

## **Rewilding as opportunity: Seigneurial monopolization of wildlife under early agrarian capitalism (Guelders and Flanders, 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

This paper examines elite monopolizations of hunting wild animals in relation to regional developments in the agrarian economy in the early modern Low Countries. Palaeoecological evidence shows that the centuries after the Black Death saw an upsurge in European flora and fauna – including in the Low Countries. This period of ‘rewilding’ was accompanied, from the mid-fifteenth century onwards, by widespread restrictions over who could catch which type of animal, where, and when. Such hunting rights were often appropriated by seigneurial elites. Despite a recent surge of scholarly interest, however, historians are divided over the economic and environmental repercussions of such elite monopolizations of wild animals. Environmental historians emphasize that these exclusive rights could unintentionally result in the protection of animal populations and their habitats. Other scholars maintain, conversely, that European elites used such regulations to shield natural resources from commodification in their pursuit of capital accumulation, which had a destructive influence on natural environments and ultimately sparked the ecological crisis of the modern world. This paper seeks to expose the relationship between economic developments and hunting monopolies through a subregional comparison of seigneurial hunting rights in the Low Countries during the environmentally and economically dynamic period between c.1450 and c.1650. The focus will be on two Netherlandish regions that saw an early development of agrarian capitalism in this period (Coastal Flanders and the Guelders River Area), and two regions that persisted as peasant societies throughout the pre-industrial period (Interior Flanders and the Veluwe).