

Annual Report 2021

Stichting Observation International

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Introduction

The Observation International Foundation was established on December 1, 2015 for the further international development of Observation.org, the digital platform for registration of 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 organisations active in the fields of (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 basic principle is that the system developed 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 in Europe and beyond with local, regional or nationally operating organisations and governments. 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.

An amendment to the Articles of Association was implemented in 2020 aimed at strengthening and improving the administrative and executive organisation. 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. For Observation International, the year 2021 was mainly dominated by further giving shape and substance to the new administrative organisation. In addition, changes were made to the implementation organisation and personnel. In the meantime, the continued development of the platform also continued and a number of new international partnerships were entered into.

Governance

Board

Up to and including 31 December 2020, Observation International had a broadly composed board, consisting of twelve representatives of the affiliated organisations and substantive experts in a personal capacity.

The amendment to the articles of association implemented in 2020 provides for a different administrative organisation, consisting of a small and decisive board (Board) and a broadly composed advisory board (Global Team). The new Board took office on 1 January 2021 and consisted of Reinier Akkermans (chairman), Henk Schmitz (secretary) and Olaf Bánki (member).

Marianne de Rijk held the position of treasurer until January 1, 2021 and had terminated her board membership as of that date. Pending the formal appointment of a new treasurer, she continued to cooperate with the handling of ongoing financial and administrative matters after that date until 31 May 2021, and where necessary participated in the board meetings as an advisor/hearing officer for some time.

As previously announced, Reinier Akkermans definitively ended his administrative activities for Observation International in the second half of the year. Olaf Bánki succeeded him in the position of chairman. In addition, Szabolcs Nagy was appointed board member in September.

On December 31, 2021, the composition of the Board was as follows.

Position	Name	Year of appointment
Chairman	Olaf Bánki	2021
Secretary	Henk Schmitz	2021
Treasurer	Vacancy
Member	Szabolcs Nagy	2021

The board met four times in 2021 as a full composition. In addition, a combined form of progress meeting and board meeting between chairman, secretary and director Dylan Verheul took place weekly to fortnightly on Monday mornings.

Global Team

Also on January 1, 2021, all other members of the former board were appointed as members of the Global Team. The powers, composition and working method of the Global Team are globally regulated in the amended articles of association. In addition to this, the Board and Global Team established internal rules of procedure in 2021 with further agreements on the composition, working method, financial contributions, decision-making and voting rights of this advisory board.

Organisations that have joined Observation International as partners can nominate a representative (head of delegation) to the Global Team. If desired, this official contact person can be accompanied or replaced by a second person (associate delegate) during the meeting.

In addition, the Global team has expert members. These are members who, because of their specific expertise and contacts, can contribute in a personal capacity to the development of the platform and the organisation. The Global Team met four times in 2021.

As of December 31, 2021, the composition of the Global Team was as follows.

Name	Position	Organisation	Country/nationality
Olaf Bánki	Chairman	Observation International	Netherlands (NL)
Henk Schmitz	Secretary	Observation International	Netherlands (NL)
Marc Herremans	head of delegation	Natuurpunt	Vlaanderen (BE)
Jean-Yves Paquet	head of delegation	Natagora	Wallonia (BE)
Jean-Sébastien Rousseau -Piot	associate delegate	Natagora	Wallonia (BE)
Jan-Ole Kriegs	head of delegation	LWL-Museum für Naturkunde	Nordrhein-Westfalen (GE)
Peter Kaufmann	head of delegation	Haus der Natur Salzburg	Austria (AT)
David Tempelman	expert member	None	Netherlands (NL)
Ulrich Haese	expert member	None	Netherlands (NL)
Szabolcs Nagy	expert member	None	Hungary (HU)
Hans Verdaat	expert member	None	Netherlands (NL)
Tineke van Bussel	head of delegation	Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA)	Caribbean Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao (NL)

In addition to the formally appointed members of the Global Team, the following people generally also attended the meetings as advisors or listeners: Dylan Verheul (manager Observation International), Martine Lemmens (employee of Observation International projects) and Julio Rabadán González (coordinator for Observation International in Spain).

Organisation and personnel

Following a reshuffling of powers, cash flows and responsibilities in 2020, the new organisation for management, development and operation was fully operational on 1 January 2021. Within Observation International, all the officials involved were housed in one team under the direction of a director.

Observation International's workforce consisted of two permanent employees and one permanently seconded employee. In addition, Observation International hired the structurally required capacity from the ICT company Zostera for the development and management of the system. This also provided for the implementation of some administrative matters. In addition, the director (for 20 hours a week) was seconded via Zostera.

