

The struggle for effective Conservation of hamsters in The Netherlands

The conservation of the Common or European hamster in the Netherlands has started in 1998, when foundation 'Das & Boom' ('Badger & Tree') filed a lawsuit to protect the hamster. Several ecologists had warned for years that the species was close to extinction, but no effective measures were taken. In 1999 only one population remained near the City of Maastricht and the Ministry of Agriculture only then decided to take action and trapped the last individuals. These individuals were the founders of the Dutch Hamster breeding program. In 2002 the first off-spring of these hamsters was released in the Sibbe-reserve, a 45 ha large nature reserve with a specific nature friendly agriculture management.

Since the first release of captive-bred hamsters in 2002, we have learned a lot of the ecology of hamsters, have released hundreds of hamsters in more than 10 areas and even exported hamsters to Belgium (Flanders) and North Rhine-Westphalia. So far this has not resulted in a sustainable population in the Netherlands. Should we consider the conservation of the hamster a failure? What have we learned from all conservation efforts, monitoring and research? And what are the biggest challenges right now?

In this presentation I will give an overview of the long and bumpy road of twenty years of hamster conservation in the Netherlands.

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