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THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER FROM THE PIERRE & VACANCES - CENTER PARCS GROUP

Groupe

**Pierre & Vacances**  
*CenterParcs*

## Biodiversity: on course toward pollinator tourism

Tourism can pose a risk to biodiversity, but it can also help conserve it and teach the public about its significance. It really benefits people in the field since their activity depends so much on these natural assets. Pierre & Vacances - Center Parcs knows this all too well and is on the case.

### Main topics

#### GROUNDWORK P. 2

The Group is building an increasingly structured approach to protecting biodiversity at its sites.

#### IN PRACTICE P. 5

From maintaining green spaces to managing tropical plants: spotlight on actions.

#### WHAT'S NEXT? P. 7

Upcoming projects include an effort to improve management of the Group's process and raise more awareness on biodiversity with its customers and owners.

#### UP FOR DEBATE P. 8

To what extent should we shield nature? Opinions from Jean Chabert from Pierre & Vacances Development and Antoine Cadi from the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (Bird Protection League).

### EDITORIAL

**Fostering both the harmony of our sites with their surroundings and the interaction of our customers with the environment are two fundamentals of the Group.**

In 1967, the Group's first venture in Avoriaz was the first car-free ski resort, with a biomimetic architecture that makes buildings look like the mountains around them. At the same time in the Netherlands, the first Center Parcs was inviting city dwellers to recharge their batteries in the heart of the forest. Forty-five years later, this quest to reconcile the built and the natural environments, and guest experience, remains central to our projects. The 22nd Center Parcs Vienne is under construction and is going even further to offer an experience where one can watch semi-wild animals. Villages Nature, a project developed with Euro Disney, will offer a unique «nature» experience and showcase planted buildings. Enhancing forests and landscapes, designing gardens in harmony with nature, developing and operating sites while taking care of biodiversity - these are the actions our Group is undertaking to help our customers reconnect with their loved-ones and with nature...



**Gérard Brémond,**  
Président of Pierre & Vacances -  
Center Parcs



Nature deserves  
a break

More information about the  
sustainable development  
approach of Pierre & Vacances -  
Center Parcs Group is available on:  
[www.groupepvc.com](http://www.groupepvc.com)

# Protecting biodiversity: natural capital of the tourism industry

From designing to operating its sites, Pierre & Vacances - Center Parcs is working to control its impact on biodiversity as much as possible. What's at stake? Meeting the demands of its stakeholders – with its customers at the front lines.

Besides the residences in areas where the natural heritage is the main attraction, the Group manages 15 villages clubs located in sprawling rustic spaces and 21 Center Parcs nestled in the heart of the forests. Directly affected by biodiversity issues, it is becoming increasingly diligent in its efforts to protect the flora and fauna. Ever stricter regulations mandate it.

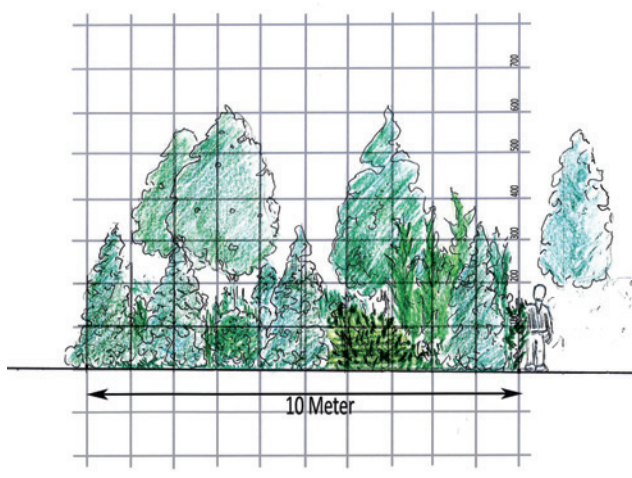
The priority is to prevent, reduce its impacts on species and habitats and offset them as a last resort. This requirement is particularly affecting building permits for new facilities. Now even before finalizing its decision on a piece of land, the Group commissions ecologists to do a preliminary survey to check whether it is located in a sensitive area. Once the location is selected, it then conducts a detailed four-season inventory on fauna, flora and natural habitats. "The main goal is to detect if there are any protected species," explains Alexandre Delamarre of Biotope. "At the future site of the Center Parcs of La Vienne we found several dozen protected species, some of which have local implications, particularly the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and a butterfly called the marsh fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*). We

meticulously analysed the populations and even went as far as to count the butterfly's caterpillars. But we are also interested in more common species and how the ecology works as a whole. The aim is to identify all the issues at hand so we can take the necessary conservation measures."

