Arboretum Wespelaar

Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar
Year Report 2025

Despite exceptionally dry and hot conditions for most European gardens, 2025 saw a peak in visitor numbers, with over 11,000 people experiencing the outstanding Magnolia *bloom, the first flowering and fruiting of several key taxa, and another impressive autumn display. The Arboretum continued its global conservation efforts, contributing to international research, monitoring plant health, and supporting threatened species in* ex situ *collections, strengthening its role as a reference hub for dendrology. The satellite Arboretum in Marche-en-Famenne was further developed, with the* Crataegus *collection expanded and the Arboretum featured in several specialist publications.*

THE COLLECTIONS

The **living collection of woody plants** in the Arboretum currently (as of 24 December 2025) contains 5,307 specimens representing 2,347 different taxa (versus 17,681 specimens and 5,067 taxa on the whole of the estate). These numbers include the 337 new accessions on the estate during 2025 of which 77 (or almost 23%) are of documented wild origin.

Almost **80 woody plants were removed** from the collection as part of our ongoing efforts to enhance the aesthetic quality, seasonal interest, and overall health of the living collection. Wood samples of important specimens — particularly those that are rare and/or of wild origin — are preserved in our own xylarium and are also shared with the Tervuren Wood Collection of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium. In the Vijverbos, we continue thinning of the young Corsican pines. The aim here is to provide the existing collection — often *Rhododendron* species and other woody rarities — with additional space and light, allowing them to develop optimally beneath a relatively open pine canopy.

It comes as no surprise that 2025 began much as 2024 ended: **exceptionally wet**, with waterlogged soils and challenging working conditions for the team. A bright spot amid these trying conditions was the abundant flowering of *Hamamelis ovalis*. The flowers are small and their colour rather subtle, yet they are well worth a closer look. We are proud to have three specimens of this rare American species — only discovered in 2004 — in the collection, and to report that they are thriving. From mid-February onwards the weather turned warm and dry, allowing us to open our doors to our seasonal ticket holders once again earlier than usual on Wednesday, 26 March. The dry spring continued and we enjoyed **excellent flowering from the *Magnolia* collection**. *Magnolia martini* bloomed for the first time with soft yellow flowers borne amongst neat, narrow leaves, and the creamy white flowers of *Magnolia macclurei* also caught our attention, particularly because of their abundance and soft, pleasant fragrance. Other eye-catchers were *Magnolia kobus* 'Pseudokobus', 'Manchu Fan', 'Tiffany', 'Advance', 'Sweet Valentine', 'Janaki Ammal' and *M. x loebneri* 'Encore', to name but a few.

Photo 1: *Magnolia martini* flowering for the first time

In April, the assessment committee of the Koninklijke Vereniging voor Boskoopse Culturen (KVBC) visited Arboretum Wespelaar. The KVBC is a Dutch organisation of nurserymen that independently evaluates new and existing cultivars. As part of their star rating procedure for **yellow-flowering *Magnolia* cultivars**, the committee visited

Wespelaar twice in 2024. During the first round, magnolias with pale yellow flowers were assessed, while the second round focused on the darker-flowering selections. To account for a broader range of weather and climate conditions, two additional judging sessions were scheduled for 2025. We were therefore pleased to welcome the committee again in 2025, for the second consecutive year of evaluations at Wespelaar. A comprehensive report including the final assessment will be published in the 2026 issue of *Dendroflora*.

Photo 2: Visit of the KVBC evaluating our yellow flowering *Magnolia* cultivars

In mid-April, the *Wisteria's* were true eye-catchers, as was an excellent selection by grower Damien Devos: the crabapple *Malus hupehensis* 'Fox's Pride', a veritable cloud of pure white blossom! By mid-May, conditions had turned exceptionally dry (as in 2020 and 2022), with a **spring drought** of the kind that would normally be expected only once every 20 to 50 years. Some *Rhododendron* are beginning to show signs of stress, while other species are flowering remarkably well, including *Weigela florida*, all flowering ashes — especially *Fraxinus sieboldiana* — and, once again, the various *Styrax* species and cultivars.

