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Special issue “Grazing and Grazing animals”



PREFACE

This special issue of the "Vakblad voor Natuurbeheer" in English about grazing is unique. It is not only the second special issue on the same subject, it is also co-financed by the Ministry of the Flemish Government, the Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment, and English Nature. Moreover, it has been published now in both English and Dutch. The overwhelming support and attention for the subject is hardly surprising. In terms of physical area where it is being practised, grazing management has come of age. In the Netherlands, grazing has become a normal management measure in nature areas. In recent years, there has been a growing movement towards developing grazing into a more natural activity.

In Flanders, as in the Netherlands, nature policy has developed quickly since the Nature Decree of 1997. The Flemish government is serious about obtaining and managing a network of viable nature areas. Grazing animals are being introduced in more and more areas bought up by the government. Unfortunately, grazing duration and intensity and type of grazing is too often limited by the size of a site. In the future, nature development sites will have to be big enough to enable natural processes such as grazing to run their course.

The impact of grazing, however, extends beyond the nature areas themselves. The subject sometimes provokes fierce debates with the agricultural sector, animal welfare organisations, the leisure industry and even in parliament. There was a lengthy political wrangle about the possibility that large herbivores in nature areas might spread diseases to livestock and humans. This point of conflict was finally resolved by a series of guidelines issued by the State Secretary for Nature Management on dealing with suffering, disease and calamities. The value of such guidelines became clear recently, when foot-and-mouth disease broke out in England and the Netherlands in the spring of 2001. The epidemic not only threatened the agricultural sector but also large herbivores in nature areas.

In order to realise the desired type of grazing in nature areas of the required scale, nature managers need to work together and harmonise activities with other sectors, in particular the agricultural sector. The foundation for co-operation seems to be good. Both sides agree that the rural areas should be characterised by sustainable production of quality food, vibrant nature and a healthy environment. Grazing in large nature areas could fulfil an important role, in terms of both recreation and the sustainable production of quality food. There are large agricultural pockets in the extensive nature area Veluwe, where we could perhaps someday realise plans for 'large grazing areas' which complement the national ecological network. This special issue does not contain feasible, concrete plans to that end, but it might perhaps lead to a third special issue in the future.

In Flanders as well as the Netherlands, considerable experience and knowledge has been acquired in recent years about large herbivores and all related matters. Visions and strategies abound on desks, but do not always trickle down to those in the field. Sometimes this is due to general concern and a lack of information. This special issue is intended especially for nature managers but also interested members of the public, farmers, animal welfare officers, journalists and others. We are confident that the selection of articles on large herbivores in nature areas both at home and abroad will meet many parties' need for information.

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Grazing, and specifically livestock farming, has an integral role in the conservation of England's biodiversity. Centuries of grazing have shaped the English landscape, creating habitats of international conservation importance such as the chalk grasslands and heaths in the south, and the upland *Calluna* moors of the north.

Modern agricultural practices and habitat fragmentation have changed the balance of grazing. Whilst it remains a valuable management tool for nature conservation, we also find that too much, or too little grazing in certain areas threatens the species and habitats we are trying to conserve on our nature sites.

In 2001 England suffered a foot-and-mouth epidemic that had devastating consequences for livestock farming and the local communities who depend on it for their livelihood. This special issue comes at a time when politicians, agriculturalists and nature conservationists in England are working together to find a way forward for grazing animals in the countryside that affords economic, social and environmental sustainability. The role of large scale natural processes, and that of large grazing animals within the landscape, are subjects being openly discussed.

This special issue helps to share knowledge and experience gained by colleagues in Flanders and the Netherlands. As a result our discussions of both policy and practical implementation will be better informed.

Let us hope that this special issue is the first in a line of collaboration that helps us all to share nature conservation knowledge and experience for the long term benefit of biodiversity across Europe.

Dr. Andrew Brown
Action Chief Executive
English Nature



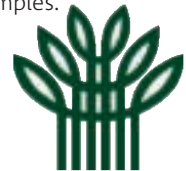
The Dutch experiences presented in this special issue are of high relevance also in Denmark. A main threat to Danish biodiversity is changes in grazing regimes in natural and semi-natural areas. The Red-data books list numerous species in decline caused by too little or too much grazing. The traditional moderate levels of grazing are no longer of economical interest to most farmers.

Reasons for these changes can be found in the agricultural and economic development. If we want to protect and enhance the many qualities linked to moderate levels of grazing, new ways of obtaining such levels in nature areas must be developed. The methods must present a balance between economic, ecological and social factors. In the management of NATURA 2000 areas such methods may often be necessary to reach favorable conservation status.

The experiences can also be relevant in the many cases where grazing with local domestic races of livestock are used, e.g. the Danish Forest Cow. This race was bred to combine hardiness and good-naturalness to the public. Therefore it is very useful for nature management.

In this light the experiences presented in this issue are highly relevant as inspiration and best-practice examples.

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Danish forest cow. Photo: Rita Buttenschøn.

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SPECIAL EDITION ON GRAZING AND GRAZING ANIMALS

by the Special Edition Editorial Team

The presence of large herbivores grazing in nature areas is not an isolated phenomenon. Policy makers, managers, supervisors, researchers and visitors are all involved in one way or another. The issues involved are diverse and include such matters as ecology, ethology, ethics, welfare, animal health and the spread of diseases. The outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the United Kingdom and in The Netherlands in 2001 illustrates the last point only too clearly. On the advice of the Ministry of Agriculture in The Netherlands all nature areas with large herbivores have been closed to the public for the first time.

