

Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar Year Report 2024



2024 was another wet year with exceptional amounts of rainfall. For some tree species this was pernicious but the vast majority of plantings benefited from this natural irrigation after the dry summers of 2021-'22.

For our visitors, braving the rain was naturally more challenging and we noticed a decline in visitor numbers in 2024. Still, we had many successful visits and activities with the highlight no doubt being the Magnolia study weekend we organised for the International Dendrology Society. We managed to bring together the cream of Magnolia experts and provided an exciting and diverse programme for some 80 dendrologists from 10 different countries.

THE COLLECTIONS

The **living collection of woody plants** in the Arboretum currently (as of 16 December 2024) contains 5,290 specimens representing 2,312 different taxa (versus 17,407 specimens and 5,034 taxa on the whole of the estate). These numbers include the 390 new accessions on the estate during 2024 of which 77 (or almost 20%) are of documented wild origin.

Around 80 **woody plants were removed** from the collection as part of an ongoing effort to improve the aesthetic value, interest and health of the living collection. Wood samples of the important specimens (rare and/or wild origin) are kept in our own xylarium but are also shared with the Tervuren Wood Collection of the Royal Museum for Central Africa. On a private piece of land adjacent to the Arboretum, a grove of larch trees was cut that were planted by Werner de Spoelberch in 1948 but had hardly grown in recent years, due to the impact of the recent dry and hot summers. In addition, some of the trees were affected by the European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) and there was no point in keeping them any longer. This felling will probably also affect the adjoining part in the Arboretum as there will now be a lot of extra light and sun and the wind will also have free play there.

The winter of 2024 can easily be summarised in a single word: wet! Still, we were lucky to get a **thick layer of snow in mid-January** and the temperature was sufficiently low to be able to open the Arboretum doors to our members. The winter scenery was breathtaking and attracted many enthusiastic visitors.

The **February storms** caused little damage but still we lost an important specimen, an *Abies durangensis* of known wild origin (Cerro Mohinora in Mexico). This is an extremely rare species in Western European collections. Fortunately, the fall caused no additional damage with the exception of a *Daphniphyllum* that was touched but that certainly will recover. Perhaps this is already a first victim of the wind having free rein after felling of the neighbouring larches.

The **Magnolia flower show was early and spectacular** with remarkably intense colours: *Magnolia* 'Premier Cru', 'Purple Star', 'Burncoose', 'Big Ben' or 'Charles Raffill' to name a few were breathtaking. Yet we were faced with a real dilemma this year as the completely saturated soil due to abundant rainfall made an early opening of the Arboretum difficult (and mowing impossible!). Nevertheless, we opened on 24 March with the advice to avoid the really wet areas and to bring appropriate footwear (wellies).



Photo 1. *Magnolia* 'Premier Cru' (*M. sargentiana* 'Blood Moon' x *M. sprengeri* 'Claret Cup') heralded the arrival of spring.

In April, the assessment committee of the KVBC (*Koninklijke Vereniging voor Boskoope Culturen*) visited Arboretum Wespelaar. The KVBC is a Dutch organisation of nurserymen

that independently evaluates new and existing cultivars. Their assessment committee visited Wespelaar twice for their star rating procedure of **yellow-flowering Magnolias**. During the first round, they evaluated magnolias with pale yellow flowers, while in the second round, they evaluated the darker flowering cultivars. To account for a broader range of weather and climate conditions, they plan to conduct two additional judging sessions in 2025. The final results will be published in *Dendroflora*.

Unfortunately, in 2024 we again faced a **late spring frost (24 April)** and although the temperature did not drop extremely deep (-1.7°C), the early spring and sprouting meant that the impact was significant. The casualties were the usual: young shoots and leaves of most Juglandaceae, many *Fraxinus*, *Magnolia*, *Tilia endochrysea*, *Emmenopterys henryi* (of course), *Celtis koraiensis*, and even some *Azalea*, *Ginkgo* and *Tilia cordata* 'Winter Orange'. It was surprising to see that even the first fronds of *Dryopteris* and *Matteucia* were frozen.