Photo 3: *Fraxinus sieboldiana* flowering remarkably well in 2025

The prolonged dry period provided an opportunity to carry out a number of **structural maintenance and management tasks**: a long section of fencing was replaced; the Artois Pond, along with all ditches and canals, was cleaned out; a pump and its associated irrigation system were repaired and upgraded; and drainage was restored or newly installed in many areas that had remained waterlogged previous winters, and especially in the winter of 2024.

June was recorded as the **warmest month ever measured**, and for the first time in 25 years, we refrained from taking cuttings, as doing so under such conditions would have been futile. It is crucial that cuttings are taken while young, fresh, and crisp, and not left to overheat in an excessively hot greenhouse day after day.
2025 was another mast year for our native pedunculate oaks (*Quercus robur*), and we took the opportunity to collect acorns from our finest specimens to sow on a bare plot outside the Arboretum, where we are promoting natural regeneration. Elsewhere, we removed

acorns as much as possible — by raking or using nets — to prevent millions of seedlings from emerging among the beds or under and between collection plants in the following year. *Quercus pontica* also fruited for the first time — acorns that we naturally collected for propagation. The same applies to *Corylus fargesii*, which we first introduced into cultivation in mainland Western Europe in 2007 and which, after 18 years, has now produced fruit for the very first time.

The heat and drought have been truly exceptional. Several *Tilia* dropped branches, and a number of species that normally tolerate such conditions, including *Gymnocladus* and *Metasequoia*, now also showed signs of stress, with leaves curling and partially shedding.

Photo 4: Cleaning out of the Artois Pond during the dry spring

Although autumn was rather grey and subdued, the **leaf colours were once again outstanding**. This year's highlights included *Oxydendrum arboreum*, *Acer distylum*, *Acer saccharum* subsp. *leucoderme*, and *Stewartia malacodendron*, some specimens of which turned almost purple. *Acer pycnanthum* proved highly variable, yet several individuals displayed beautifully warm orange-red tones, while *Quercus stellata* also stood out for its rich autumn display. It was also a remarkable year for fruiting. One could hardly overlook the ever-reliable *Ilex* 'Sambeau', the huge quantities of fruits on *Parrotia persica*, the large yellow (edible) globes of *Crataegus mexicana* 'Stipulacea', or the curious compound fruits of *Maclura pomifera*, somewhat reminiscent of human brains. Never before had they been so abundant, and visitors eagerly collected them for decorative use.

Photo 5: Beautiful autumn colours on *Acer saccharum* subsp. *leucoderme*

In mid-November, Arboretum Wespelaar **attracted media attention with the transplanting of a large *Quercus stellata***. This relatively uncommon species in collections had been growing near the Taxodium Pond since 2013 and is valued for its attractive habit and autumn colour. However, it stood in close proximity to a wild-collected and equally rare *Aesculus wilsonii*. The latter has proven to be fully hardy and has grown and flowered more vigorously than initially expected. As the two trees began to compete for space, a decision had to be made. Rather than remove one of them, it was decided to relocate the oak. The *Quercus* was root-pruned and prepared over a period of three years and was successfully transplanted to a new location in the winter of 2025. We trust that both specimens will continue to develop well and remain valuable elements of the collection for many years to come.

