

Annual Report 2020

Observation International Foundation

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Introduction

The Observation International Foundation was established on 1 December 2015 for the international further development of Observation.org, the digital platform for recording species observations. At the time of its foundation, there were three national versions of the platform, namely Waarneming.nl, Waarnemingen.be and Observations.be.

The foundation's statutory purpose is to promote the worldwide collection and registration of reliable and verified observational data of flora and fauna. The target group consists of volunteers, professionals and organizations that work on (scientific) nature research, protection of nature and landscape, nature education and regulations for environmental quality. The aim is for the collected data to be optimally available and used for all these purposes. A core activity of the foundation is the management, exploitation and further development of digital platforms and associated mobile applications such as ObsIdentify. A starting point is that the developed system is freely accessible to everyone and can be used free of charge.

For the international expansion and development of the system, Observation International actively seeks cooperation with local, regional or nationally operating organizations and governments in Europe and beyond. They can join as partners if they want to contribute actively and financially to the further development and promotion of the digital platform in their own environment.

For Observation International, five years after its foundation, the year 2020 was mainly dominated by strengthening and improving the management and implementation organization. To this end, among other things, the articles of association were renewed, tasks, contracts and cash flows were taken over from other organizations and preparations were made for setting up our own executive organization with paid employees. The amended articles of association provide for a transitional arrangement with a provisional board whose task is, among other things, to form a definitive board by 30 September 2022 at the latest.

Board

The composition of the board changed in 2020. Jeroen Snijders stepped down as board member and Olaf Bánki was appointed in his place. Henk Schmitz was appointed as a new board member on 1 November in the position of secretary. On December 31, 2020, the composition of the board was as follows.

Name	Position	Country/nationality	Year of appointment
Reinier Akkermans	chairman	Netherlands	2015
Henk Schmitz	secretary	Netherlands	2020
Marianne de Rijk	treasurer	Netherlands	2019
David Tempelman	member	Netherlands	2015
Marc Herremans	member	Belgium (Flanders)	2015
Ulrich Haese	member	Germany (NRW)	2016
Jean-Yves Paquet	member	Belgium (Wallonia)	2016
Szabolcs Nagy	member	Hungary	2017
Hans Verdaat	member	Netherlands	2019
Jan-Ole Kriegs	member	Germany (NRW)	2019
Olaf Bánki	member	Netherlands	2020

The board met five times in 2020: on March 4, May 20, August 5, September 7 and Dec 3. In addition to the formally appointed board members, Julio Rabadán Gonzáles (Spain) and Peter Kaufmann (Austria, Salzburg) also participated in the meetings, as did Dylan Verheul (manager Observation International) and Martine Lemmens (project officer Observation International).

In the context of the transition to a better organization of the board and the administrative apparatus, the board decided to amend the articles of association. This was formally completed with the passing of a deed at the notary on September 30, 2020. The new articles of association provide for a small and decisive board (Board) with a broadly composed advisory board (Global Team). In December Reinier Akkermans (chairman), Marianne de Rijk (treasurer), Henk Schmitz (secretary) and Olaf Bánki (member) were appointed as the board of the renewed organization with effect from 1 January 2021. The board also appointed all other members of the former board, plus Julio Rabadán Gonzáles and Peter Kaufmann as members of the Global Team.

Organization and personnel

In the period 2014 to 2020, three different organizations, each with their own role and responsibility, were involved in the management, development and operation of the digital platform Observation.org. The organizations involved were the Stichting Natuurinformatie (SNI), NatuurBank Nederland (a partnership of SNI, Stichting Staring Advies and NatuurBank Limburg) and Observation International. The spread of tasks and authorities increasingly led to a lack of clarity about administrative responsibilities and the management of the team of employees. As of 2019, the three organizations therefore jointly worked out a plan for improving the organization at both administrative and operational levels.

In the transition year 2020, the plan was implemented and partly already realized. As a result, the new organization will be fully operational as of January 1, 2021. Not only the form of government has been adjusted (see Chapter 2), but also the implementing organization. As of that date, all employees have been accommodated in a clear structure under the direct supervision of a director. The employees (who were employed by four different employers until 2020) will then have an employment contract with Observation International or have been seconded to the new organization for a long time. The required fixed capacity for the further development of the system and related ICT applications is hired through a framework contract with the company Zostera.

Partners and cooperation

Partner organizations

Observation International is a network organization of national or regional working organizations that promote the use of the Observation.org platform in their area of work. The cooperation agreements are laid down in partner agreements. This regulates, among other things, which contributions (financial, personnel, in-kind, services) both parties will make. In 2020, the Haus der Natur (Salzburg, Austria) joined as a partner, as did the Grupo de Estudio dos Animais Salvaxes (Santiago de Compostella, Spain).

The overview below shows which partners were part of Observation International on December 31, 2020.

Organization	Agreement	Country and/or federal state
Observation International	(2015)	(Netherlands)
Natuurpunt	(2015)	Belgium (Flemish Region)
Natagora	(2015)	Belgium (Walloon Region)
Haus der Natur (Museum für Natur und Technik)	2020	Austria
LWL-Museum für Naturkunde	2019	Germany (Nordrhein-Westfalen)
Azul Marino Fundación de la Comunidad Valenciana	2019	Spain (Comunidad Valenciana)
CSCF, Center Suisse de Cartographie de la Faune	2018	Switzerland
GEAS, Grupo de Estudio dos Animais Salvaxes	2020	Spain (Galicia)
Società italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione delle Libellule	2018	Italy

Naturalis and the NDFF

The Dutch observation data from Observation International are provided annually to the National Database of Flora and Fauna (NDFF) in exchange for a financial compensation. This fee is invested in the management and development of the digital platform.

The data was passed on up to and including 2019 on the basis of an agreement between NatuurBank Nederland (the then operator of Waarneming.nl, the Dutch platform of Observation) and the NDFF.

In 2020, Observation International provided data through a contract with Naturalis Biodiversity Center. The collaboration between Observation International and Naturalis, including for hosting the system and developing recognition software and apps, has been around for some time and was further strengthened in this way in 2020.

Observations and users

With the expansion of the number of partners, the number of users of the platform also increases. This concerns on the one hand people who enter observations and on the other hand visitors to the website who are looking for information. The increasing number of users leads to a steady growth of the database. Observations are entered either directly via the website or via mobile applications that allow field entry on a smartphone or tablet. Those are the apps iObs, ObsMapp and ObsIdentify. These apps use automatic image recognition to identify species from one or more photos.

The number of active users (persons who enter observations) increased from 51,641 to 79,182 in 2020.

The number of new observations in the system's database grew from 17,183,381 to 20,795,431 in 2020.

The total number of observations in the database thus grew from 124,928,634 to 145,723,791 in 2020.

Validation of observations

To guarantee the scientific quality of the data in the system's database, an extensive system has been set up around the Observation.org platform for validating every entered observation. The core of this system is that after an initial automatic validation, species specialists assess the observations according to a fixed protocol and then approve them if they do not. It is visible to users of the system which observations have or have not been validated. Maintaining and expanding the network of validators, who often work on a voluntary basis, is one of the core tasks of every partner organization, whereby the necessary support can be provided from Observation International.

In 2022, 956 validators were active. The table below shows the distribution over different countries.

Country	Validators in 2020
The Netherlands	348
Belgium	226
Germany	147
Other countries	235

Finance

With a turnover of more than € 68,559, the 2020 financial year was closed with a positive result of just over € 11,548. This result was added to the freely disposable capital of the foundation, which increased to € 26,818. For further details, reference is made to the Annual Accounts 2020 adopted by the board.