The historically developed collaboration between Zostera and Observation International is expected to intensify in the coming years. Both parties have expressed the intention in 2021 to investigate the possibilities for a merger. Initial exploratory talks have already taken place and it was decided to seek external legal and business advice for the further elaboration of a plan.

One of the permanent employees (communication manager) terminated his employment during the year under review. It was decided not to fill the vacancy for the time being, pending the further development of a possible merger.

In addition, a pension plan was established in 2021 for the employees of Observation International.

Partners and collaboration

Partners

Observation International is a network organisation of national or regional working organisations 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. Participation in the decision-making process via the Global Team (advisory council) is also laid down in the agreement. In 2021 the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance joined as a partner. In the year under review, agreement was also reached with the Stiftung Naturschutz Schleswig-Holstein (the formal signing of the contract took place shortly after the turn of the year in 2022).

The overview below shows which partners were part of Observation International on December 31, 2021.

Organisation	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)
Stiftung Naturschutz Schleswig-Holstein	(2022)	Germany (Schleswig-Holstein)
Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance	2021	Caribbean Netherlands, Aruba and Curaçao
Azul Marino Fundación de la Comunidad Valenciana	2019	Spain (Comunidad Valenciana)
CSCF, Center Suisse de Cartographie de la Faune	2018	Switzerland
GEAS, Grupo de Estudo dos Animais Salvaxes	2020	Spain (Galicia)
Società italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione delle Libellule	2018	Italy

Other collaborations

Observation International works closely with Naturalis Biodiversity Center. The collaboration covers, among other things, the hosting of the system and the development of recognition software and apps, and was intensified from 2020 onwards.

Observation International provides the Dutch observation data from its platform annually directly to the National Database of Flora and Fauna (NDFF).

This was previously done on the basis of a contract between partner Stichting NatuurBank Nederland and the operator of the NDFF (BIJ12). The financial compensation received for this was invested in the platform by NatuurBank Nederland. This contract has been running through Naturalis since 2020. Observation International receives financial compensation from the NDFF through BIJ12 and Naturalis. The relevant cooperation contract between Observation International and Naturalis was extended by one year in 2021. Both parties are in consultation with each other to investigate the possibilities for further cooperation.

In 2021 a collaboration was established between Observation International and the private company Natuurhuisje.nl, in which the latter organisation will act as the main sponsor of the platform. A sponsorship agreement was concluded for this purpose for the year 2022. Both parties have the explicit intention to continue this collaboration for a longer period of time.

With the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, Observation International joined the international network organisation Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) in April 2021 as a partner. GBIF aims to unlock all available biodiversity data worldwide. This fits in seamlessly with the objectives of Observation International. Observation International has joined with Associated Participant status. This means that no financial contribution is made to GBIF. Consequently, Observation International does not have voting rights on the Governing Board of GBIF, but is allowed to participate in the deliberations.

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. An improved and expanded version of ObsIdentify was released in 2021. In particular, the use of this accessible and uncomplicated app led to a large increase in the number of registered observations.

The number of active users (persons who enter observations) increased from 79,182 to 128,701 in 2021.

The number of visitors to the website is measured over several domains, for which no aggregated figures are known.

The total number of observations in the system's database grew in 2021 from 20,795.431 to 25,691,012.

The table below shows how in 2021 the numbers of entered observations, observers and website visitors were distributed over the Netherlands, Belgium and other countries.

Country	Observations	Observers	Visitors
The Netherlands	12,980,740	71,184	2,208,532
Belgium	8,777,068	59,963	798,940
Other countries	3,933,204	26,038	400,139

Validation of observations

To ensure the scientific quality of the data in the system's database, the Observation.org platform comprises a comprehensive system for validating each observation entered. 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 organisation, whereby the necessary support can be provided from Observation International. In 2021, expanding the network of validators was high on the agenda. This is also expected to be necessary in the coming years because the expansion of the number of validators must keep pace with the sharp increase in the number of observations entered.

The table below shows the development of the numbers of validators in different countries.

Country	Validators in 2020	Validators in 2021
The Netherlands	348	414
Belgium	226	290
Germany	147	161
Other countries	235	288

Finance

With a net turnover of more than € 600,000, the 2021 financial year was closed with a positive result of just over € 22,000. This result was added to the freely disposable capital of the foundation, which increased to almost € 50,000. For more information, we refer to the Financial Account 2021 which was approved by the Board and Global Team.