Photo 6: Transplanting of a large *Quercus stellata*

Plant pests and pathogens pose an increasing threat to global plant health. In this context, sentinel plants in botanic gardens and arboreta play an important role in the early detection of emerging and known risks. Through the V.B.T.A. (Belgian Association of Botanic Gardens and Arboreta), Arboretum Wespelaar continued its participation in the Targeted Surveillance Programme of the International Plant Sentinel Network (IPSN) in 2025. During spring and summer, selected sentinel plants in the collection were monitored as part of surveys for Beech Leaf Disease (BLD), oak pests caused by wood-boring insects, Pine Tortoise Scale, Rose rosette virus and, for the first time, Japanese beetle (*Popillia japonica*). Observations were shared with the IPSN, and staff participated in online meetings to evaluate the Belgian survey results. The feedback received on our observations, photographs and related information proved both valuable and informative, helping us to remain alert to potential threats to the collection. To date, none of these pests or pathogens have been detected at Arboretum Wespelaar. In April, representatives of ILVO (Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) collected samples from *Tsuga*, *Pseudotsuga* and *Pinus* to test for *Phytophthora pluvialis*. All samples tested negative. Additional analyses for *Lecanosticta*, *Dothistroma septosporum* and *Dothistroma pini* also yielded negative results. ILVO further examined material from a declining specimen of *Torreya californica*; the probable cause was determined to be abiotic stress. At the beginning of summer, a specimen of *Pinus densiflora* showed rapid decline. Plant material was submitted to ILVO for analysis, together with samples from a young plantation of *Pinus nigra* subsp. *laricio* exhibiting needle rust symptoms and premature needle drop. No primary fungal pathogens were detected. The deterioration is most likely attributable to climatic stress, with excessively wet conditions in one year followed by drought in the next.

Photo 7: *Pinus nigra* subsp. *laricio* exhibiting needle rust symptoms

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 2025 and a total of 122 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 a special focus this year on *Tsuga*, *Chimonanthus* and *Camellia*) 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 2025, a more systematic approach was adopted, and in addition to the general inventory, a detailed examination of the genera *Epimedium*, *Dysosma* and *Podophyllum* was conducted.

In 2025, **no new cultivar registrations** were submitted. However, we continued the follow-up of *Magnolia* 'Unique' (the unusual cross between *Magnolia acuminata* and *Magnolia cylindrica*), *Magnolia* × *brooklynensis* 'Misty Blue', and *Magnolia* 'Victoire'. All three cultivars were successfully propagated by Carlos Verhelst and Job Vergeldt. These propagated plants will be evaluated further to assess their performance and development after propagation. The same applies to *Mahonia* × *savilliana* 'Diamant', a beautiful hybrid of *Mahonia gracilipes* and *M. eurybracteata*.

During the *Magnolia* IDS study weekend in 2024, Jim Gardiner (Vice President of the Royal Horticultural Society, UK) expressed particular enthusiasm for two young *Magnolia* selections in our testing field. He proposed the working names *Magnolia* 'Ice Chocolate' and *Magnolia* 'Candy Stripe'. *Magnolia* 'Ice Chocolate' ('Roseanne' seedling × 'Eskimo') produces white flowers that contrast attractively with the rich brown emerging foliage. *Magnolia* 'Candy Stripe' ('Toro' × 'Sunsation') also shows promising ornamental qualities. Material of both selections will be sent to Job Vergeldt (Magnoliastore) for winter propagation. The resulting plants will be monitored closely to evaluate their horticultural potential.

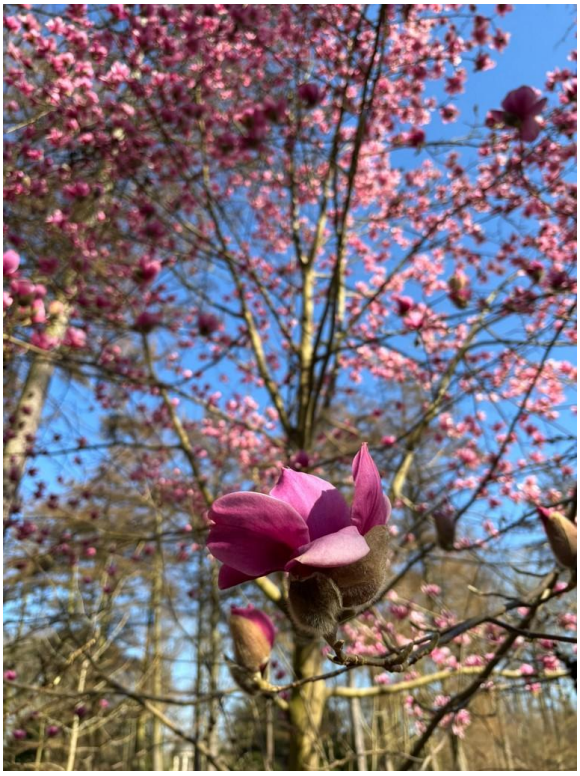

Photo 8: A close follow-up of the recently registered *Magnolia* 'Victoire' continued in 2025