4 An earlier special edition devoted to grazing appeared in the magazine *Bosbouwvoorlichting* in September 1996. New research results, a controversial new theory developed by Frans Vera on grazing and the landscape, and the general discussion on allowing cows and horses to return to the wild and the issue of whether large herbivores in nature areas should be allowed to die a

natural death have shown that the time is ripe for another special edition on this subject, published both in the Dutch and the English language.

The purpose of this special edition is to provide more information on important aspects of grazing which also have practical relevance for managers of nature areas and policy-makers. In response to

the matters currently under discussion we concentrate on more natural forms of grazing. It is a misconception to believe that there is a consensus of opinion on this subject. Views are divided on the effects of grazing and the role of large herbivores in the natural ecosystems. We believe it is important for all the views to be represented, but there is unfortunately not enough room for extensive discussion of the issues here. We would however welcome any reactions to this special edition.

It is interesting to note that in as far as opinions differ, researchers are just as divided in their views as site managers and policy makers. No one has a monopoly on knowledge about grazing. The same could be said about the responsibility of allowing nature areas to be grazed. Thanks to the fact that policy makers, managers and researchers have the courage to experiment with different forms of grazing, new facts are being brought to light. This is absolutely necessary, because real natural grazing disappeared in our climate zone long ago, and the question remains whether we can recon-



Grazing in nature areas has to be acceptable to people, plants and animals.

struct it. The point is not to run any unnecessary risks. New forms of grazing must be acceptable both for the large herbivores and for other species which occur naturally in the area grazed and the surrounding area. Good communication is vital. We hope that this special edition will contribute to that.

This special edition begins with a summary of 25 years' practical management experience by Harm Piek and Henk Siebel of Natuurmonumenten. This is followed by three articles on various aspects of the prehistoric, natural western European grazing system. Margret Bunzel-Drüke of Germany takes us back to a time before the Holocene, when really large herbivores like giant elk and mammoth still lived in this region. The parkland she describes is similar to the landscape of a later epoch described by Frans Vera, which he suggests was only populated by 'smaller' grazers like aurochs, tarpan, red deer and moose. Daniël Josten of the Ministry of Flemish Community describes the situation of large grazing animals in Flanders. Joep Dirx of Alterra doubts whether these animals occurred in large numbers in the Netherlands. He believes that most of the higher ground was covered by woodland before humans cleared the areas on a large scale.

A number of writers discuss the influence of grazing on plants and animals, and what consequences this has for management. Loek Kuiters of Alterra gives a summary of the results of a scientific study on the subject and comments on the theory of Frans Vera. Jan Bokdam of Wageningen University talks about his own study of poor sandy soils which questions the feasibility of maintaining open landscapes with limited food through grazing alone. Henk Strijbosch of the University of Nijmegen discusses the vulnerability of reptiles and other fauna and warns that they should not be disregarded in the development and management of grazed nature areas. Stichting Ark contributes two articles giving a clear insight into the various aspects of natural grazing in the floodplains of the major rivers. These authors make a case for year-round grazing as opposed to seasonal grazing. They also discuss the social



behaviour of large herbivores and management aimed at creating genetically healthy herds.

The risks of animal diseases are highlighted by Jaap van Leeuwen and Gerard van Essen of the Institute for Animal Science and Health, ID-Lelystad. Paul Koene of Wageningen University shares his views on the way domestic animals can be made feral and demonstrate their natural behaviour.

Korthals discusses the ethical aspects of large herbivore management. He introduces the new principle of respect for the self-sufficiency of large herbivores. He also makes a plea for a multiform ethical approach, which holds that there can be different moral standpoints for one and the same situation. Hensens and Maasland give a number of facts about the interrelation between grazers and public; an aspect to pay attention at. Frans Vera wrote an interesting article about the question whether European bison and cattle will cross spontaneously or not.

Marionne van de Klashorst and Ruud Kreetz of Natuurmonumenten write about the importance of good communication for grazing projects. Geert Groot Bruinderink of Alterra makes a strong plea for the extensive linking zones which will be necessary to connect the European nature areas. Inset boxes throughout the issue contain practical knowledge supplied by various authors. These vary from a list of the old breeds in the Netherlands and cattle dis-

eases to a text about the Chillingham cattle, descendants of the aurochs.

Finally, Hans Kampf from the Dutch National Reference Centre, who has been the driving force in developing policy for natural grazing in the Netherlands, gives a summary of the Ministry of Agriculture's policy document on grazing. This special edition closes with an article by the editors, which draws conclusions and makes recommendations for the future.

The editorial team for the Dutch issue is made up of Paul Aukes, Henke Beije, Luuk Draaijer and Hans Kampf, all from the Dutch National Reference Centre for Agriculture, Nature and Fisheries. The articles are translated by the Translation Office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries. The texts are read by Dave Stone of English Nature.

More information, collected by Hans Kampf is available on internet (URL: <http://www.minlnv.nl/grazers/>). or: <http://www.kampf.nl/hans/>