

Dear Sir,

The Dutch National Society of Family Gardens, the AVVN, would like to nominate the family garden park 'Nieuwe Levenskracht' ('New Vitality') for the international certificate of ecological family gardening. 'Nieuwe Levenskracht' is a member of the Amsterdam branch organisation of the AVVN. The garden complex was founded in 1933 and has recently celebrated its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The management-team of 'Nieuwe Levenskracht' takes an active approach in promoting ecological gardening amongst the gardeners, and has done so for fifteen years. This resulted in 35 percent of the park members practicing ecological gardening. The park was awarded the three-stars National Certificate for ecological gardening thirteen years ago and this status was prolonged year on year.

Seven years ago the attempts to strengthen the ecological significance of the garden park for the urban area of Amsterdam were renewed, resulting in a four-level approach:

- 1.) Identifying and developing the existing ecological values of the garden park.
- 2.) Seeking cooperation with third parties.
- 3.) Enhancing ecological consciousness and the experience of the natural world with both gardeners and visitors from surrounding urban areas.
- 4.) Developing education on topics concerning nature and ecological gardening.

Implementing these policies effectively improved the ecological status of the garden park and will continue to do so in the future. The garden park was granted a four-stars National Certificate, the highest achievable, in 2013 as a direct result of these improvements.

A summary of the most important achievements:

The expansion of Amsterdam since the 1930's has resulted in a unique layout of the city. Newly developed urban areas stretch like fingers of a hand into the surrounding region with broad green wedges between them. With the ongoing urbanization the vitality of these green wedges was endangered. In order to integrate the isolated green areas into a network a 'Main Ecological Structure' was developed at the start of this century. Waterways and drainage canals along which animals can migrate interconnect the green areas and play a vital role in the integration. This set of waterways is called the 'ecolint'.

Garden park 'Nieuwe Levenskracht' is located in one of the green wedges, close to a main ecological zone of migration. If our garden park could improve its function as an ecological stepping stone along the migration route it would contribute to the integration of the green zones. This would in its turn be beneficial to the ecological structure surrounding Amsterdam.

In 2006 a plan was drawn up to adjust the banks of the main drainage canal which runs through the park and the neighbouring sporting grounds. Both the water control board (Hoogheemraadschap Gooi- en Vechtstreek) and the province of Noord-Holland recognized its relevance and contributed financially to its execution. A number of educational and informational meetings were held for the park members in order to raise enthusiasm for the project. To encourage the feeling of shared responsibility it was decided that an important part of the project was to be executed by the gardeners themselves.

A zone of gradual transition between the water of the drainage-canal and the embankment was established by the creation of wetland areas; a modification beneficial to many groups of animal species such as snakes (grass snake), amphibians, birds and dragonflies. Next to the wetland areas an array of other biotopes was realized. A wall of sods (plaggenmuur) was built as habitat to all kinds of insects, small animals and specific plants. And furthermore an

extended lime-mortar insect-reptile-wall with a wide variety of micro-climates was erected. Dead-hedges were placed on several locations providing living space for all sorts of small animals and to facilitate new generations of grass snakes a brooding heap was assembled. Currently a toad-pool is in the last phases of construction. Also a number of insect hotels were placed throughout the park area.

A wide variety of indigenous plants was planted. As time passed new species also appeared spontaneously. At the last count more than 185 species were listed, varying from common to endangered species. A fixed group of volunteers is responsible for the maintenance of these ecological zones.

During the preparation and execution phase of the project there was an elaborate cooperation with the management of the adjacent sporting grounds. This organisation has taken important steps in improving the ecological status of the area under its control. Another result of the cooperation was that across the sporting grounds and the garden park several walking-routes were laid out. In a joint effort with the municipality of Amsterdam numerous educational signs were developed which were placed along these walking-routes. The signs give in a colour- and playful way information about the nature and animal life on the sporting grounds and the garden park.

On a regular basis presentations are given to park members and the neighbourhood on topics concerning the ecological projects.

To assure continuity of the current policy and sustained commitment to the development of ecological values, the park management, the ecozone-volunteers and the park maintenance group have drawn up plans for the coming years formulating new projects and improvements to our embedding in the 'Main Ecological Structure' of Amsterdam.