



Dutch engineers build artificial islands to bring wildlife back

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Dutch engineers build artificial islands to bring wildlife back-The archipelago of five islets was created under an ambitious project, and it has already attracted greylag goose, common tern, and several species of waders

- Markermeer, one of Europe's largest freshwater lakes, Once upon a time it was teeming with fish .
- But this vast 700-square-km expanse of water, which regulates the level of water in the rest of the Netherlands, had become until recently nothing more than a cloudy mass devoid of aquatic life.
- Now the hope is that a new artificial archipelago of five islands will bring nature back to the area via a typically ambitious engineering project for a low-lying country that has battled the sea for centuries.
- The lake was once part of the Zuiderzee, an engineering wonder of the world completed in 1932, which closed off a huge expanse of water to keep out the North Sea and combat flooding.
- Vital in a country where 26% of the land is below sea level, the scheme created an inland lake and polders, land reclaimed from the sea, but at a cost to the environment.
- Over the subsequent decades, sediment used to create a dyke separating the Markermeer from a neighbouring body of water, the IJsselmeer, washed away and sunk to the bottom of the lake.
- That turned the water cloudy, negatively impacting fish and bird populations, plants and molluscs.
- About 8 km from the port of Lelystad, the ranger walks down the side of an artificial sand dune.
- Still-sparse vegetation covers a large part of the 700 hectares that have been built anew in the lake.
- The islets plan is among many being worked on by the Netherlands, which is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change.

- In the water there is an “explosion” of plankton that guarantees a large amount of food for the birds.
- Greylag goose, common tern, several species of waders such as the great egret and the night heron have also returned, testifying to the islands’ success.
- The project, initiated by Natuurmonumenten, a Dutch non-governmental organisation, cost €60 million (\$68 million) — much of it donated by individuals.

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