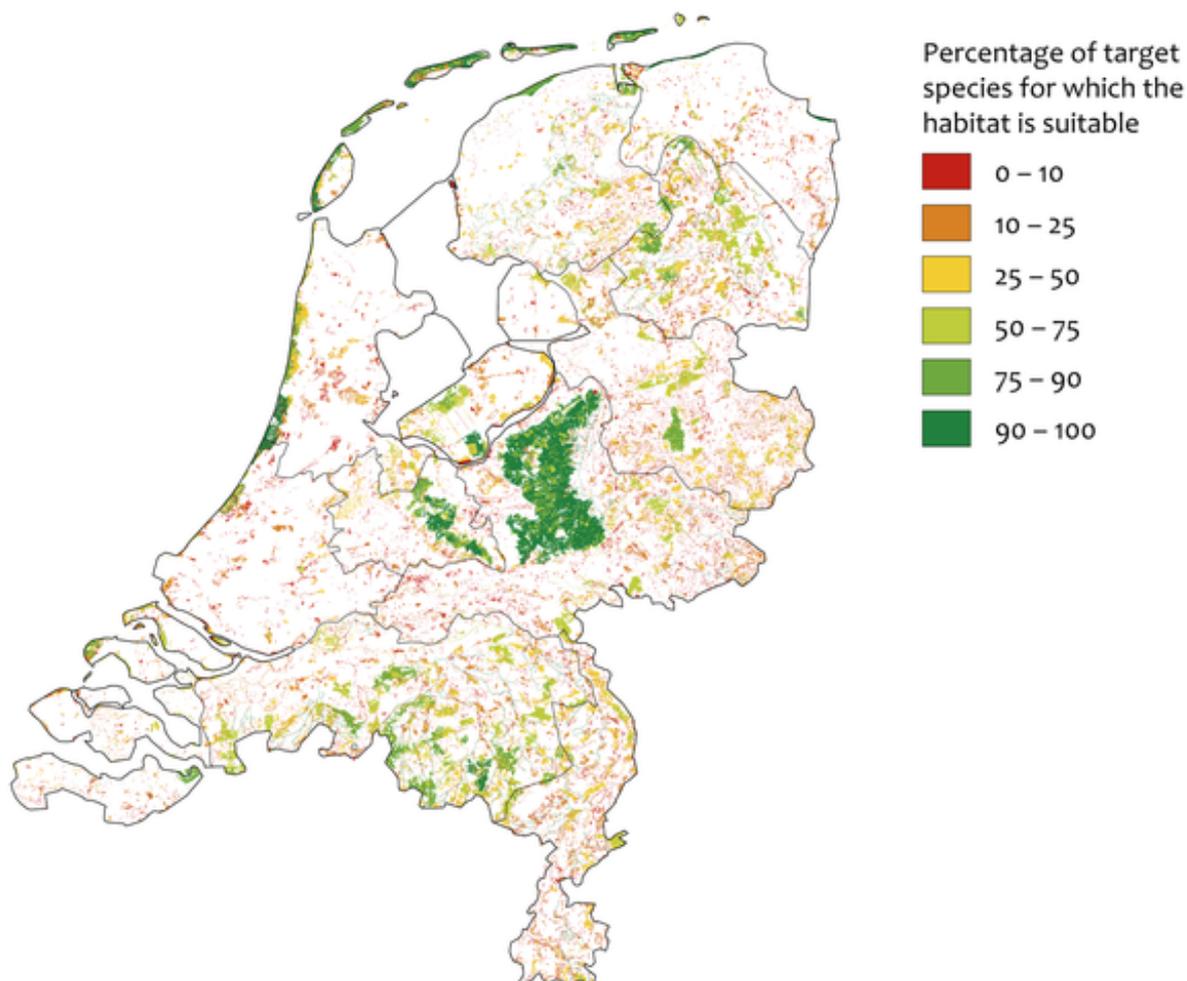[figuurgroep]

Area covered by EHS and spatial coherence

Source: WOT-Alterra.

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Spatial conditions for natural habitats, 2012

Percentage of target species for which the habitat is suitable

- 0 – 10
- 10 – 25
- 25 – 50
- 50 – 75
- 75 – 90
- 90 – 100

Source: WOT-Alterra.

