



2025

Highlights report



**National Scientific Secretariat
on Invasive Alien Species**
Belgium

Foreword

The EU Regulation no 1143/2014 on Invasive Alien Species – the IAS regulation – entered into force in 2016, following the adoption of the first list of species of Union concern.

In Belgium, the coordinated implementation of this Regulation is ensured by a cooperation agreement between the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions, which entered into force in 2019. This agreement led to the establishment of the National Scientific Secretariat on Invasive Alien Species (NSSIAS).

The NSSIAS is mandated to provide the scientific expertise necessary to support the coherent and effective implementation of the Regulation at national level. It facilitates coordination and streamlines workflows among the competent authorities, supports the Scientific Council in the preparation of IAS-related scientific advice for the National Committee, and facilitates official controls. Additionally, the NSSIAS has been temporarily mandated with stakeholder engagement activities aimed at developing codes of conduct for several recreational activities and professional sectors. These actions form part of the national action plan to prevent the unintentional introduction and spread of IAS.

This highlights report provides an overview of the principal activities and projects undertaken by the NSSIAS in 2025.

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A word from the Belgian IAS Committee



This past year I was given the honor and responsibility to chair the National IAS Committee as the representative of the Flemish authority.

Looking back at an eventful 2025, I see cooperation as a common theme in the tasks and projects that were tackled. Increasingly we realize this is a necessary aspect in the fight against invasive alien species and required on every level, from local to international.

I, therefore, in name of the National IAS Committee, and not in the least with the indispensable support of the National Scientific Secretariat on IAS, welcome the coalition of the willing to help in this fight, in the joined effort to restore our native biodiversity.

Nicolas Pardon

Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos

Chairman of the Belgian National IAS Committee (2025-2026)

OUR TEAM



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Check Clean Dry



The first national campaign on biosecurity for freshwater users.



Adoption of Codes of conduct

In May 2025, representatives of various sectoral organizations gathered at the Institute of Natural Sciences to formally **sign the codes of conduct on IAS** for angling, aquatic sports, aquaculture and boating. This event marked the culmination of a co-creation process resulting in voluntary tools designed to promote biosecurity measures and help reduce the spread of IAS in Belgium's freshwater ecosystems.

Communication campaign

The adoption of the code also marked the launch of a communication and outreach campaign developed in collaboration with representatives across freshwater sectors, both recreational and professional. The campaign encourages freshwater users to become **Heroes in the protection of freshwater ecosystems**. By applying the Check, Clean, Dry protocol, they can all help reduce the spread of invasive alien species, which often hide like “invisible dragons” on nets, boats, clothing, and equipment.

Together, let's protect our rivers, ponds and lakes!

The campaign has been disseminated through a [press release](#), various press articles, and the social media channels of competent authorities and sector organisations.

Presentations and trainings have already been delivered to several federations, including Walloon aquaculturists, Walloon aquatic system managers, Walloon sports directors, and Flemish anglers. Additional sessions are planned throughout 2026.

[Discover all campaign materials here](#)



Biosecurity for management of freshwater systems

In 2025, we finalized the biosecurity guide for managers (FR-NL) including practical guidance for **integration of biosecurity into public procurement procedures**. To support its implementation, we also developed an online webinar (FR-NL) and an educational video (FR-NL). The guide was actively disseminated across the Walloon, Flemish and Brussels-Capital Regions, as well as to all stakeholders identified through the collaborative development process.

[Consult the guide in FR or NL](#)



Publication - Survey on anglers and IAS

The results of our survey on the **risks associated with recreational angling in Belgium** in relation to the spread of IAS were published in the scientific journal **Management of Biological Invasions**. This study provides insights into the current hygienic practices related to angling equipment and the level of awareness among anglers regarding IAS. The findings also supported the development and roll-out of the national Check-Clean-Dry campaign.

[Consult the article](#)



Codes of conduct on IAS

Engagement with professional stakeholders in sectors at risk of the introduction and spread of IAS

ORNAMENTAL PLANTS AND GREEN SECTOR

In 2025, the Secretariat organized a series of **stakeholder consultations** with representatives from the horticultural sector, including **producers, sellers, and end users**, with the objective of co-developing a code of conduct on IAS. These discussions supported the formulation of a set of measures aimed at reducing the establishment of invasive ornamental plants in nature and limiting the introduction and spread of invasive organisms associated with the trade of potted plants (such as weeds, ants or flatworms) in Belgium.