## Spark biodiversity whenever possible

Designing the general layout for the Center Parcs Vienne was an ongoing process and it was revised a number of times to give the site's ecological constraints as much consideration as possible. Among other things, the Group planned for fewer cottages to leave untouched an area with a high concentration of great crested newts and devil's bit (devil's bit attracts the fritillary). For the road leading to the construction site and the facility, certain existing forest paths will be off-limits since they are lined with devil's bit and newts. In an effort to offset its marginal impacts, it will build marshes for the newts and bring in and transplant devil's bit. But it only intend to offset in the strict sense of term. "Our goal, if possible, is

*"The main goal is to detect if there are any protected species"*



View of the park five years after opening Center Parcs Bostalsee. This park is scheduled for opening in 2013.

A VIP cottage at the Center Parcs Vienne. \*

to spark biodiversity,” points out Marie Balmain, Sustainable Development Manager: select plant species that benefit natural habitats and restore the ecological corridors destroyed by past exploitation of the soil so the fauna can move around freely and multiply... And going forward, design biodiversity-positive projects and buildings with planted roofs and façades. This approach is already heralding the new Villages Nature project...

Protecting sensitive areas, preventing pollution of the soil and water, etc. In order to better control the risks of destroying the natural environment during construction, the Group has drawn up a green construction charter. And the process also continues into the operational phase. The Group is notably getting ready to apply ecological maintenance rules for green spaces and natural areas.

.....  
**“Design biodiversity-positive projects and buildings”**  
 .....

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## 3 QUESTIONS FOR...

**Eric Magnier**, Key Account Manager  
at Pierre & Vacances Development

**Several measures were taken at the Center Parcs des Trois Forêts in Moselle, France to stimulate biodiversity. What is the outcome so far?**

We created about a dozen water ponds in the forest by very carefully selecting where they ought to be built. Administrative authorities have noticed they have attracted amphibious species and insects and that larger animals are coming there to drink, etc. We also restored the beds of the water streams that run through the site which had previously been ruined by the logging industry.

A concrete structure had collapsed into one of them and was blocking the fish. Surveys by the French National Bureau of Water and Aquatic Environments show they have now come back.

**What changes are you noticing between past projects and the project in La Vienne?**

The authorities are stepping up oversight to protect endangered species and their habitats. They are also taking a more comprehensive approach to the regulatory packages (on water, land clearing and endangered species). In La Vienne we

really considered every aspect of biodiversity and ecological services, for example not only replant to replace what we have cleared but also choose plant species that encourage biodiversity, increase the vegetation around catchment areas for drinking water to improve its quality etc.

**How do you work with the environmental advocacy groups?**

They are involved in the projects beginning in the design phase. In La Vienne they will also be part of the site's biodiversity oversight committee during its operation, which is a new feature.

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***“In 30 years we have planted over 1 million trees and bushes from 450 species!”***

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>> In France, it is the only private green and natural space manager to have helped create the Ecojardin label launched in 2011 by the Plante & Cité Association. Lastly, villages clubs and Center Parcs are creating activities to raise customer awareness about nature, mainly designed for children.

### **A voluntary effort rooted in the Group’s history**

“For us, protecting biodiversity is more than a regulatory obligation,” explains Marie Balmain. “First and foremost, it’s about giving customers what they want. Reconnecting to nature is a major trend in tourism and for the most part Pierre & Vacances - Center Parcs saw it coming. “The “green wave” in France finds its origins in a passion for gardens,” recalls Thierry Huau, a government-certified landscaper and urban planner who realises the Group’s projects. Pierre & Vacances - Center Parcs was quick to meet the challenge. Twenty years ago, it built one of the first tourist sites that speculated on the appeal of a garden - that was the le village club des Restanques du Golfe de Saint-Tropez. No one was talking about biodiversity yet, but even back then we were weaving a narrative about the local plant world by blending native and cultivated plants, creating a lake with undeveloped banks that attracted a whole anthology of plants, insects and amphibians, not cutting down trees, nurturing the ecosystems beneath the oak groves, etc.” Nature is also embedded the DNA of Center Parcs which are designed as places to re-energize at the foot of the forest. “We have always

put emphasis on the landscape quality and have a long history of championing biodiversity,” explains Jean Henkens, a biologist and landscape architect at Center Parcs. “In 30 years we have planted over 1 million trees and bushes from 450 species in de Het Heijderbos or de Kempervennen parks in Belgium!” The public’s interest in nature is going to start growing. By applying a voluntary approach to protecting ecosystems, the Group is making its sites more attractive. That is why it also values the heritage of the institutional and individual owners that invest in the sites. Lastly, it helps promote acceptance among the local populations and environmental groups for its activities while meeting increasingly stringent requirements from local governments to protect the natural heritage. In other words, it is securing a long future for its development. ●



The village club des Restanques du Golfe de Saint-Tropez.