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[/figuurgroep]

Spatial coherence of natural areas insufficient for many species

The aim of Dutch nature conservation policy is to ensure sustainable conditions for the preservation of all species and populations that were present in the country in 1982. Enabling long-term survival of plant and animal species requires two spatial conditions to be met: preservation of habitats and opportunities to move between habitats. Spatial conditions are insufficient if a habitat area is too small or too fragmented. Many species are on the Red List due to insufficient spatial coherence of the habitats they depend on.
Although the increase in the surface area covered by natural habitats has been accompanied by improved spatial coherence, this improvement is currently not meeting its target.

Slight decrease in spatial coherence due to policy change

The calculated level of spatial coherence in the Dutch National Ecological Network has decreased slightly during the last year, as a result of changes to the agri-environment schemes. Changes in national policy have resulted in some areas under agri-environment schemes no longer being regarded as part of the EHS. These areas have not been included in the calculation of the spatial coherence level of the EHS. The policy changes therefore imply a slight drop in the calculated coherence level of the EHS between 2009 and 2012. It is unclear whether this decrease in the calculated level reflects a real change in the field. In addition, the provincial authorities are currently still determining the definitive borders of the EHS areas.

Natural areas differ in robustness

The level of spatial coherence differs between the various natural areas in the Netherlands. Some of these areas are too small or too internally fragmented to provide a sustainable habitat for the species living in them. Some other areas are potentially large enough or are sufficiently interconnected, but their potential is not realised in the current situation of high environmental pressure. Examples of robust areas include the Veluwe and Utrechtse heuvelrug areas and various coastal dune areas. Many of these areas have been designated as protected sites under the European Birds and/or Habitats Directives.

National and provincial governments try to improve sptial coherence

The new network of natural areas in the Netherlands (Natuurnetwerk Nederland), which is referred to as Ecologische Hoofdstructuur in legislation, aims at creating a coherent network of natural areas. This is the most important Dutch contribution to the international efforts to stop the decline in biodiversity. The 2013 covenant called Natuurpact includes agreements between the national and provincial governments on nature policy and the growth of the EHS. The surface area covered by newly created habitats is to continue to expand until 2027, by 40,000 hectares, while about 80,000 hectares will be redeveloped. This partly involves the redevelopment of lands that have been acquired before. The agreements between the national and provincial governments also mention increasing the spatial coherence between natural areas. The provincial governments will elaborate plans for this in the next few years. In addition, the national government will complete its multi-year programme for defragmentation of natural habitats (Meerjarenprogramma Ontsnippering) in order to remove the 215 local barriers caused by national infrastructrure, which are hampering connectivity within the EHS. New infrastructure is to be planned in such a way as to fit within the statutory requirements.

Policy objectives

This indicator refers to the following objectives and national concerns mentioned in the long-term vision for infrastructure and spatial planning (Structuurvisie Infrastructuur en Ruimte):

- Safeguarding a liveable and safe environment which preserves unique natural and historical values (liveable and safe).
- National concern No. 11: opportunities for preserving and reinforcing unique national and international historical and natural qualities.

The same indicator also acts as a general biodiversity indicator for the Convention on Biological Diversity and refers to the general nature conservation objective of striving towards sustainable conditions for the preservation of all species and populations that were present in the Netherlands in

1982. Another policy goal is to reduce the number of Red-List species.

References

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- Ministerie van Economische Zaken. (2013). Natuurpact ontwikkeling en beheer van natuur in Nederland [5], Den Haag
- Reijnen, M.J.S.M., A. van Hinsberg, M.L.P. van Esbroek, B. de Knegt, R. Pouwels, S. van Tol & J. Wiertz (2010) Natuurwaarde 2.0 Land. Graadmeter natuurkwaliteit landecosystemen voor nationale beleidsdoelen [6]. Wageningen, WOT Natuur & Milieu - Wageningen UR. WOt-rapport 110

Relevant information

- Meerjarenprogramma Ontsnippering [7] (MJPO)

Reference for this page

CBS, PBL, RIVM, WUR (2014). Spatial coherence of the Dutch National Ecological Network, 1990-2012 [8] (indicator 1523, version 04 , 7 October 2014). www.environmentaldata.nl. Statistics Netherlands (CBS), The Hague; PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, The Hague; RIVM National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, Bilthoven; and Wageningen University and Research, Wageningen.

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