Late April marked a significant expansion of the collection, as the Arboretum acquired Mr. Walter Wessels' private **collection of wood samples**. Around 1,200 high-quality, uniformly prepared, and properly labelled wood samples were donated and added to our xylotheque database. This exceptional collection will undoubtedly be valuable when we organise an exhibition on wood. Beyond its educational importance, it also holds significant scientific value.



Photo 2. The *Rhododendron* collection of the Arboretum saw a significant expansion. Here a flowering specimen of *R. prunifolium*.

The ***Rhododendron* collection** saw a significant expansion thanks to a generous donation from Dr. Ralf Bauer and the German Rhododendron Society. It consists entirely of deciduous species, all wild-collected in the United States, specifically *Rhododendron arborescens*, *atlanticum*, *austrinum*, *calendulaceum*, *canescens*, *carolinianum*, *chapmanii*, *colemanii*, *cumberlandense*, *eastmanii*, *flammeum*, *minus*, *periclymenoides*, *pilosum* and *prunifolium*. This brings the collection of deciduous *Rhododendron* close to completion, and we are planning to organise a BDB study day on these fascinating plants in the near future.

A genus (***Styrax***) and family (Styracaceae) that we have been working on for several years to build a more comprehensive collection often underperformed compared to expectations. However, 2024 turned out to be an exceptional year, with an abundant display of stunning, fragrant flowers on several of our *Styrax* specimens. Notably, *Styrax japonicus* 'Pink Bells' and 'June Snow' put on a spectacular show. Yet even these highlights suffered from the three defining elements of spring and summer 2024: mosquitoes, slugs, and rain — endless rain. The wet summer was, of course, excellent for our *Rhododendron* and

Hydrangea collection, with the undisputed highlight being *Hydrangea aspera* 'Rosemary Foster', and several visitors noted that this was perhaps the greenest summer ever. Another advantage of the cool and rainy spring and summer was that we were able to expand our bonsai exhibition in the courtyard, both in number and duration. Once again, the wet weather led to a late autumn, but the Japanese maples put on a spectacular display of color in mid-November. *Carpinus betulus* 'Rockhampton Red' also earned top marks for its brilliant autumn foliage.



Photo 3. *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Lilacina'. The wet summer was a blessing for our *Hydrangea* collection.

Plant pests and pathogens present a significant risk to global plant health and this threat is ever rising. Sentinel plants within botanic gardens and arboreta can play a vital role in providing information on future and/or known threats. Within the V.B.T.A. (The Belgian Association of Botanic Gardens and Arboreta) some Belgian collections decided to join the Targeted Surveillance Program within the IPSN (International Plant Sentinel Network). Arboretum Wespelaar joined this surveillance program and became an official member of the IPSN as well, an international network with now 90 member gardens. This gives us extra resources on pests and pathogens such as diagnostic guides, posters on target organisms, etc. This also means that we will provide

information on future or known plant threats. In 2024 we continued several surveys: on Beech Leaf Disease (BLD), oak pests caused by some borers, Pine Tortoise Scale, Rose rosette virus, and the Japanese beetle *Popillia japonica*. Viaverda confirmed a *Phylloxera* attack (an aphid-like insect) on *Quercus crispula*. While it affects the leaves, it does not kill the tree and poses no major threat. However, we observed the native *Agrilus biguttatus* (two-spotted oak buprestid) along with a severe infestation of the oak pinhole borer (*Platypus cylindrus*) on a declining *Quercus robur*, which had to be removed. Climate change is undoubtedly exacerbating these types of pest issues. We sent larvae samples of *Agrilus*, *Cerambyx*, and *Platypus* species to ILVO for identification. They confirmed the presence of the native *Agrilus biguttatus*, ruling out the more concerning *Agrilus auroguttatus* or *A. bilineatus*. Additionally, the suspected *Cerambyx* species turned out to be a rare native beetle, *Plagionotus detritus*, whose larvae develop in damaged or dead wood of stems and branches. Two pine trees showed suspicious resin outflow, prompting FAVV to collect samples to check for *Fusarium circinatum*, an emerging threat from France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Fortunately, no alarming pest was detected.



Photo 4. *Ulmus lamellosa*.