A key component of the code is the **adoption of two plant lists:**

- > a list of species for which **sales** in Belgium will be **phased out**,
- > a list of species whose sale is accompanied by **targeted communication** on invasive risks and appropriate maintenance requirements.

These lists were negotiated with the sector based on a **risk screening** identifying ornamental **plant species** posing a **priority invasive risk for Belgium**.

The code further promotes the use of native or safe non invasive plant species as alternatives. To support this transition, a **guide of alternative plants** was developed in 2025 to assist both professionals and private gardeners in making their selection.

The adoption of the code, along with the rollout of associated awareness raising materials, is planned for Spring and Summer 2026.

PETS SECTOR

As part of a national action plan to prevent the introduction and spread of IAS, a **code of conduct for pets** has been developed in collaboration with sectoral organisations.

The code sets out measures for professionals, including the **accurate identification of animals and plants** in retail settings, **appropriate waste management** practices, and the reporting of mislabelled animals or contaminants. It also provides guidance on communication to buyers, in particular discouraging the release of pets into the wild and ensuring proper preparation before acquiring a new pet.

The code has been endorsed by representatives of the sector and is scheduled for **formal adoption in Spring 2026**, together with accompanying communication materials that will be further disseminated in the second half of the year.



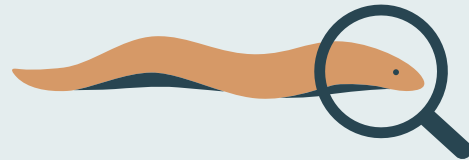
SOIL SECTOR

The soil sector was also a focus of our stakeholder engagement activities in 2025, with the objective of developing a dedicated code of conduct. Together with an organizing consortium (ANB, Brussels Environment, INBO, ISSeP, OVAM, SPW), a series of meetings was held with representatives from federations of **soil experts, soil transport, soil storage, construction and road and railway network operators.**

The working groups contributed to refining sector-specific information and addressing regional differences across Belgian regions, identifying priority measures and drafting guidelines. In addition, **priority plant species** were identified based on their impact, ease of recognition, and ease of remediation.

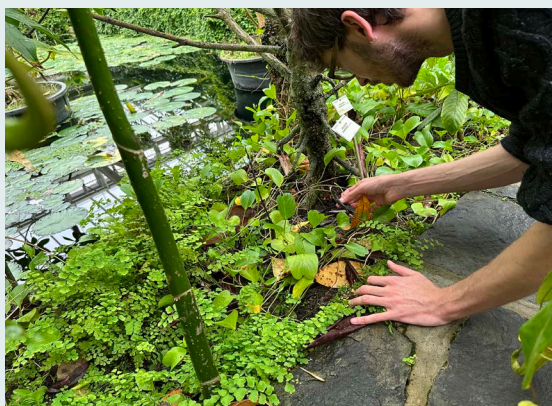


FlatwormWatch




Citizen science project for monitoring of terrestrial flatworms

The citizen science project **FlatwormWatch** was launched in spring 2024. In 2025, outreach efforts were further pursued to engage citizens and nature enthusiasts in the detection of non native flatworms in gardens and garden centres. We produced a **bilingual video**, and a final report for participants. The project was also showcased at the **Citizen Science Fair 2025** in Brussels and at the Netwerkdag **Tuinen in Verbinding** by Mijn Tuinlab in Leuven.



After one year, the results are both encouraging and concerning. The **marked increase in flatworm observations in Belgium** demonstrates the strong potential of citizen science to support invasive species monitoring. At the same time, the data indicates that **several flatworm species are now established in the country.** These results will inform an upcoming risk assessment of non native terrestrial flatworms in Belgium.

 Consult the results in [FR](#) or in [NL](#)

FlatwormWatch is a project led by the National Scientific Secretariat on IAS, in collaboration with the Institute of Natural Sciences, Botanic Garden Meise, the Institute for Nature and Forest Research and Hasselt University.

Support to inspection

The federal authority has adopted a protocol aimed at the implementation and reinforcement of frontline checks at border control posts. Within this framework, NSSIAS provided scientific support.



Sampling manual for inspection

The existing **guidelines for morphological identification and DNA sampling of IAS** were updated and consolidated in a sampling manual. This manual provides operational guidance to inspectors of the federal agency for the security of the food chain (FAVV-AFSCA) and customs officers and establishes standardized procedures for the collection and transmission of photographic evidence and DNA samples to designated experts. This ensures that analyses are conducted consistently on quality-controlled material and metadata is collected in a uniform way. The procedures for the control of imported animal consignment were clarified during a **site visit at the BCP of Brucargo** in Zaventem.

