



Nesting boxes on Elia pylons provide successful places for kestrels to breed

- Elia works with local residents, farmers, nature lovers and environmental organisations associations to improve biodiversity around its overhead lines.
- Nesting boxes hanging from high-voltage pylons are a popular place for kestrels to breed in.
- Farmers also benefit from these boxes: there are fewer crop losses because kestrels chase away mice and other small rodents.
- Over the past 15 years, more than 300 chicks have been hatched in the nesting boxes hanging from Elia's pylons between Tienen and Sint-Truiden.
- This year, 8 of the 10 nesting boxes were used by kestrels.

Since 2007, more than 300 young kestrels have been born in nesting boxes hanging from the Elia high-voltage line between Tienen and Sint-Truiden. Ten nesting boxes hang about ten metres above the ground on pylons along this line. Due to their location (high up in the air and near agricultural land), the boxes have proven to be a great success for this bird species. This year, eight nesting boxes were used: in two of the boxes, the chicks were already big enough to ring. On Friday 24 June, the other chicks will be ringed. By hanging up these nesting boxes, Elia is promoting biodiversity around its facilities.

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We are aware that our overhead lines have an impact on the environment. We take measures that are beneficial for the ecosystem and biodiversity in order to limit our impact on the environment. Installing these nesting boxes is a good example of some of the steps we are taking. We will continue to work on this in future.

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Ilse Tant, Chief Community Relations Officer

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The kestrel population is under pressure. The nesting boxes hanging from pylons are safe breeding sites where they can raise their young in peace. Elia staff remove the young birds from the nesting boxes so we can ring them and monitor their movements. We hope Elia will continue and even expand this kind of work in future.

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Philippe Smets, scientist and ringer



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In 2006, Elia was asked to hang nesting boxes for kestrels on pylons along the overhead line running between Tienen and Sint-Truiden. After assessing factors like the best orientation for breeding success, pylon accessibility and different options for safely hanging the boxes, Elia decided to hang 10 nesting boxes along the line. Given its location in an agricultural area, the project has proven to be a true win-win: farmers are seeing less crop loss because kestrels hunt mice and other small rodents that inhabit their crops. It is also a great habitat for the birds themselves.

The nesting boxes hang 8 to 10 metres above the ground, meaning the kestrels can easily spot prey and fly in and out of them freely. The nesting boxes are firmly attached to the pylons to ensure they do not move around in the wind, so providing a quiet home for kestrels. There is also very little chance of their eggs being taken. Thanks to all these factors, the nesting boxes have been a success. Back in 2007, Elia was able to ring 30 chicks. 2011 was the best year for bird ringing: 43 chicks were ringed. Some years proved to be less successful for the nesting boxes; in 2016 for example, only 12 chicks hatched. But in 2020, 32 chicks hatched. This year, we were able to ring 9 kestrels from 2 nests. In the other nests, the eggs hadn't hatched yet or the chicks were not mature enough to ring.

To ring the chicks, a specially trained Elia employee with permission to do so climbs the mast up to the nesting box and then places the chick in a special bag. Once the young bird has been lowered to the ground, a ringer (scientist) takes notes about certain pieces of data, such as the chick's wing length and gender. The chick is then ringed and safely returned to its nest.

Elia has hung nesting boxes for kestrels, peregrine falcons and even an osprey throughout various locations in Belgium. Three peregrine falcons were recently ringed in the Rupelstreek region, where more than 50 peregrine falcons have been ringed over the last 20 years. Elia also carries out such work for smaller birds; it has hung nesting boxes for swifts in Schelle and tawny owls in Tisselt.

About Elia Group

One of Europe's top five players

Elia Group is active in electricity transmission. We ensure that generation and consumption are balanced around the clock, supplying 30 million end users with electricity. With subsidiaries in Belgium (Elia) and the north and east of Germany (50Hertz), we operate 19,271 km of high-voltage connections. As such, our group is one of Europe's top 5. With a reliability level of 99.999%, we give society a robust power grid, which is important for socio-economic prosperity. We also aspire to be a catalyst for a successful energy transition towards a reliable, sustainable and affordable energy system.

We make the energy transition happen

By expanding international high-voltage connections and integrating ever-increasing amounts of renewable energy into our grid, we are promoting both the integration of the European energy market and the decarbonisation of society. We also continuously optimise our operational systems and develop new market products so that new technologies and market parties can access our grid, thus further facilitating the energy transition.

In the interest of society

As a key player in the energy system, Elia Group is committed to working in the interest of society. We respond to the rapidly changing energy mix, i.e. the increase in renewable energy, and constantly adapt our transmission grid. We also ensure that investments are made on time and within budget, with a maximum focus on safety. When we carry out our projects, we manage stakeholders proactively by establishing two-way communication with all affected parties very early on in the development process. We also offer our expertise to our sector and relevant authorities to build the energy system of the future.

International focus

In addition to its activities as a transmission system operator, Elia Group provides various consulting services to international customers through its subsidiary Elia Grid International (EGI). Elia is also part of the Nemo Link consortium that operates the first subsea electrical interconnector between Belgium and the UK.

Elia Group is a listed holding company whose core shareholder is the municipal holding company Publi-T.

More information: elia.be & eliagroup.eu

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