Having a perfectly labelled and correctly identified collection is one of the main objectives of the Arboretum. Since 2014 we have significantly increased our efforts and our team continues this **major inventory round** at the Arboretum and the dendrological collections of the surrounding private estates of *Herkenrode*, the *Park of Wespelaar*, the *Potager de Wespelaar* and *Bosveld*. This important and valuable work continued in 2024 and a total of 99 beds have been thoroughly inventoried. During this inventory, each plant is localised within a certain bed, its health status is assessed, the identity is verified if possible and/or as needed (with extra attention this year to the members of the Ulmaceae family), and the label is placed on a healthy branch clearly visible for our collaborators and visitors. The perennials are also inventoried per bed, but usually this is done in two stages: once in (early) spring in order to identify bulbs and spring flowers and a second time in the summer period when many perennials and grasses are at their peak. In 2024, a more systematic approach was adopted, and in addition to the general inventory, a detailed examination of the genus *Epimedium* was conducted.



Photo 5. *Magnolia x brooklynensis* 'Misty Blue' is still under evaluation for potential future registration as a new cultivar.

In 2024, **no new cultivars were registered**. However, we did name an intriguing hybrid of *Magnolia acuminata* with *M. cylindrica*, 'Unique'. This cross is particularly remarkable because these species do not hybridize in collections, as their flowering periods do not overlap; *Magnolia cylindrica* flowers from late March to early April, while *M. acuminata* begins flowering in May. The hybrid traces back to 1992 when Philippe de Spoelberch received seeds from August Kehr, who had pollinated *Magnolia acuminata* flowers using refrigerated pollen from *M. cylindrica* collected earlier in the spring. Over time, three plants were raised, with plant 95011-C proving to be the most exceptional. Each year, it produces an abundance of soft yellow flowers, and in autumn, its striking deep russet foliage stands out, a rare feature for a *Magnolia*. Grafting material was sent to two nurserymen who will handle further propagation of this possible new cultivar. They will also graft *Magnolia x brooklynensis* 'Misty Blue', which we are eager to evaluate after propagation. This *Magnolia* was also raised by Philippe de Spoelberch from seed obtained through the MSI seed exchange in 1988. While it has an untidy growth habit, its flowers are extraordinary, emerging in greenish-blue to misty blue hues before maturing into deep yellow. Despite its secluded spot among large *Rhododendrons*, it never fails to catch the eye when in bloom.

Another plant we are keen to follow is *Magnolia* 'Victoire', a large, warm purple-flowering *Magnolia* growing in the Potager and that has been making a strong impression every spring for a couple of years now.

VISITORS

2021 will be remembered by many as the corona-year. The pandemic caused an unprecedented peak in visitor numbers at all nature-related organisations: botanic gardens, arboreta, public parks or nature reserves all experienced a spectacular increase in visitor numbers. Now that the pandemic is over and people spend their free time as before, the figures are back to normal. Unfortunately, the often bad weather conditions (twelve consecutive months of above-average rainfall – a record!) have nevertheless had an impact on visitor numbers and we see a drop from 10,027 visitors in 2023 to 9,811 in 2024.

The number of individual visitors reached to 6,948 (vs. 7,647 in 2023) while the number of groups amounts to 97 (vs. 82 in 2023). The season ticket sales also experienced a setback: from 591 in 2023 to 485 in 2024.



Arboretum Wespelaar has an exceptional dendrological collection and therefore attracts a significant number of **specialised visitors** every year. Colleagues from Belgium and abroad came to visit the collections and also specialised dendrological groups and (future) arborists enjoyed a tailor-made guided tour. Well-known and experienced dendrologists

and nurserymen also visited the Arboretum and it is always a pleasure to tour the site with such specialists.

In 2024 our **website** had 25,067 users (vs. 21,432 in 2023) and 108,027 pageviews (vs. 81,439 in 2023). Apart from the homepage and “contact and visit” page, the most visited pages in 2024 were the database of images linked to the identification keys, the Beltrees database page, the map of the Arboretum and the plant collection page.



