

# CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR AGAINST BIODIVERSITY

## A RESEARCH ON BIODIVERSITY HARMS

**CONDUCTED BY NICC AND IEW,**
**FUNDED BY BELGIAN FEDERAL SCIENCE POLICY (BELSPO)**

Biodiversity is threatened on several fronts in Belgium, without a global criminal policy to protect it.
The vital need for natural spaces and urban vegetation, the territorial occupation of these spaces and their unequal distribution, the limited information available to citizens on the protection of biodiversity, the leeway of the actors in charge of controlling and sanctioning its infringements, and their possible questions on the type of sanctions to adopt (administrative or penal; preventive or repressive) are all major environmental and social issues that the current health crisis, combined with the recent heat waves, has recently highlighted.


**TEAM**

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Through an innovative alliance between researchers in the Human Sciences at the National Institute of Criminalistics and Criminology (NICC) and researchers in the Life Sciences at Inter-Environnement Wallonie (IEW), the CRIM-BIODIV project has a double objective: the construction of an interdisciplinary dialogue in order to understand the multiple social realities in which biodiversity conservation issues take place; and the development of criminological expertise on biodiversity protection.



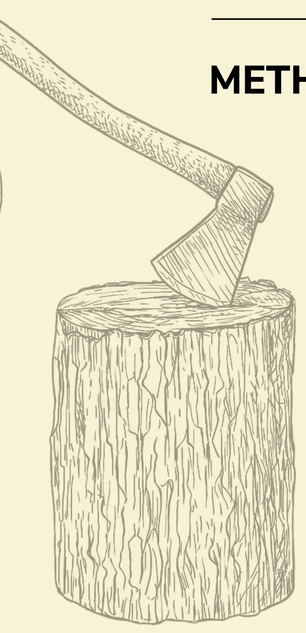
## INTRODUCTION

The research project highlights the essential need to ensure that harm to biodiversity is not neglected and to provide a fair and appropriate social response, including a penal one. This work is therefore intended as a means of curbing the prevailing sense of impunity in this area while establishing an inclusive approach to the preservation of nonhumans. In other words, the CRIM-BIODIV project contributes to debating the relevance of institutional responses to biodiversity damage and the type of reactions they require (retributive, educational, compensatory sanctions, etc.).



## OBJECTIVES

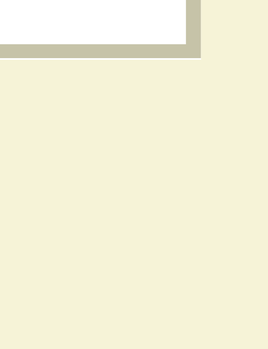
The CRIM-BIODIV project has three operational objectives, based on a relational and micro-social approach to biodiversity damage. Firstly, it intends to identify the mechanisms and levers of individual, citizen, association and professional action in the face of environmental norms protecting biodiversity, including identifying the knowledge, values and attachments of each. Secondly, it aims to increase knowledge on the social representations of environmental norms protecting biodiversity, of deviations from these norms and of the social reaction (including penal reaction) to these deviations. Finally, it aims to identify the methods that can be mobilised to encourage behavioural changes to protect biodiversity, such as indirect suggestions (nudging), based on the sociological elements collected during the investigation.



## METHODOLOGY

The methodological process of the CRIM-BIODIV research is based on four methodological pillars: the construction of an interdisciplinary dialogue between the social sciences and the life sciences; the establishment of a state of knowledge; case studies of biodiversity harm in Belgium; and the construction of a sustainable tool for biodiversity protection.
The construction of criminological knowledge on biodiversity infringements is mainly done through a study of different cases, as many “problem situations” in which an (alleged or proven) harm to biodiversity has led to a questioning or an action on the part of one or several individuals, acting as citizen(s) or as representative(s) of a public authority. The case study allows for an in-depth analysis of diverse present or past situations in their particular context. For each case selected, the methodological approach consists of identifying and analysing the mediatisation and grey literature surrounding it (expert reports, internal notes, etc.); mapping the actors involved in these cases and carrying out semi-directive (anonymous) interviews; for cases “in progress”, observing the action through a presence in the field (on-site observations, attendance at meetings, monitoring of hearing...).
The CRIM-BIODIV project therefore aims to create an inclusive instrument that will contribute to the preservation of biodiversity: a permanent tool for analysing situations where biodiversity is being damaged. The latter will include co-constructed tools for action by the entities concerned. Based on an identification of needs, and following a phase of experimentation in the field, this tool could be used by individuals, environmental associations or public authorities.

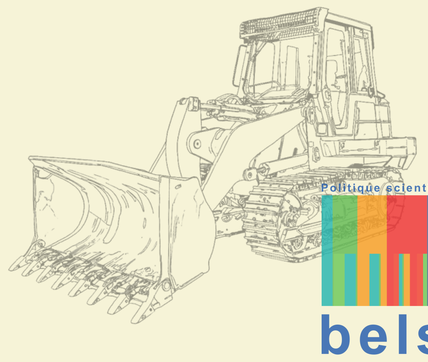
## IMPACTS



The impact of the CRIM-BIODIV project in criminology will be important since it aims to establish a new field of research that has been little explored in French-speaking criminology. Within the human sciences, we expect the project to enable dialogue between criminologists, anthropologists of nature, sociologists of deviance, political scientists... investing in environmental issues. Also and above all, we expect the interdisciplinary dialogue to be fruitful with researchers in ecology and land use planning, in particular, so that the broadest possible alliance can be established for the protection of biodiversity.
Public authorities, and in particular those responsible for the prevention, detection and prosecution of cases of biodiversity damage, will benefit from the analyses that will be produced in the CRIM-BIODIV project as the study of cases of biodiversity harm will reveal "good practices" in this area: the levers for a resolution that takes biodiversity protection seriously; the obstacles to intervention by the competent persons and authorities; the position of the perpetrators; and the factors that would enable them to change their behaviour.
As the aim of the project is to protect biodiversity by increasing criminological knowledge and by building an interdisciplinary dialogue concerning it, it will potentially have a significant impact on the environment and on each of the areas of interaction, between humans and non-humans, that sustain it.

## 15 CASE STUDIES

The CRIM-BIODIV project includes the study of 15 very varied and complementary cases of biodiversity harm, in which the damage to biodiversity is illegal or not, obvious or not: a trial for bird trapping; "concreting" of natural sites; a nudging campaign to reduce pollution in a pond; destruction of natural habitats; management of invasive alien species (here, the raccoon dog and the muntjac deer); a conflict over the use of a natural resource; poaching; deforestation; awareness campaigns promoting "weeds"; hunting infringements; or... the crucifixion of a beaver.



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