In the autumn of 2025, the existing *Magnolia* exhibition in the Artois Pavilion was replaced by a **photographic exhibition focusing on autumn colour** — one of the Arboretum's principal themes and a major annual attraction for visitors. The exhibition provides visitors with additional information on the most important and spectacularly colouring species and genera in the collection. An accompanying illustrated text leaflet is offered free of charge in three languages.

Photo 9: Autumn exhibition at the Artois Pavilion

VISITORS

On the first Sunday of April, the Arboretum welcomed nearly 1,000 visitors in a single day — an exceptional start to the season. Glorious spring weather and peak *Magnolia* bloom certainly played their part, but the true catalyst proved to be unexpected media attention: a feature in the written press and a radio report, both published without prior notice, brought a remarkable influx of visitors. In retrospect, this record-breaking day set the tone for what would become an **outstanding year in terms of visitors**, a total of 11,167. Only in 2021 — the exceptional COVID year, when outdoor destinations were among the few accessible leisure options — did we record higher visitor numbers.

The number of individual visitors reached to 8,302 (vs. 6,948 in 2024) while the number of groups amounts to 99 (97 in 2024). The season ticket sales stagnated at 483, two less than last year.

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 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 2025 our **website** had 29.101 users (vs. 25.067 in 2024) and 115.419 pageviews (vs. 108.027 in 2024). Apart from the homepage and 'contact and visit' page, the most visited pages in 2025 were the database of images linked to the identification keys, the BELTREES database page, the map of the Arboretum and the plant collection page.

The Arboretum's website continues to grow as **a reference platform for woody plants in cultivation in Western Europe**. It currently hosts 47 vegetative identification keys for

selected genera and species, composed by Jan De Langhe. These practical tools are widely used by professionals and enthusiasts alike. In addition, the online database now offers more than 54,000 high-definition images, covering over 6,000 taxa — a virtually inexhaustible source of information and visual documentation. An increasing number of these images are also featured on TREES AND SHRUBS ONLINE (TSO), further extending the Arboretum's international reach. A search conducted in December 2025 yielded 1,159 results for "Wespelaar" on the TSO platform, underlining the growing visibility and impact of our collections.

Photo 10: *Mahonia nitens* 'Kalmthout', one of the high-definition images by Jan De Langhe available on the Arboretum website. These images were also used for the IDS & BDB *Mahonia* study day in Arboretum Kalmthout

Our **Facebook** page currently has 3,850 followers (3,661 in 2024). Throughout the opening season, new photographs from the collection are shared on a regular basis, allowing followers to keep track of what is flowering and evolving in the Arboretum at any given moment. The images are conveniently grouped by month, creating a visual chronicle of the seasons. As in most previous years, the most appreciated album was 'October', which received 927 likes — a clear testament to the enduring appeal of autumn colour. Other well-received posts included a new cover photo of the flowering Magnolia Meadow (captured by drone), an announcement of our spring opening in April, and a report on the visit of the Magnolia Society International (MSI) to the Arboretum in April.

Photo 11: *Magnolia* images taken with a drone are always a success on social media

Our **Instagram** page currently has 3,329 followers (2,789 in 2024). The most popular posts in 2025 included a series of drone photographs of the flowering Magnolia Meadow at the end of March (552 likes), drone images capturing the autumn colours around the Artois Pond in October (367 likes), and a post showcasing flowering Magnolias in April (330 likes). New content is shared regularly, featuring carefully selected photographs of plants in bloom at that moment. Each post includes the scientific name of the plant, a detail that is highly valued by our followers and reflects the Arboretum's commitment to both beauty and botanical accuracy.

In 2023 we started with a **LinkedIn** account. Our LinkedIn page currently has 435 followers (vs. 366 in 2024), and our **YouTube** channel has 61 followers and 4.248 total views.