Photo 6. *Euonymus sanguineus*. One of the high-definition scans by Jan De Langhe available on the Arboretum website.

There are 47 vegetative **identification keys** for selected woody plant genera and species in cultivation in Western Europe, composed by Jan De Langhe, available on our website. Moreover, there are more than 55,000 high-definition images (+6,000 taxa) consultable on the website, making this an inexhaustible source of information and beauty. The genera *Euonymus* and *Rhus* received special attention in 2024. More and more of these images are also used on the TSO (Trees and Shrubs Online) website. Jan De Langhe retired in 2024. It goes without saying that we will continue to update the identification keys as needed, both in terms of nomenclature and content. However, the number of available scans will unfortunately

stagnate until we find a worthy successor for this meticulous work.

Our **Facebook** page currently has 3,661 followers (3,406 in 2023). During opening season, new plant pictures from our collection are regularly added in order for our followers to see what is flowering or happening at that moment. The pictures are grouped by month. Our most liked album was the Album “October” (472 likes). Other appreciated posts included a post about the International Dendrology Society (IDS) Magnolia Study Weekend held at Arboretum Wespelaar in April (120 likes) and a post about our latest selections added to the Arboretum website: *Magnolia* 'Anne Leitner', *Magnolia x wieseneri* 'Charm and Fragrance', *Magnolia* 'Joli Pompon' and *Fraxinus americana* 'Bash Bish Falls'.

Our **Instagram** page currently has 2,789 followers (versus 2,294 in 2023). Every post in 2024 had in between 65 and 289 likes (144 on average). The most popular posts in 2024 were a post about our latest selections (289 likes), a series of drone photographs of the autumn colours around the Artois Pond in October (277 likes) and a post about the IDS Magnolia Study Weekend (267 likes). New posts are added regularly, containing a selection of photographs of plants flowering at that time. The scientific plant name is always mentioned, which is much appreciated by the followers.

In 2023 we opened a **LinkedIn** account. Our LinkedIn page currently has 366 followers (vs. 279 in 2023). The most engaging post was about our latest plant selections (see above).

Since 2023, we have also started keeping statistics for our **Arboretum in Marche-En-Famenne**. In 2024 the website had 3.614 users and 9.505 pageviews. The Facebook page currently has 493 followers (vs. 347 in 2023).

The Instagram page currently has 249 followers (vs. 124 in 2023).



Photo 7. Autumn images taken with a drone are always a great success on social media.

DATABASES

All our collections (woody and perennial plants, propagation, herbarium, bonsai collection, wood samples, cones and fruit, books, journals and reprints) are kept in a database management system which is updated on a daily basis. It is easy to extract and distribute information from this comprehensive database. The catalogue of woody and perennial plants can be downloaded from the Arboretum Wespelaar website and the woody plants information is at the same time available in an online searchable database. In 2016 we started linking photos to the individual specimens which can be consulted in the online database. The past nine years 11,500 pictures were linked. This is an important project which will continue and expand in the years to come.

The woody plant information is shared – by means of a yearly upload of our data – with two other **online searchable databases**. In 2003 nine Belgian gardens made their database of living plants accessible via one website: PLANTCOL. In May 2023, the successor to this platform saw the light of day: botanicalcollections.be. This online platform

brings together the living plant collection data of 25 Belgian gardens and arboreta. All these gardens together hold no less than 99,345 accessions belonging to almost 27,500 different taxa, well documented, and therefore invaluable for research, horticulture, garden tourism and the preservation of plant species for the future. The second online database we share our data with is PlantSearch of Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) which is a global database of living plants with over 1,100 contributing institutions. PlantSearch then provides us with a list of **taxa that are included in the IUCN Red List**. We use the most recently published Red Lists received via BGCI to update our list. The 2024 update resulted in one additional taxon, *Liquidambar orientalis*, which has been part of our collection for some time but was recently reclassified from 'Endangered' to 'Critically Endangered'. In the 'Endangered' category, we lost our only *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (though a young plant will soon be relocated) as well as *Magnolia dawsoniana*. Additionally, *Magnolia lotungensis* has been newly added to the collection with an 'Endangered' status, while *Magnolia fraseri* var. *pyramidata* and *Magnolia macrophylla* var. *dealbata* have also been reclassified as 'Endangered'. In the 'Vulnerable' category, two taxa that have long been in our collection, *Eucommia ulmoides* and *Zelkova carpinifolia*, were recently designated as 'Vulnerable'.

