The Verklikkerstrand: Where coastal nature and recreation thrive together

Gemeente Schouwen-Duiveland, Netherlands
Municipality of Schouwen-Duiveland
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
Nature & Environment

Summary of Good Practice Story
Verklikkerstrand, a 1.5 km stretch of Natura 2000 protected coastline on the Dutch island of Schouwen-Duiveland, is critical breeding habitat for coastal birds like the ringed plover and little tern, but by 2017 no breeding nests were recorded at all as recreational beach use pushed young birds away from food-rich wet sand areas. Starting with a 2018 pilot cordoning off part of the beach, land manager Staatsbosbeheer refined the approach yearly, adding trained volunteer birdwatchers in 2019 (which helped 14 nests of four species succeed that year) and, from 2020, joining the national "Het Groene Strand" programme to leave natural flotsam in place, run manual beach clean-ups, fix beach-traffic routes, and require dog leashes during breeding season. Between 2020 and 2024, breeding pairs increased by 65 (42 of them little terns), the area won the 2022 "Groene Strand Wimpel" award, and by 2025 the multi-stakeholder "Groene Strand community" had formalised its cooperation and secured beach-management permission through 2029. The lesson: protection status alone isn't enough — meaningful biodiversity recovery on a busy coastline requires active management, continuous monitoring, and genuine collaboration between conservationists, authorities, businesses, volunteers and visitors.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context
Schouwen-Duiveland is an island municipality in the province of Zeeland, located in the south-west of the Netherlands. Surrounded by the North Sea, Lake Grevelingen and the Oosterschelde National Park, the island is characterised by a unique combination of water, nature and recreation. With 21 kilometres of North Sea coastline, extensive beaches, dune landscapes and protected nature reserves, Schouwen-Duiveland is one of the most diverse coastal landscapes in the Netherlands, where recreation and nature conservation are closely intertwined.

On the western side of the island, Verklikkerstrand forms a 1.5-kilometre stretch of natural coastline between the beach access points of Renesse and Burgh-Haamstede. The area forms part of the Natura 2000 sites Voordelta and Kop van Schouwen and is therefore among the most valuable coastal nature areas in the Netherlands. In addition, the beach is of great importance to breeding and migratory birds. At the same time, Verklikkerstrand is a popular destination for walkers, beach visitors and recreational users. Finding a balance between nature conservation and recreational use has therefore been an ongoing challenge for many years.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed
As a Natura 2000 site, Verklikkerstrand plays a vital role as a habitat and breeding ground for coastal birds such as the common ringed plover, the Kentish plover and the little tern. Protecting and restoring these vulnerable species is essential to maintaining healthy populations in the long term.

At the same time, biodiversity in the area came under increasing pressure, partly due to more intensive recreational use. Research conducted by Deltamilieu Projecten in 2022 showed that young birds mainly forage on the wet parts of the beach. These are also the areas where many recreational users spend their time. This disturbance forces the young birds to move to less food-rich areas. The consequences became apparent when no breeding nests were recorded on Verklikkerstrand in 2017. As a result, the beach was at risk of losing its function as a breeding ground for coastal birds.

For the stakeholders involved, this sent a clear signal that protection alone is not enough. Preserving biodiversity within a Natura 2000 site requires active nature management, continuous monitoring and close cooperation between site managers, authorities and other stakeholders. Only through targeted intervention can suitable conditions for breeding coastal birds be maintained and enhanced. The challenge here is to carefully balance nature restoration and recreation, ensuring that both the ecological and social values of the area are preserved.

The Vision: What you set out to do
The ambition was clear: Verklikkerstrand had to be restored as a healthy and resilient coastal ecosystem, where unique Natura 2000 habitats and vulnerable coastal breeding birds would

have sufficient space to recover and thrive. At the same time, the area had to remain attractive and accessible to residents and visitors.

By combining nature conservation, education and collaboration, the parties involved wanted to demonstrate that nature conservation and recreation do not have to be mutually exclusive. This approach was in line with Het Groene Strand, a national initiative that aims to give nature and the experience of nature more space on Dutch beaches.

Verklikkerstrand demonstrates how a Natura 2000 site can provide space for vulnerable nature while remaining a place where residents and visitors can experience the coast.

The Journey: How change happened

The protection of breeding birds on Verklikkerstrand began in 2017, when Staatsbosbeheer observed that hardly any breeding nests had been recorded. This prompted an investigation into how the area's natural values could be enhanced, after which a pilot project involving specific measures was launched.

In 2018, a section of the beach was cordoned off for the first time to provide peace and quiet for breeding birds. Although this did not yet lead to successful breeding, it provided valuable insights for the further development of the area. A year later, in 2019, the location of the cordoned-off area was adjusted based on the findings, and a group of volunteer bird watchers was established. During weekends and holiday periods, these volunteers help monitor the breeding area, inform visitors and raise awareness about the importance of protecting coastal birds. This approach proved successful: in 2019, fourteen breeding nests of four species were recorded, including the ringed plover, Kentish plover, little ringed plover and oystercatcher.

From 2020 onwards, Verklikkerstrand became part of the national programme 'Het Groene Strand'. The focus shifted from nest protection alone to a broader approach to nature restoration and nature experience. Natural flotsam is now left in place, beach clean-ups are carried out manually, fixed routes for beach traffic are established, and during the breeding season there is a 24-hour leash requirement for dogs. In addition, efforts are made to monitor natural values and provide information.

