

Funding for biodiversity recovery in Limburg

Dutch universities are jointly raising funds for research this spring. Wageningen focuses on biodiversity, with a project of nature restoration in the South Limburg hills, where many unique species are on the brink of collapse.

‘Unfortunately, public funds are limited and pioneering research is becoming increasingly difficult to get funding for,’ says Arianne van Ballegooij, fundraiser at the University Fund Wageningen (UFW). ‘This campaign is how Wageningen is putting the theme of biodiversity in the spotlight. Private individuals can donate to the South Limburg Hills Biodiversity Rescue Plan.’

The project is about new forms of nature restoration, says Philippine Vergeer, assistant professor in Plant Ecology and Nature Management. Many unique species, such as mezerium and white helleborine,

have been reduced to isolated patches of nature. ‘Saving them needs you to look not only at the species itself, but more broadly at the landscape as a whole.’ Scattered across the hills of South Limburg are remnants of chalk grasslands, old woodlands and stream valleys. ‘Insects such as bumblebees and honeybees migrate along linear structures such as hedges, copses and footpaths. We’re going to restore these cultural and historical elements locally in order to reconnect the populations.’ Some species in the hills have a unique genetic makeup, acquired over millennia of evolution. ‘They’re unique in the South

Limburg hills,’ says Vergeer, ‘and many of them are on the brink of going under.’ Funds from the campaign will be used to strengthen local populations. ‘We collect seeds from local plants, for instance, and cross-breed them in the greenhouse in Wageningen to make the best possible use of the available genetic potential. Thank you all very much in advance! When we plant the seeds, we choose not only the ideal spots but also places with just a bit more light, or just a bit drier or wetter.’ The researchers are monitoring the recovery. ‘Deliberately utilizing all the variation in the landscape will let us encourage genetic diversity. That’s hugely important if the populations are to be viable.’

Info: www.wur.nl/supportjouwuniversiteit



Mezerium, white helleborine and the baneberry are unique to the hills of South Limburg.