

# 2020-2025

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION **RBINS**

ROYAL BELGIAN INSTITUTE OF NATURAL SCIENCES  
PRESENTATION DOCUMENT



# OUR INSTITUTION

**RBINS is devoted to nature: its long history and its sustainable management.** Over more than 175 years, we have grown from a series of individual collections to the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, esteemed as much by the academic world for our research as by the public for our museum galleries.

**Over time, we have also taken on new roles:** scientists at RBINS are responsible for advising public authorities in a wide range of fields of natural sciences, supported by modern research infrastructure. Our collection has grown into one of the largest in Europe and our Museum is amongst the most visited in Belgium.

**RBINS is unique in many ways:** a federal institution that allows the public to explore the richness of our collections, while at the same time our scientists are monitoring the health of the North Sea, negotiating international agreements on behalf of the country, are mapping Belgium's geology and biodiversity and conducting fieldwork across the world. This complex role brings its own challenges, but also enriches our work and sets us apart.



## OUR MISSION AND VISION

Our mission is to provide the scientific world, public authorities and society in general with good and relevant science, appropriate advice, opening up avenues of discovery in nature, including its long history and its sustainable management.

### THIS REQUIRES US:

- **to produce good and relevant science:** complex issues need sound, modern, up-to-date knowledge;
- **to maintain and enrich our research infrastructure and make it available in the form of collections, databases and models:** sound forecasts need certified long term reference data;
- **to link our research to action and policy as much as possible:** to increase the impact of scientific results, we need relevant and targeted communication, providing independent advice at the appropriate level;
- **to enhance citizens' understanding and knowledge,** in particular through our Museum, allowing them to make informed choices regarding their own lives and futures.

### *OUR VISION:*

## BRINGING NATURE INTO EVERYONE'S LIVES



## OUR CONTEXT

**As an institution, we have a national outlook that is reflected in our collections, our research and our policy work.** But our work has a clear international relevance and is also greatly affected by global issues.

**In 2020, we find ourselves at a turning point in history where issues in natural sciences are at the forefront of international concerns.** With the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals fresh in our minds, we see topics like biodiversity, health, climate and energy brought under the spotlight like never before.

**The role of society within these global issues means that engaging the public is crucial.** As a museum, this means we continue to strive to bring science to the public in new ways, to diversify our audiences and even to engage them in research.

**The research context in which we work is also changing.** New opportunities appear in the form of technologies and tools that revolutionise our work and revitalise our collections. At the same time, we must address key questions around open science, funding sources and strategic cooperation.

**To fulfill RBINS' mission in the face of these challenges, we set out our strategy for the next six years.**



# OUR STRATEGY

Between 2020 and 2025, RBINS' strategy centres around three key principles. These principles apply to all aspects of our work: from our research and policy support, to our collection management, to our public engagement.

- **A focus on excellence**

As an institution, we concentrate our resources on our strengths and the areas where our work is highly necessary and at the same time recognised as being outstanding.

- **Added value for stakeholders**

We continually strive to meet and surpass the needs and expectations of our stakeholders. This diverse range of groups includes our audiences, policymakers and research partners.

- **An independent, financially balanced and viable position**

Within the federal public landscape, RBINS takes responsibility for its own sustainability, in terms of its budget, organisation, partnerships and collaborations.



## OUR STRATEGY: RESEARCH

Our research strategy was developed through a long internal consultation process and is structured around the research themes, grouped in three 'flagships', in which RBINS excels: '*Nature Discovery*' (evolution, biodiversity and ecosystems dynamics), '*Humans and Nature*' (past interactions, marine issues and policy support), and '*Nature, our Future*' (geo-resources, forecasting and biological migrations). We implement this strategy by prioritising these research themes.

### CONCRETELY, THIS MEANS:

- **Supporting our research themes with targeted resources**  
We evaluate our research strategy to ensure RBINS is well equipped to carry out excellent research within each theme. To this end, we define and monitor a variety of key performance indicators and scan for opportunities, making recommendations for shifts in the strategy. Once these recommendations are implemented, the evaluation cycle restarts.
- **Commitment to securing sustainable resources**  
To continue to grow and show leadership within our research themes, we scan and assess potential for additional resources, beyond what is possible through our structural funding. This can be publicly at European, federal or regional levels, or through service-related projects with private companies and foundations.
- **Testing possibilities for cooperation**  
Our strategy examines the ways in which RBINS' work is closely linked to cooperation with external partners and stakeholders, including several key roles within policy support at various levels. We seek to analyse our position in comparison to that of other actors so we can develop and build on these relationships, maximising opportunities that new partnerships can bring to better fulfill our mission.