In the Arboretum inventory we find one species in the category 'extinct in the wild' (EW): a taxon known to only survive in cultivation or as a naturalized population well outside of its past range (*Franklinia alatamaha*); 15 species in the category 'critically endangered' (CR): a taxon that meets any of the criteria for Critically Endangered and is therefore facing an

extremely high risk of extinction in the wild (for example *Acer pentaphyllum*); 37 species in the category 'endangered' (EN): a taxon that meets any of the criteria for Endangered and is therefore considered to be facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild (for example: *Fitzroya cupressoides*, *Picea martinezii*); 82 species in the category 'vulnerable' (VU): a taxon that meets any of the criteria for Vulnerable and is therefore considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild (for example *Davidia involucrata* var. *vilmoriniana*, *Pseudotsuga sinensis*).



Photo 8. *Davidia involucrata* var. *vilmoriniana*, categorised as VU on the IUCN Red List.

Arboretum Wespelaar is globally the only garden that grows threatened *Ilex brachyphylla* according to the BGCI PlantSearch database and there is only one other collection that lists *Magnolia sinostellata* (EN), *Fagus hayatae* (VU), *Rhododendron comisteum* (VU), *Rhododendron elliottii* (VU) and *Rhododendron komiyamae* (VU). There are only two other collections with *Quercus kiukiangensis* (EN), *Sorbus bakonyensis* (CR) and 3 other collections with *Acer calcaratum* (VU), *Carpinus hebestroma* (CR), *Magnolia macrophylla* var. *dealbata* (EN), *Rhododendron hylaeum* (VU) and *Rhododendron prunum* (VU).

The figures for the entire estate are as follows: one species extinct in the wild (*Franklinia alatamaha*); 20 CR-species (*Betula lenta* f. *uber*, *Fraxinus americana* and *Rhododendron amesiae* as examples of taxa outside the arboretum); 47 EN-species (*Abies fraseri*, *Cedrus atlantica*, *Magnolia dawsoniana*, *Rhododendron mallotum* and *Zelkova abelicea* as examples of taxa outside the arboretum); and 110 VU-species. The complete list of endangered species growing at Arboretum Wespelaar and the surrounding estates is available upon request.

The Arboretum **library** has a steady growth of items and we now have 3,685 accessions, mostly books (2,724) but also journals, maps, reprints, cd's, and DVD's.



Photo 9. The enthusiastic participants of the IDS *Magnolia* study weekend.

EDUCATION

We are often highly recommended for our **guided tours**. It is of course important to keep the botanical and horticultural knowledge of our dedicated guides at a high standard and for that reason a class is organised on a monthly basis. Some of the subjects that we studied in 2024 were tree identification in winter, the genus *Magnolia*, the new plantings for 2024, and the Ulmaceae family. Additionally, one afternoon discussions were held on which

trees should be removed and the reasons for their removal. We also visited the adjacent private garden of Herkenrode and the neighbouring Park of Wespelaar. In January, our guide team visited Arboretum Kalmthout, where we focused on winter-flowering plants, with a particular emphasis on the *Hamamelis* genus. Heavy snowfall during this visit made the return journey exciting and very time-consuming, but everyone arrived home safely.

One of the more effective ways to **share dendrological expertise and horticultural practice** is the organisation of lectures and study days. A good example are the annual winter meetings organised by the Arboretum for the Belgian Dendrological Society. Three fascinating topics were covered: Evolution (the past and future of Darwin's brilliant insight), and two lectures on botanical expeditions— one to South Korea and another to Japan. Another annually recurring activity is the one we organise for our staff and volunteers. This year, we had the pleasure of welcoming Abraham Rammeloo, who has been the director of Arboretum Kalmthout for 25 years. He gave a talk about 25 plants that left a lasting impression on him throughout his career—a unique perspective that was very well received by the audience.