Since 2023, we have started keeping statistics for the satellite **Arboretum in Marche-En-Famenne**. In 2025 the **website** of Arboretum de Marche had a significant increase in users and pageviews: 7.168 users (vs. 3.614 in 2024) and 17.611 pageviews (vs. 9.505 in 2024). The

Facebook page currently has 709 followers. The most liked post was a post about autumn colours with 96 likes. The **Instagram** page currently has 492 followers. Here as well, the most liked post was a post from October showing plants with beautiful autumn colours (66 likes).

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 on-line database. The past ten years more than 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 21 Belgian gardens and arboreta. All these gardens together hold no less than 99,643 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 2025 update resulted in one additional taxon being included in our *Critically Endangered* category: *Zelkova sicula*. Although this species has been present in our collection since 2020, our plants were accessed under the cultivar name 'Ciranna', which meant that the BGCI database did not recognise them as Red List material. This year, we planted an additional wild-origin specimen received from Giuseppe Garfi via Gregor Kozlowski (Fribourg, Switzerland).

Photo 12: *Zelkova sicula* - a critically endangered species in our collection

At the same time, we lost *Magnolia zenii*, and our *Glyptostrobus pensilis* was moved to recovery. We continue to monitor this specimen closely and, once fully recovered, it will be reintroduced in the collection. As a result, the total number of *Critically Endangered* taxa decreased from 15 to 14. In the *Endangered* category, we added

Rhododendron farinosum, a recently introduced species originating from a second newly discovered location, and *Rhododendron platypodum*, which has returned to the collection after a period of recovery in the nursery. This brings the total number of *Endangered* taxa to 39. Within the *Vulnerable* category, *Rhododendron noriakianum* was added to the list. We now hold two accessions in the arboretum and one in Herkenrode, representing a total of six plants. Unfortunately, our *Tilia callidonta* was lost due to late frost damage; consequently, the total number of *Vulnerable* taxa remains stable at 82 for the Arboretum. For the entire estate the numbers are: 1 EW, 20 CR, 49 EN and 117 VU.

Arboretum Wespelaar is globally the only garden that grows threatened *Ilex brachyphylla* according to the BGCI PlantSearch database. In our nursery we have *Rhododendron comisteum* (VU) which only grows in one other collection and that is also the case for *Rhododendron komiyamae* (VU). There are two other collections that list *Fagus hayatae* (VU), *Rhododendron elliottii* (VU) and *Sorbus bakonyensis* (CR). And there are only three other collections with *Acer calcaratum* (VU), *Magnolia macrophylla* var. *dealbata* (EN), *Magnolia sinostellata* (EN), *Quercus kiukiangensis* (EN) and *Rhododendron pronum* (VU).

A list of the extinct, critically endangered and endangered species growing at Arboretum Wespelaar is available on our website: https://www.arboretumwespelaar.be/EN/Conservation/. The complete list of endangered species growing at the Arboretum and the surrounding estates is available upon request.

The Arboretum **library** has a steady growth of items and we now have 3,824 accessions, mostly books (2,826) but also journals, maps, reprints, cd's, and DVDs.

Photo 13: Arboretum Wespelaar is globally the only garden that grows the threatened *Ilex brachyphylla* according to the BGCI PlantSearch database

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. In 2025, several specific plant groups were examined in detail, notably *Rhodorastra* (subsection within the genus *Rhododendron*) and *Cyclobalanopsis* (section within the genus *Quercus*). The volunteer who maintains our

bonsai collection on a weekly basis delivered a dedicated lecture on this collection. The session covered the fundamentals of bonsai: what defines a bonsai, the different styles and types, pruning techniques, and the specific materials and tools required for proper maintenance. Other, more annually recurring topics included the collection of perennials, trees and shrubs that were cut and the reasons behind their removal, as well as the 2025 newly planted trees. A lecture on plant morphology focusing on stipules — their definition, position, and the different morphological types — was also very enthusiastically received.