Training of federal inspection services

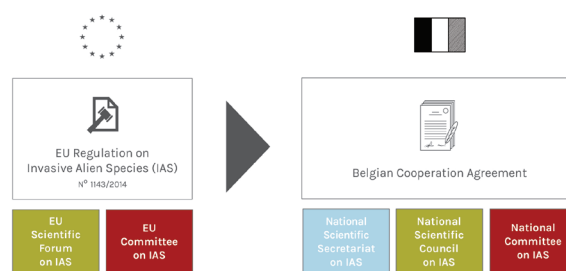
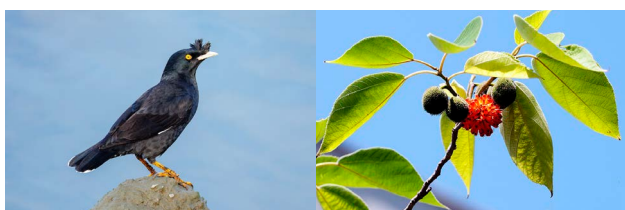
Two training courses were organized for federal inspection services (FAVV-AFSCA) at the **border control posts (BCP)** of Zaventem and Bierset. In collaboration with the inspection service of the Federal Public Service Health (DGEM), inspectors were trained on the application of the new protocol, the **use of the sampling manual**, and the **identification of priority species**.



Action at EU level

UNION LIST UPDATE

In August 2025, the EU Member States voted to add **26 new species** to the list of Union Concern, marking the fourth update of the Union list, which now includes 114 species. The IAS Secretariat coordinated the **preparation of Belgium's position** for this vote, in collaboration with experts from the Scientific Council and policy officers of the National Committee. Relevant stakeholders from the plant and pet sectors were also consulted during the process. In parallel, **baseline distribution data** for the newly listed species were compiled in collaboration with INBO and submitted to EASIN, contributing to the harmonized monitoring of species of Union concern at EU level.



EU REPORTING

In accordance with reporting obligations under the IAS Regulation, Member States are required to report to the European Commission every six years on its implementation. In July 2025, Belgium submitted its **national report for the 2019-2024 reporting period**, with NSSIAS acting as lead reporter and coordinating the overall reporting process. NSSIAS was responsible for compiling, harmonising, and consolidating inputs from the authorities. The report provides a **synthesis of all management efforts** undertaken by the three regions. It also outlines the actions implemented at both federal and regional levels regarding **prevention**, the national action plan on priority pathways, **early detection**, and **monitoring**.

Planning ahead

Working program 2026-2028

A **new working program** for the period **2026–2028** for the NSSIAS was established after adoption by both the National Committee on IAS and the Interministerial Conference on the Environment. This program defines the Secretariat's priorities for the next three years, and includes renewed actions to support the coordinated implementation of the IAS Regulation in Belgium, strengthen links with the EU level, and intensify prevention efforts.



Research needs for policy

An analysis of **research needs in support of IAS policy** in Belgium was carried out by NSSIAS in collaboration with the Scientific Council. This assessment identifies priority scientific actions that were integrated into our new working program and will inform the forthcoming update of the National Action Plan.

Update of the National Action Plan

The current **Action Plan of prevention on priority pathways** covers the period 2022-2026. The NSSIAS has already launched the revision process by synthesising recommendations for improvement and exploring a new structure together with the competent authorities.



Outreach & Workshops

Our work has also been presented at national and international level:

- > Presentation on the **IAS regulation and insects** at the study day of the Royal Belgian Society of Entomology
- > Presentation on the Belgian implementation of the EU Regulation at the **French technical workshop on IAS** in Montpellier organized by IUCN France
- > Presentation on **biosecurity** to rat trappers in Flanders
- > Presentation on the **manageability analysis** and **FlatwormWatch** to the EU Commission during a visit at INBO
- > Presentation of our work on **Codes of Conduct with freshwater sectors** at the online conference of the HORIZON projet GUARDIAS, and at the **Benelux study day** on invasive plants





Invasive Alien Species
National Scientific Secretariat



With the support of the Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, Bruxelles Environnement/Leefmilieu Brussel, Agency of Nature and Forest, Research Institute for Nature and Forest and SPW-ARNE (Departement Nature et Forêt).

The National Scientific Secretariat on Invasive Alien Species (NSSIAS) is hosted at the Institute of Natural Sciences.