In mid-April, we organised a ***Magnolia* study weekend in Wespelaar** for the International Dendrology Society. This highly successful event was quickly fully booked. Naturally, participants visited the *Magnolia* collections of both the Arboretum and the surrounding private gardens. However, we also managed to secure some renowned experts in the *Magnolia* world for engaging lectures: Paul Goetghebeur spoke on *Magnolia* taxonomy, Philippe de Spoelberch shared insights on

starting and maintaining a *Magnolia* collection, and Maurice Foster delivered a talk titled "*Peerless Flowering Trees – The Asiatic Aristocrats.*" The second day was just as captivating, featuring lectures by Jim Gardiner on the *Magnolia* collections in the Sussex High Weald, Koen Camelbeke on yellow-flowering Magnolias, and Tom Christian on Magnolias in the authoritative reference work *Trees and Shrubs Online*. The enthusiasm and gratitude among participants were immense, and the Arboretum team deserves congratulations for their excellent and seamless preparations and organisation.

Eighteen **students and three trainees** worked in the Arboretum in 2024 and we wish to thank them for their help and assistance and for bringing new ideas and youthful vivacity to the Arboretum.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

We are frequently consulted by scientific institutions or botanical collections with regards to the plants we are growing. After evaluation of the request, we share information, observations, seeds, leaf material or cuttings for scientific research.

A total of eleven such international collaborations were set up in 2024 focusing on different plant groups such as conifers, *Crataegus*, *Juglans*, *Lonicera*, *Magnolia*, *Nothofagus*, *Quercus*, *Rhododendron* and *Sorbus*. These projects were shared with research institutions in Belgium, The Netherlands, the U.K. and the U.S.A. The subjects were very diverse and included horticulture, conservation of threatened tree species, biochemistry, education, molecular

genetics and collection management. The excellent quality of our data, both in terms of structure and content, allowed us to participate in a project with the Cambridge Botanic Garden on the dynamics of living collections. This ultimately resulted in a high-impact article, published in January 2025, titled '*Insights from a Century of Data Reveal Global Trends in Ex Situ Living Plant Collections*', in the journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution*. The full list of (inter)national collaboration projects, including additional detailed information, is available upon request.



Photo 10. Measuring trees for the BELTREES database.

SERVICES TO THIRD PARTIES

Acquiring, compiling, and sharing dendrological knowledge and expertise is one of the main goals in the mission statement of Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar. One of our important recurring beneficiaries is the **Belgian Dendrological Society** (BDB): the director of the Arboretum is a member of the Board of directors of the society and of the editorial committee of the society's Yearbook; since 2016 he is also publisher of the BDB Yearbook. For BDB members we organised a successful dendrological excursion to the Park of the Royal Palace in Laeken. This activity was quickly

fully booked, and we plan to organise another visit to this unique location in 2025.

A member of the Arboretum Wespelaar team provides for the secretariat of the BDB and Arboretum Wespelaar also remains the driving force behind the database of remarkable **Trees of Belgium** (BELTREES). This database contains today 39,400 living measured trees with 4,226 new accessions or updates in 2024, an all-time record! This year we again organised two meetings (region of Flanders, and Wallonia plus Brussels) with several of the most important contributors to the database in order to encourage and increase the number of yearly measurements. In 2017 we also started linking available photos to the BELTREES accessions. In the past seven years, 10,143 photos were linked and uploaded. These photos can be accessed on the website of Arboretum Wespelaar.

Two Arboretum Wespelaar staff members continue their function of secretary of the **Belgian Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta** (V.B.T.A.). In addition to the usual activities, a new membership application was submitted in 2024, specifically for the greenhouses of the Botanical Garden of Liège. A small delegation, including a representative from Wespelaar, visited the site for evaluation, and membership is planned to take effect in 2025.

The Director of the Arboretum is Chairman of the expert committee of **Fondation Franklinia** and Vice-President of the **Magnolia Society International** (MSI), he also chairs the Science & Conservation Committee of this organisation. In 2025, a study trip will be organised for the MSI to France and Belgium,

with a mandatory stop in Wespelaar, of course. Koen is co-organising this meeting.



