

Wildlife Hospital 'Natuurhulpcentrum'

City: Oudsbergen

Period of the project: 1st April – 30th September 2023

Accommodation: Host family

Activities and mission of the organisation:

Natuurhulpcentrum is a wildlife rescue center that helps around 10.000 birds and animals yearly.

80% of the animals are wild native ones. They are brought to the center or caught by an animal rescue team, because of they are wounded, ill or too young to take care of themselves. Cured animals are then released back into nature.

20% of the animals are exotic ones. They are brought to the center because of seizure, abundance, closure of zoo's, ...). They temporarily stay at the Natuurhulpcentrum until a new home is found.

Sector of the organisation: **wildlife conservation**

Location of the project:

Oudsbergen is a municipality in the Belgian province of Limburg that has 23,000 inhabitants. It is situated 10 km from Genk – a city of 80,000 inhabitants – and 20 km from Hasselt, the capital of the province Limburg. Most of the inhabitants of Oudsbergen work in small enterprises with different purposes. Oudsbergen – 90 km east of Brussels and 15 km west from the borders with the Netherlands and Germany – is well-known in Belgium for its woods and eco-tourism.

Workplace environment:

Natuurhulpcentrum has permanent staff, but as a non-profit association, most of the co-workers are volunteers of all ages. There are also interns throughout the year, who mostly stay for a few weeks up to a few months.

What the volunteer can expect:

An international volunteer will create the opportunity for a cultural exchange between the 125 local volunteers and himself/herself. Moreover, working with an international volunteer will have a stimulating and motivating effect on the local volunteers because they will feel internationally appreciated for the job they are doing.

Tasks of the volunteer:

The volunteer will be involved in the daily management of the center.

This includes:

- assistance to medical care of fractures and wounds (5%)
- feeding the animals (45%);
- upkeep of accommodations (10%),
- cleaning cages and fence (35%),

- assisting in the organisation of the 'Open House' – event, which takes place in September
- educational programmes (only if you speak Dutch), such as the following:
 - Raising awareness about the environment and nature through educational activities.
 - Walking events, such as the “fox wander”, an adventurous evening walk in the forests of Oudsbergen. During this walk the participants will meet several “fairy talelike animals” who will offer something to eat or drink or who will give a task. If the participant does all the tasks well, he/she can win a little price.
 - For schools: guided tours of the center.
 - Informative posts on the association’s website or brochures e.g. about feeding the birds in the winter.

Specific requirements:

Volunteers should be willing to be involved in the daily activities of the center, be motivated to carry out all kinds of tasks. The volunteer will receive training for the tasks he/she will be expected to carry out.

Required language skills:

Basic knowledge of English and strong motivation to learn Dutch.

Volunteer’s benefit:

- The volunteer will learn the names, habits, history, food etc. of the wild animals in the center.
- The volunteer will learn how to take care of hurt animals: what to do when an animal is hurt and brought to the center (e.g. first of all, the animal is put in a dark room, as this will help it calm down after experiencing stress).
- The volunteer will learn how to calm down an animal who is panicking or in pain.
- The volunteer will learn to tell which accommodation is most suitable for which kind of animal.
- The volunteer will learn about the environment and nature.
- The volunteer will learn the cleaning criteria and methods for the cages.
- The volunteer will learn how to rescue wild animals from difficult situations, e.g. a roe in a garden.
- The volunteer will learn how to raise little wild animals that don’t have a mother anymore, as well as how to feed them, keep them warm, etc.
- The volunteer will learn how to work together with others. He/she will develop communication techniques and skills about working in a group.
- The volunteer will learn how to present information to others, e.g. when a class of children comes to visit the center.
- The volunteer will learn how the local people deal with nature, what their vision on nature and on environmental problems is, what the local politics about nature are, and how wild animals are handled. The local people on the other hand will be able to make contact with the culture of the volunteer and they will learn how he/she sees nature in all its different aspects.
- The volunteer will learn more about the dynamics of volunteer work in the Belgian culture. The local people on the other hand will have the opportunity to learn more about the dynamics of volunteer work in the culture of the volunteer.

By working together with the local people, the volunteer will be able to get deeply in contact with the Belgian culture. He/She will learn about the visible things, such as food, clothes and music, but also about the invisible things, such as opinions and values. In the same way, the local people will be able to get deeply in contact with the culture of the volunteer as they will work very closely together.