Online visitor monitoring in Dutch nature reserves and National Parks

John van den Berg, senior recreation and toursim policy advisor Staatsbosbeheer, the Netherlands.

Introduction Staatsbosbeheer & the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a delta area and is a haven for a large share of the European habitats. Out of roughly 200 European habitattypes the Netherlands houses almost 50 habitattypes on just a very small part of Europe that is densely populated.

- 42.000 square kilometers
- 17 million inhabitants
- 480 inhabitants per square kilometer

Staatsbosbeheer – commissioned by the government – manages a considerable share of all nature reserves and National Parks in the Netherlands. Staatsbosbeheer is promoting outdoor-recreation at as many sites as possible.

- 250.000 ha nature reserves and National Parks
- 6% of the total surface of the Netherlands
- 92% is open to the public
- 100-150 million annual visits

Occasion; the budgetcut 2014

In 2014 there was a big cut of almost 40% in the budget for recreation due to government decisions. So it was necessary for Staatsbosbeheer to redefine its recreational ambitions. In this redefinition we wanted to hold the public interest central and operate more demand driven.

At the beginning of 2014 we did have for some of our nature reserves estimations of the visitor numbers and their appreciation. But we didn't have any systematic research regarding visitor numbers for our most visited nature reserves in the different parts of the Netherlands.

So we had to collect visitor data in order to redefine our ambitions and to prioritize.

The task

We had to collect – in a very short time – data regarding our visitors per site. As we are provincial organised the data had to be collected likewise. We wanted to do this for a great number of the most visited sites per province. The collection of the data had to be uniform and without any effort for our local rangers. So we decided to perform online visitor research.The data we wanted to collect should be usuable in ranking our most visited sites and had to increase our knowledge of visitors as well.

The key performance indicators we decided to collect regarding each individual nature site were meant to form an objective set of data leading to insights that informs our decision-making.

Our basic set of questions

- Number of unique visitors
- Characteristics of the visitors
  - male/female ratio
  - age distribution,
- Origin of the visitors
- Categories of number of visits a year

Later on in the process we added some extra features of the visiting public to get a better understanding of our visitors.

Our extended set of questions:

- Activiies during most recent visit
- Expenses during most recent visit
- Appreciation of the area
- Appreciation of different recreational facilities
- Points of improvement of recreational facilities

So during the process of collecting data province by province we made a shift from a more basic to a more sophisticated set of data. With this set of data we are able to make decisions on the provincial level. And whats more the data helps us to get a better understanding of the visitors to an specific nature reserve.

Study design

As Staatsbosbeheer was not experienced in online research we worked closely together with TNS.NIPO and NBTC. Two Dutch private organisations. NBTC is the Dutch organisation experienced in the field of tourism and marketing. TNS.NIPO is a leading global research agency specialised in online research. Based on our set of questions they made a preliminay basic design. The benefit of working together with NBTC and TNS.NIPO is that the outcome of the research comes up to high standards. After testing the study design in one province we added some additional questions. At the moment we have data for the most visited site of 6 out of 12 Dutch provinces.

In the online visitor research all visitors of 0 year and older are included. The weighted sample is drawn out of an existing national database. In this weighted sample the inhabitant close by are overrepresented, those living at a greater distance are underrepresented. This is according to the distance people are willing to travel in visiting a nature reserve or National Park. Regarding children under the age of 12; one of the parents of the child is approached for the research. The definition of a visit is a visit in spare time in the preceeding 12 months. We donn't apply any time restrictions, so a short visit less then 30 minutes is also included. On the other hand commuting is excluded as it has no recreational purpose, but a visit by car through or to the sites is included.

Figure 1.

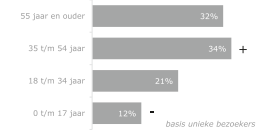
Bezoekersaantallen (o.b.v. unieke bezoekers) naar natuurgebieden in Noord-Brabant

	Gebied	Aantal unieke bezoekers*
1	Loonse en Drunense Duinen	1.209.000
2	De Biesbosch	790.000
3	]DVWER\ën Markdal	514.000
4	Dordtse Biesbosch	453.000
5	WHUZLMNWH bossen en Vennen	416.000
6	De Kempen	401.000
7	Leenderbos	323.000
8	Strabrechtse +HLGH	296.000
9	Dorst	277.000
10	Groote Peel	270.000
11	Deurnse 3HHO	235.000
12	Bossche %URHN	232.000
13	Kampina	216.000
14	Chaamse %RV	200.000
15	0DDVKRUVW	198.000
16	Huis ter Heide	177.000
17	/LHVERV	175.000
18	Sliedrechtse Biesbosch	170.000
19	Ulvenhoutse %RV	170.000
20	Maasuiterwaarden	149.000