## RECAP

### **Integrating biodiversity in site construction and operation**

1 Choose locations with beautiful landscapes that are not in sensitive areas.

2 Design facilities and green/natural spaces that encourage biodiversity and provide customers an excellent natural environment.

3 Maintain the green and natural spaces in a way that stimulates biodiversity and offers customers a place to reconnect with nature.

## Differentiated management of green areas and nature : test and deployment

**D**ifferentiated management of green areas and nature is designed to protect biodiversity by modulating maintenance for different parts of a garden according to their use. For example, not cutting the grass short in a remote area and giving it some added aesthetic value, perhaps even replacing it with a flowered prairie, leaving a grassy rim around the base of a tree trunk, maintaining organic niches like dead trees, etc. It also means covering exposed soil with shredded green waste (mulch) to prevent evaporation and cut down on watering, discouraging weeds from spreading and attracting beneficial fauna, reducing the use of chemical products and promoting organic-based control methods with natural predators like using ladybirds for aphids, a technique that is well-known by now.

### Fewer chemical products

The Group began considering this move in 2008 and tested it on three sites in 2012. "Now we use almost no herbicide except on the pathways," says Alexandre Morosolli, the Director of the village club Pierre & Vacances of Port-Bourgenay in the Vendée region. The mulch makes the soil loose and easy to work, so we can pull out the weeds by hand without much effort. These practices require retraining, but the gardeners are even more on board because it protects their health and makes their work more meaningful. It also requires informing the customers, who are sometimes surprised to see parts of an ornamental garden in their natural state. Their overall reaction has been very

positive. Customer satisfaction regarding green spaces is very high, a proof that we can reconcile ecology and aesthetic." These results have prompted the Group to speed things up. "We built a differentiated management standard plan for all our sites," explains Alix Houdayer, Sustainable Development Operational Manager. "It included a report on current maintenance methods and devising standard space classification codes to map out all the zones according to their purpose (ornamental, natural, etc.) and rules to enforce in each one. By the spring of 2013, the 22 French sites with green spaces larger than 2000 m<sup>2</sup> will have completed their differentiated management plan. "To put these plans into practice, the Group is reviewing contracts that link it to the site and land owners." ●

*"The mulch makes the soil loose and easy to work, so we can pull out the weeds by hand without much effort."*

**69%**

of customers are charmed or very satisfied by the green space maintenance at the village club Pierre & Vacances of Port-Bourgenay in August 2012. Only 1% was unsatisfied.

**25%**

of sites are affected by this approach, or all the sites with green and natural spaces (gardens and forests) larger than 2,000 m<sup>2</sup>.



The village club Normandy Garden in Branville, close to Deauville - The differentiated management of green areas and nature means for example adjusting how high the grass is cut. The challenge is to protect habitats and promote biodiversity while providing a comfortable space for customers.

## Aquariaz – Aqua Mundo Responsible management for tropical plants

**A**quariaz, the Group's new water park in Avoriaz, France and Aqua Mundo in Center Parcs feature a good deal of tropical vegetation. These plants cannot handle the cold so are not at risk of becoming invasive. Jean Henkens, the Center Parcs biologist and landscape architect, collects them from tropical countries and is careful to protect biodiversity and local economies. "I only take a plant if there are more than 100 specimens per hectare. If not, I take back seeds, cuttings or plants from deforested lots slotted to be burned for farming. These

Aqua Mundo - Center Parcs of Het Heijderbos in the Netherlands.

samples are taken with the consent of local populations. As a tradeoff, the Group supports development projects to start new schools, health centres, knowledge exchange programmes, etc." To transport the plants, they are put to sleep with an injection that enables them to last several weeks in a shipping container without water or light. In Europe they are first transplanted in a greenhouse to help them adapt to their new environment. Only an average of one plant per thousand does not survive the journey. ●



Wanna be a gardener" at Center Parcs

## Center Parcs - Pierre & Vacances villages clubs "Wanna be a Gardner."

**T**he Group raises awareness among its young customers about biodiversity. Many Center Parcs house a teaching farm and some are hosting activities called "Wanna be a forest ranger" or "Wanna be a gardener" to introduce them to the forest and gardening. On their side,

the Pierre & Vacances villages clubs organise activities called Eco'lidays focused on issues of the future. For example, in the summer of 2012 themes included bees and pollination. ●

## The Parcs de Port-Grimaud 18 hectares of protected land

**F**or 10 years, the Pierre & Vacances Les Parcs de Port-Grimaud residence near Saint-Tropez has been listed as a protected area by the local chapter of the Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (Bird Protection League). With over 50 species of birds, the park's ornithological diversity has flourished by eliminating chemical fertilizers, planting a wide range of different tree species and installing new birdhouses. Signs are posted to inform customers and information is given on that subject when they arrive at the site. ●



More than 50 species in the Pierre & Vacances Les Parcs de Grimaud Residence.