Photo 14: The guides of Arboretum Wespelaar during their monthly class

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 (BDB). Two dendrological travel reports were presented: one covering an expedition to the Hoàng Liên Son mountains in northern Vietnam, and another focusing on a study trip to Japan. In addition, the honorary president of the Society, Philippe de Spoelberch, delivered a lecture on the dendrological collection in his garden in southern France (near La Garde-Freinet), reflecting on both its successes and the inevitable setbacks. Another annually recurring activity is the one we organise for our staff and volunteers. This year, we visited the 'Provinciaal Groendomein Vrijbroekpark' in Antwerp province. This 135-hectare estate — the oldest provincial domain in the country — hosts several significant and highly interesting collection gardens, including a famous rose garden, a collection of hardy Ghent azaleas, extensive collections of *Magnolia* and *Wisteria*, and a historic arboretum.

From 31 March to 9 April, Jean-Pierre Morby and Koen Camelbeke organised a *Magnolia* study tour through France and Belgium on behalf of the **Magnolia Society International**. A highlight of the programme was, of course, a visit to Arboretum Wespelaar on Monday 7 April. Nearly 90 participants attended, enjoying the Arboretum's *Magnolia* collection at peak bloom, guided and supported by the ever-efficient AW team. The group also visited the private garden Herkenrode, adding further depth and horticultural interest to the day's programme. The visit concluded with a lecture by Philippe de Spoelberch entitled *The Making and Maintenance of a* Magnolia *Collection*, offering valuable insights into the long-term vision, curation and care of this important collection.

In recognition of his outstanding contributions to horticulture and dendrology, the Director of the Arboretum was awarded the prestigious **Veitch Memorial Medal** by the Royal Horticultural Society. This medal, established in 1870, is granted to individuals who have made an exceptional contribution to the advancement of the science and practice of horticulture, and is considered one of the highest honours in the field.

Thirteen **students and four trainees** worked in the Arboretum in 2025 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 regularly consulted by scientific institutions and plant collections regarding the trees and shrubs held in our collection. Upon request, we provide accession lists as well as seeds, fruits, leaf material or cuttings for research purposes.

In 2025, **ten international collaborative projects** were initiated or further developed. A particular highlight was our collaboration with the Cambridge University Botanic Garden, which contributed to the publication entitled *Insights from a Century of Data Reveal Global Trends in* Ex Situ *Living Plant Collections*, published in *Nature Ecology & Evolution* on 21 January 2025. Arboretum Wespelaar was one of 50 collections selected to provide data for this global study. All participating institutions were acknowledged as co-authors of the publication.

Although Arboretum Wespelaar does not hold an extensive collection of the genus *Nothofagus*, we were invited to contribute data to the *Nothofagus* Conservation Gap Analysis. This joint initiative is coordinated by Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI), the Global Conservation Consortium for *Nothofagus*, Wakehurst and Forestry England.

Photo 15: Arboretum Wespelaar contributed data to the *Nothofagus* Conservation Gap Analysis. The endangered *Nothofagus alessandrii* is one of the many images by Jan De Langhe available on the Arboretum website

Another fascinating project in which we are participating is coordinated by Colorado State University and The Huntington Botanical Gardens, titled the *Fungal Spore Trapping Project*. The goal of this initiative is to develop Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) tools for fungal pathogens, similar to the monitoring systems already in place for insect pests. The project focuses on evaluating potential airborne fungal pathogens in tree nurseries and propagation facilities of gardens and arboreta. Airborne spores are sampled using “spore traps” equipped with rotating, greased rods. DNA is then extracted from the collected spores, and metabarcoding (or metagenomic) approaches are applied to identify and characterise the fungal species and communities present. Finally, the data allow comparisons of fungal species and communities across different geographic regions, including western versus eastern North America, eastern Asia (Korea and Japan), and Europe, providing insight into global patterns of fungal distribution and potential risk. At Wespelaar, filters were installed and replaced in the greenhouse and propagation tunnel from June through November.

We will subsequently receive a detailed overview of the fungal species detected on site. The project will continue in 2026.