Visitors are actively informed about the natural values of Verklikkerstrand through information panels at beach access points, signage around the cordoned-off areas, and conversations with volunteer birdwatchers. Attention is also drawn to the area's vulnerable natural environment and the desired behaviour of visitors beyond the beach. Through initiatives such as Schelpenteldag, the Schouwse Jutterdagen, the 'Zuunig op Weze' campaign, NME educational programmes and communications from Eilandmarketing Schouwen-Duiveland (DMO), residents and visitors are involved in nature conservation.

The project is supported by an active ‘Groene Strand community’ comprising the Municipality of Schouwen-Duiveland, Groencombinatie Schouwen-Duiveland, Natuur- en Vogelwacht Schouwen-Duiveland, Eerste Hulp Bij Zeezoogdieren (EHBZ), ASEAL, Stichting Duinbehoud, Stichting Natuur- en Milieueducatie (NME), De bende van het strand, Het Zeeuwse Landschap, Staatsbosbeheer, Deltamilieu Projecten, Vogelbescherming Nederland and industry representatives. The partners meet annually to evaluate the results and coordinate management for the new season.

The breeding area is protected each year from 15 April to 15 September by barriers made of posts and ropes. The exact location of the barrier is adjusted annually to reflect the current situation in the area, including dune formations and lessons learned from previous breeding locations. The barrier covers a maximum area of 0.4 km². Nests located outside the barrier are protected separately.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

The joint efforts have led to tangible results for nature, visitors and the destination. In 2022, Verklikkerstrand was awarded the ‘Groene Strand Wimpel’, recognising its achievement in sustainable beach management, nature conservation, education and collaboration.

Clear results are also visible from an ecological perspective. Between 2020 and 2024, the number of breeding pairs increased by 65, with the strongest growth recorded among little terns, with 42 additional breeding pairs. This positive development is not limited to breeding birds, in addition natural processes are given more space, allowing embryonic dunes to develop further. These young dunes form the basis for new dune formation, contribute to the natural protection of the land behind them from the sea, and at the same time create a dynamic habitat for plants and animals.

The impact is also noticeable among visitors and the local community. Initially, conservation measures were mainly seen as restrictions, but they are now increasingly viewed as visible evidence of care for nature. Volunteers, business owners and visitors increasingly recognising Verklikkerstrand as a place where nature restoration and recreation go hand in hand.

Cooperation within the Groene Strand community was structurally embedded in 2025 through a joint agreement for the conservation of the Groene Strand. In addition, permission for the annual beach management was extended until 2029. In 2026, the project also gained a prominent presence through a pop-up exhibition within the BeachHub at Transferium Renesse, where visitors can learn about the story behind the Groene Strand.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

Het Groene Strand has demonstrated that nature restoration is possible within a busy coastal destination when nature organisations, authorities, businesses, volunteers and visitors work

together towards a shared ambition. An important lesson is that protection only is not enough. The success of the Verklikkerstrand is due to the combination of active nature management, monitoring, education and the involvement of the local community.

It also became clear that relatively simple measures can make a big difference. Adjusting the location of barriers, deploying volunteer bird watchers and actively informing visitors have contributed to greater understanding and support for the protection of vulnerable nature. At the same time, protecting biodiversity remains an ongoing process. Changing recreational pressures, weather conditions and natural dynamics require annual evaluation and adjustment of measures. Furthermore, future developments, such as climate change and changes to the coastal landscape, call for an adaptive approach.

For other destinations, Verklikkerstrand demonstrates that nature restoration does not begin with major investments, but with collaboration, local involvement and a shared ambition. By engaging visitors in nature conservation, support for protective measures grows and a stronger connection is created with the unique coastal landscape.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact
The impact of the Groene Strand extends beyond Verklikkerstrand itself. The project has fostered strong collaboration between nature organisations, public authorities, businesses and volunteers, who are working together in the Groene Strand community to improve the quality of the island’s coastal area. The knowledge and experience gained are actively shared and contribute to raising broader awareness of biodiversity, coastal nature and sustainable recreation.

The results have also led to a stronger integration of nature conservation values into policy and management. In 2023, the Kop van Schouwen Natura 2000 Management Plan was adopted, in which Verklikkerstrand is explicitly included as an important area for the protection of coastal nature and breeding birds. In 2025, this was followed by the municipality of Schouwen-Duiveland's new Beach Policy, in which Verklikkerstrand is officially designated as a nature beach.

In addition, through educational programmes, volunteer activities, campaigns and information provision, the project contributes to a growing awareness among residents and visitors.

The Verklikkerstrand demonstrates that a coastal tourist destination can also be a valuable habitat for flora and fauna. By linking nature conservation, recreation and collaboration

Awards or Certifications
Groene Strand
Groene Strand Wimpel

Green Destinations

Web Articles

Other Relevant Links

Quotes or Testimonials

At Verklikkerstrand, nature is given the space it needs to thrive. Visitors enjoy the sun, sea and sand while respecting the beach-nesting birds to provide a safe breeding environment for coastal birds. Together, people and nature share the coast in harmony.