## Selective purchasing to protect biodiversity

All of the tropical wood bought for new Pierre & Vacances - Center Parcs projects are FSC or PEFC certified. The Group is also preparing to serve organic food. For example, the Pierre & Vacances villages clubs are working with their catering partner to offer a breakfast composed of fair-trade and organic products.

## New projects: measuring biodiversity and showing its value to customers

*“Getting the public to see the environment in a new way”*



The biodiversity trail in the village club Pierre & Vacances of Belle Dune: created with WWF France, it teaches people about the local flora and fauna with informative signs posted along the walk around the lake.

Volumes of chemical products used, percentage of ground made artificial... Pierre & Vacances - Center Parcs is already following indicators relative to its impact on the ecosystems (see inset). The next step is measuring the progress of biodiversity on its sites. “We need indicators in order to make sure our efforts are having a positive effect and demonstrate that to our stakeholders when we start new projects,” explains Marie

Balmain, Sustainable Development Manager. The authorities are also becoming ever-more vigilant about monitoring the measures companies are taking to offset their impact on biodiversity. For example, in France sites inspections that were focusing up to now especially on water, tend to be reinforced. We still need to convert changes in biodiversity into practical indicators, which is no easy task. “Working with nature is never easy,” acknowledges Alexandre Delamarre from Biotope. “Providing you use reproducible counting methods, it is definitely relatively easy to see how a given species is developing. But, for instance, there are external factors that

can alter it. This could mean the population of bats that were hunting and reproducing in the summer at a Center Parcs may go down because the cave where they live (located outside the park) in the winter has been destroyed.”

### A new outlook on the environment

A new project awaits the Group: to show its customers the value of biodiversity on its sites. There is a whole host of communications tools yet to be invented and developed to improve how we explain this approach to customers. Signs that encourage tourists to explore life in a marsh or a ditch, to learn about insects, workshops about growing an ecologically friendly kitchen garden, etc. A holiday village can also be a vehicle for getting the public to see the environment in a new way. ●

### Five indicators under surveillance.

#### Protecting biodiversity

- Volume of chemical products used
- Proportion of sites that have introduced a differentiated management of green areas and nature

#### Preventing pollution

- Proportion of waste that is sorted on construction sites
- Proportion of sites set up to sort waste and encouraging their customers to sort

#### Sustainable use of the soil

percentage of ground made artificial for new projects.



**Jean Chabert**, Managing Director of Pierre & Vacances Development

## To what extent should we shield nature?



**Antoine Cadi**, advisor to the Managing Director of the LPO (Bird Protection League)

**“Our goal is to demonstrate the value of biodiversity of the sites we operate and to bring nature at the heart of the client’s experience.**

*Developing a new project is a long term process that requires a constructive dialogue with our stakeholders. For any new development, we surround ourselves with experts to devise solutions designed to protect the flora and fauna as much as possible and even sometime restore some habitats that were severely damaged by past activities. We work closely with local authority to do so. This is carried out together with a reflexion on the landscape and green areas design in order to offer to our clients a high quality environment based on local species and that encourages biodiversity.*

*On few projects though, we are encountering obstacles. Biodiversity indeed remains a very touchy subject that frequently brings out opinion based on ideology. More than any other, It demands that the local experts, environmental groups and operators truly work together.”*

**“Today it is no longer a question of making nature a sanctuary, even though we have to keep creating reserves to protect endangered species.**

*We must urgently figure out solutions where people and human activity can find a happy medium with nature. It goes without saying we have to protect species but also the natural spaces for the benefits they provide so that the pollinators can continue their work, the groundwater is replenished, water and air stays clean, etc. It is vital to control the part of ground made artificial. That does not mean stopping all development projects, it means bringing artificialisation closer to zero by requiring undeveloped areas to offset any space lost, returning industrial wastelands to nature, working to incorporate biodiversity into new construction, etc. In other words, explore new ways of doing things. That is why the LPO is asking to work with businesses to find solutions to advance towards a greater recognition of biodiversity at all levels and make it part of the know-how of all businesses. In other words, how to boldly turn toward a system of progress. We will find even more innovative and effective solutions by combining our skills and challenging each other on these new opportunities.”*

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Created in 1967, the Pierre & Vacances–Center Parcs Group is the European leader in local tourism. It has built its growth on an original business model of synergies between its two businesses: property development and tourism. Today, with its six complementary tourism brands, the Group operates a tourism network of almost 50,000 apartments and homes, located in 300 sites in Europe.

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