Photo 11. *Acer campestre* 'Schwerinii', a good example of a climate tree.

Trees play a crucial role in the fight against climate change. They also help mitigate the impact of extreme weather, especially in urban environments. Two staff members of the Arboretum were actively involved in compiling a list of '**climate trees**' for the province of **Limburg**. Climate trees are woody plants that reach at least three meters in height and are resilient to both drought and frost, resistant to diseases, and have the potential to grow old. Currently, the focus is solely on trees in urban areas, particularly in locations where summer heat is most intense. The province then developed an online search tool that allows users to easily select a climate tree best suited to the specific planting location. Users can input factors such as the desired height and width of the tree, soil type, and hours of sunlight to make an informed choice. Additionally, the search can be further refined using filters such as crown shape, foliage type, or autumn colour.

It is crucial that the Arboretum keeps good and solid contacts with the **local community**. It is therefore with pleasure that we continue to advise the local authority on the management,

reconstruction, labelling and plantings of the public park in Haacht, the CPAS of Haacht, or individual trees on the grounds of the municipality. This year, the village square of Wespelaar was renovated, and the municipality requested our advice on plant choice. We are also active in the 'Forestry Group Wespelaar' and offer advice for cutting, thinning and planting of new woodland.



Photo 12. *Crataegus x media* 'Princesse Sturdza' was planted in the hawthorn collection this year.

ARBORETUM DE MARCHE-EN-FAMENNE

In 2018 we were able to purchase an interesting property on some 78 ha in Aye near Marche-en-Famenne. Intense dendrological development on 20 fenced ha will be combined with native and natural vegetation on larger tracts of the property but also there with interesting dendrological features. It goes without saying that this will be a long-term project. In 2024 the following was realised:

- 112 woody plants were added to the collection, which now totals 695 specimens belonging to 478 different taxa. Seventy-nine specimens are of known wild origin. Regarding the genus *Crataegus*, a target genus for the Arboretum de Marche, we have initiated a more systematic approach. Based on the available scientific literature, the genus has been divided into groups of closely related species. Each of these groups has been assigned a specific location on site, which will guide future plantings of hawthorn species.

- We have constructed two new important gravel roads in the Arboretum, specifically in the Poplar meadow and in the area known as La Golette. These roads will facilitate movement across the site but, most importantly, will ensure that work can continue during wet periods without damaging the terrain. The roads have now been sown and are gradually blending better into the surrounding greenery.
- In 2023, the Arboretum opened to the public, and in 2024, we kept the tradition of opening on the third Sunday of every month (except for November, when we open on the second Sunday). Over 400 interested visitors came to explore and enjoy the Arboretum. In addition to these open days, visits by request are also possible (guided tours). In June we hosted the Belgian Dendrology Society for their general assembly, and in September we hosted a meeting of the V.B.T.A. This brought in about 375 additional people, spread over 16 groups.



Photo 13. In June we hosted the Belgian Dendrology Society for their general assembly.

- In 2023, a forest outside the fenced part of the Arboretum - called Bois Müller - was cleared, with only a few important trees, mainly oaks, left standing. In the summer of 2024, the forest was surface-mulched. Several areas of this site are quite wet, and we plan to create ponds and ditches to channel the water. The upper part of the wood will be densely planted using a forestry approach but with interesting and rather unusual species such as *Sorbus domestica* and *Sorbus torminalis*. The rest of the Müller Wood will gradually be enriched with various collection plants allowing us to create an engaging dendrological walk in that spot.
- We continue our efforts to conserve the biodiverse rich habitats. The eco-pasture introduced last year has continued this season, again using donkeys, and we have expanded their working areas. They serve as valuable allies in controlling brambles, thistles, and other plants that, while important for biodiversity, we do not want to dominate the entire site. However, due to the wet spring, the donkeys were only able to return to the property with a month's delay. Some more sensitive areas are managed directly by the Arboretum team, while other areas are still mowed by

local farmers, with the cut grass being baled for export.



Photo 14. *Ophrys apifera* is one of ten orchid species that occur naturally at our site in Marche-en-Famenne.

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