## OUR STRATEGY: COLLECTIONS

With 38 million specimens conserved as Belgian heritage of global significance, our physical collections are among the largest in the world. They are both a reference and a research tool and constitute a significant part of Europe's major research infrastructures. As such, our strategy for collection management focuses on acquisition, documentation, conservation, exploitation and easy access, so that our collections can continue to be visited and studied by researchers from around the world. As databases, which we consider as data collections, become an increasingly important part of our scientific heritage, a specific management and conservation strategy for long-term *open access* has to be developed.

- **Access to our collections as part of a European Research Infrastructure Consortium**

Opening up our vast collections and datasets is crucial to our stakeholders and external partners. To ensure more efficient access to our physical collections, we digitise them via our own open-source collection management software, DaRWIn, which encodes all data on specimens, including links to high-definition micro CT images and 3D models. We also focus on data mobilisation and local database importation to make our datasets and collections easier to find online. In this way, by 2025 our collections will form an integral part of DiSSCo, a European Research Infrastructure Consortium for research in natural sciences, thus gaining even greater global visibility.



- **Making our data available and ensuring their conservation**  
By setting up and implementing a digital data strategy, RBINS ensures that our data collections are shared and are used responsibly, in compliance with European regulations on *open access*. Our long-term preservation strategy will maximise the potential value of these datasets as part of our heritage, allowing RBINS' scientists and our external stakeholders and partners to make optimal use of them. This means that all relevant databases have to be adapted to general standards and that uniform workflows are applied.
- **Preparation of a disaster plan**  
Having made significant progress in our quality management, the next step for 2020-2025 is the development of a disaster plan. This strategic document will detail how we prevent and prepare for threats to our collections such as issues with security, flooding and fire, as well as how we react in case of emergency to protect and eventually recover valuable collections.



## OUR STRATEGY: PUBLIC

RBINS is the place where science meets society, with 16,000 m<sup>2</sup> of permanent galleries, temporary exhibition rooms and educational workshops, enabling us to welcome some 330,000 visitors each year, around a third of which are school groups. We actively promote and share scientific knowledge on nature, and engage the public on threats to nature and society alike, such as climate change. By 2025 we aim to increase our visitor numbers by 20% by offering our visitors a unique visitors' experience.

- **Continuous investment in top quality exhibitions and spaces**  
We have renovated all of our exhibition spaces within the last twelve years, and the completion of this master plan is in 2020 achieved with the opening of our '*Living Planet*' gallery. The emphasis now is on maintaining and keeping up to date these permanent galleries as well as our temporary exhibition spaces, allowing us to exceed our visitors' expectations in terms of the quality of their experience.
- **Quality services and infrastructure for visitors**  
Our focus also moves towards the refurbishment of other public spaces within the Museum beyond the galleries: our entrance hall, our large auditorium and other educational spaces, our shop, cafeteria and cloakroom, all to ensure that our visitors feel welcome and that their needs are met. We are also working more closely with the surrounding neighbourhood and the responsible authorities to ensure accessibility of the Museum.
- **Target groups are offered tailored educational services**  
Our audiences are increasingly diverse and we take an active role in engaging a wide range of profiles, across our visitors and the participants in our outreach activities. This includes diversifying our educational and communication services to address specific target audiences, but also innovating the formats of our public engagement. The confinement following the COVID-19 outbreak highlights the need to reach people with new digital technologies which is a growing focus for the Museum.



## OUR FUTURE

**RBINS is a complex organisation with many roles.**

Likewise, our natural world and our society face multifaceted and interlinked global issues. As such, focusing on our combined strengths across research and policy support, collections management and public engagement is a way of making our unique diversity a great asset in tackling the challenges our world is facing.

**By implementing this strategy over the coming years, we further establish RBINS as an institution that actively addresses these challenges.** This strategy deepens our research, reinforces our policy support, opens up our collections and engages our audiences in ways that better equip them with the scientific knowledge to tackle global questions. It draws on past history and present knowledge, to bring nature into everyone's lives in the future, and for our future.

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