	Gebied	Aantal unieke bezoekers*
21	Ulvenhoutse 9RRUERV	143.000
22	0DULDSHHO	134.000
23	Moerputten	122.000
24	Sint Anthonisbos	104.000
25	Haagse Beemdenbos	101.000
26	Oud Meer	99.000
27	6WULMEHHN	96.000
28	Oude Buisse Heide	90.000
29	Princesseplaat/ Auvergnepolder	84.000
30	Wijbosch	83.000
31	Plateaux	80.000
32	Langenboomse Bossen/ Molenheide	76.000
33	Alphense Bergen	74.000
34	Stippelbergen	69.000
35	De Pan	63.000
36	Dintelse Gorzen	51.000
37	De Geelders	39.000
38	Moretusbos	27.000
39	Beestenveld	20.000
40	Kelsdonk	11.000

* De bezoekersaantallen zijn gebaseerd op het aantal unieke bezoekers per gebied in de periode tweede helft november 2014 tot tweede helft november 2015. Een persoon die een bepaald gebied meerdere keren heeft bezocht, is in de genoemde bezoekersaantallen slechts één keer meegeteld. Voor meer informatie, zie de leeswijzer in hoofdstuk 2.

2. De Biesbosch — 790.000 bezoekers



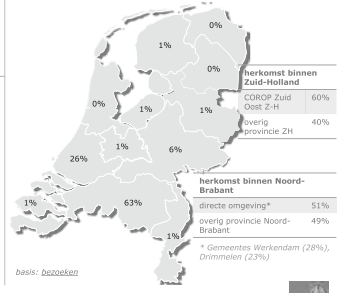
basis unieke bezoekers

+/- score is significant hoger/lager dan het totaal bezoekers aan onderzochte natuurgebieden in Noord-Brabant

aantal keren bezocht op jaarbasis in 2015		
1 bezoek	58%	460.000
2 - 3 bezoeken	25%	201.000
4 - 9 bezoeken	7%	59.000
10 - 24 bezoeken	4%	34.000
25 - 49 bezoeken	<1%	5.000
50+ bezoeken	1%	8.000
Onbekend	3%	23.000

basis unieke bezoekers

basis unieke bezoekers

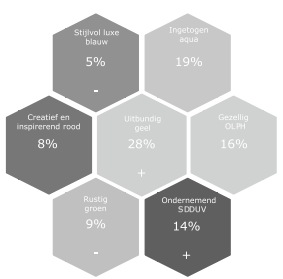


* Gemeentes Werkendam (28%), Drimmelen (23%)

basis: bezoeken

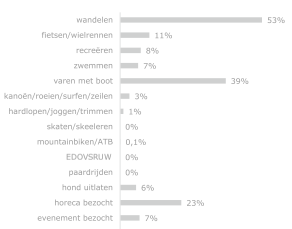
2. De Biesbosch — 790.000 bezoekers

Leisure Leefstijlensegmentatie



+/- score is significant hoger/lager dan het totaal bezoekers aan onderzochte natuurgebieden in Noord-Brabant

Ondernomen activiteiten tijdens het meest recente bezoek



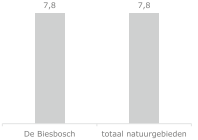
€ 10,85

per persoon uitgegeven aan het meest recente bezoek

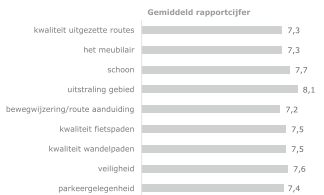
basis alle figuren op deze pagina: unieke bezoekers

2. De Biesbosch — 790.000 bezoekers

Gemiddeld rapportcijfer



Gemiddeld rapportcijfer



Opmerkingen/suggesties/verbeterpunten *(bij een 6 of lager op een of meer aspecten)*

"Slechte aanduilding parkeergelegenheid en weinig picknickplekken."

"Er zijn veel smalle (hele mooie) wandelpaden in dit gebied maar het is tevens een vochtig gebied waardoor deze paden snel erg modderig worden. Ik vond dat er weinig bankjes waren in het gebied waar ik gewandeld heb, dat zou meer mogen want vaak maak je toch langere wandelingen in een dergelijk gebied."

"Duidelijkere vaarroutes faciliteiten strandjes in de Biesbosch."

"Wandelpaden kunnen verbeterd worden door het aanbrengen van schelpenzand de routes kunnen d.m.v. duidelijkere borden bewegwijzerd worden."

basis alle figuren op deze pagina: unieke bezoekers

Restrictions

Our online research is quantitative not qualitative. We made this choice to have a very short questionnaire for preventing the recipient to get bored and answering less accurate. The advantage of working with research agency TNS.NIPO is that they make a weighted sample out of an existing database of subjects of which they allready had data like; age, gender, address, lifestyle etc..

We have no insight into the intensity of land use areas for all of our sites. On the other hand, for large areas as National Parks we can distinguish areas and get an insight in the most visited entrance.

Reflection

With the data of the the online research we were able to prioritize sites within a province. We now have a close look on the number of visitors to our most visited nature reserves and National Parks. We also got a better idea of the visitors, of its age, its gender, its recreational preferences an estimation of its number of yearly visits and so on.

And last but not least we could map the recreational expenditure at the last visit. Combined with the number of unique visitors this leads to the total recreational expenditure at the last visit. With this key performance indicator we are able to have a dialogue with the provincial government regarding the prior budget cut.