

TrIAS-AWARE

Increasing citizen awareness of the need to report observations of alien species

DURATION 15/03/2019 – 15/03/2021	BUDGET 20 000 €
Valorisation of the BRAIN-be project TrIAS	

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The goodwill, cooperation and participation of the general public is essential to the monitoring and management of invasive alien species (IAS). Without their active participation and consent little could be done to discover, monitor and control alien species invasions. Indeed, the cooperation of the public is critical to halting the initial introduction of many species.

Nevertheless, the public do not always understand why conservationists advocate the control and elimination of alien species and they might not understand why it is damaging to release domestic animals into the wild or plant garden plants outside of gardens.

TrIAS-Aware will build upon and valorize the Belspo funded project TrIAS (Tracking Invasive Alien Species). TrIAS is a data driven project to connect citizen science to both policymakers and scientists through automated data workflows. The majority of data used by TrIAS are collected by amateur naturalists and their organizations, such as Natuurpunt and Natagora and TrIAS is analysing these data to create indicators, models and risk assessments for invasive alien species. One of the aims of TrIAS is to provide information on invasive species back to the citizen naturalists in the form of indicators and maps. However, there is no scope within TrIAS to proactively encourage participation in alien species monitoring, nor explaining why this is important for the conservation of biodiversity.

Communication in the language of the participants is perhaps underestimated as a block to participation in science. In a recent study 54% of protected area directors in Spain identified language as a barrier to their work (Amano et al. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.2000933> 2016). However, language probably represents an even greater barrier to certain segments in the population whose participation would be mutually beneficial. Therefore, TrIAS Aware will reach as many people as possible by communicating in their own language on invasive species. We will explain our scientific goals in approachable language free from jargon.

Method

TrIAS-Aware will use the key messages from the TrIAS Communication Plan and explain them in an accessible manner using a mix of media (<https://tinyurl.com/ycz7mvq7>). We will particularly focus on the first key message, which is that we need evidence to inform policy on invasive species. We will use video, digital and print media in Dutch, French and German to explain these messages and we will distribute these media to reach the largest number of people.

As a product of a previous EU funded project, Alien Challenge (<http://www.brc.ac.uk/alien-challenge/home>) a short animated video was created to describe the problem of invasive species and to explain how the general public can contribute by reporting observations (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyprE13Mt5g>). This message fits well with the key messages of the TrIAS project where we aim to make closer links between citizens, scientists and policy makers. However, this video is only available in English and this is a serious limitation to its use as a promotional tool to citizens, not just in Belgium, but also globally. Therefore, to make this video accessible to a much larger audience we will commission voiceovers and subtitling for this video in Dutch, French and German.

To further support this communication effort we will create a high quality infographic in four languages (EN, FR, DE, NL). This graphic will follow the messages of the video, so that the two may be used in conjunction or independently. The artist designing this infographic will work in consultation with the TrIAS consortium and affiliated partners to ensure it is both accessible to our audience and explains clearly what we are trying to achieve.



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In addition we will write six articles in Dutch and French, which will be distributed through the print and digital media of the Botanic Garden, Natagora and Natuurpunt. These articles will be aimed at different audiences and have different goals. More general articles on invasive species will be targeted at the general public to explain the issues. More specific articles will target more expert naturalists and will encourage recording of particular species groups, such as alien birds, grasses, etc. These articles may focus on particular habitats of importance, guidance on species identification or on issues such as the impact of climate change.

Impact

TrIAS-Aware will increase the number of observations being submitted in Belgium and will support the major citizen science organizations, Natagora and Natuurpunt, to fulfil their goals. We anticipate not only encouraging recording of invasive species, but also native species, both of which will benefit conservation in Belgium. The media we are creating will be in the languages of our neighbour countries, so we will also offer our media to organizations in neighbouring countries with the aim of encourage recording of invasive species outside our borders. Invasive species show no respect for national boundaries, such that any improvement in the vigilance and activity against invasive species of our neighbours is also an advantage to Belgium.

Though it will be difficult to measure, we expect that the action will increase awareness of the issue among the general public and reduce the accidental and deliberate release of invasive species in the wild. Many invasive species are introduced accidentally or because the public are unaware of the potential dangers of releasing non-native animals and plants into the wild.

The outputs of the action will be distributed to the members and the mailing list of the Alien-CSI COST Action. Alien-CSI is a European Commission funded networking action to raise awareness of invasive species through citizen science. This consortium of 34 European countries including seven where Dutch, French or German are spoken. Quentin Groom is vice chair of this action and Tim Adriaens is a working group leader. Quentin Groom is also a substitute member of "The Citizen Science COST Action", which has 39 associated countries. The media and project will also be presented to this action as an exemplar.

The outputs of TrIAS-Aware will be sustained by making them openly available on long-term stable platforms. The videos will be uploaded to YouTube and will be embedded in partner websites. All media will be deposited on Zenodo for long term archiving and to provide a digital object identifier (DOI) so it can be cited reliably. This will be done under a permissive Creative Commons licence so that anyone can use and adapt our output for other uses.

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