Photo 16: Arboretum Wespelaar is taking part in the international *Fungal Spore Trapping Project*

A research collaboration initiated in 2022, for which we supplied plant material, resulted in a scientific publication examining the genetic differences between the American highbush cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*) and the European highbush cranberry (*Viburnum opulus*).
A detailed list of all projects in which we collaborated in 2025 is available upon request.

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 and to the public parks of the city of Aalst.

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 almost 42,000 living measured trees with 3,657 new accessions or updates in 2025. 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 eight years, 11,620 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 2025, specifically for the Jardin botanique de Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech. A small delegation, including a representative from Wespelaar, visited the site for evaluation, and membership is planned to take effect in 2026.

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 was organized for the MSI to France and Belgium, with a mandatory stop in Wespelaar.

Photo 17: *Carya ovata* - 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 continued their involvement 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.

The Founder and Director of the Arboretum have in 2025 continued to serve on the **Scientific Committee of the Geographic Arboretum Tervuren**. The committee meets approximately twice a year to discuss and advise on a range of often practical matters, including adjustments to the grouping of collections and the replacement of plantings lost to disease and/or climatic conditions. These meetings are always combined with a field visit, during which the proposed recommendations are evaluated in situ.

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 parks or individual trees on the grounds of the municipality Haacht. We are also active in the 'Forestry Group Wespelaar' and offer advice for cutting, thinning and planting of new woodland.

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 2025 the following was realised.

Collection and Growth

This year 164 new woody plants were added to the collection. The Arboretum de Marche now holds 780 specimens representing 479 taxa, including 86 plants of known wild origin. Arboretum de Marche maintains a number of species of conservation concern. Among the collection, five species are classified as Critically Endangered, nine as Endangered, seven as Vulnerable, and eight as Near Threatened, illustrating the Arboretum's ongoing contribution to plant conservation. A detailed table of these taxa is available upon request.

Social Media

Our networks continue to grow: Facebook – 710 followers (493 in 2024), Instagram – 495 followers (249 in 2024).

Site Developments

A new woodland path now connects the terrace of the visitor centre to Rognaumont. Outside the main park, a forested area of approximately 750 exotic and native plants has been established to screen the road, create a smooth landscape transition, and test species resilience. The rest of the area, locally known as Bois Müller, is gradually planted with collection material. Water management improvements in that area include a large ditch separating the forested zone from the collection, two ponds, small retention areas, and several drainage channels. These interventions relieve water pressure, regulate flows during heavy rainfall, support gradual infiltration, and create microhabitats for biodiversity.

The site map and plant list have been updated online to reflect new paths and collection plots. Small infrastructure works also improve circulation and water management in wetter areas.

Collections Highlights

The *Crataegus* collection at Rognaumont is now organized geographically by continent; some specimens were relocated to maintain this classification. Targeted watering was necessary during the summer.

Photo 18: *Crataegus monogyna* 'Versicolor' flowering beautifully in May 2025

Visitors and Engagement

From April to November, the Arboretum was open every third Sunday of the month (except in November, where it was the second Sunday). In 2025, the Arboretum welcomed about 1,130 visitors: 830 during open days and 300 on guided tours.

The V.B.T.A. completed its francophone botanical guide training in Marche. The Arboretum also hosted the Board of Directors and Expert Committee of the Franklinia Foundation in October, and a visit by Her Majesty the Queen accompanied by managers of the nearby Royal Ciergnon Estate was surely a highlight of the year.

Photo 19: *Quercus coccinea* showing its beautiful colours in October 2025

Sustainable Management and Monitoring

Differentiated management continues with two local farmers: one maintaining hay meadows, the other practicing donkey-assisted eco-grazing. Regular flora and fauna surveys, conducted by a volunteer since 2019, provide valuable data for adapting management, conserving biodiversity, and preserving the Arboretum's botanical richness.

Media Coverage

The Arboretum received coverage in *Eden*, *Sabato*, *Wallpaper*, and *CG Concept*, as well as in Jean-Pierre Gabriels book *The Contemporary Garden* (Phaidon), translated into several languages.