



WILDDRONE

D5.2 – Produce Initial Press Release

WP5, T5.4 Awareness

[Version 1.0 – 30/03/2023]

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WildDrone is an MSCA Doctoral Network funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation funding programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 101071224.

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Technical References

Grant Agreement n°	101071224
Project Acronym	WildDrone
Project Title	Autonomous Drones for Nature Conservation Missions
Project Coordinator	Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist, Professor University of Southern Denmark ups@mmmi.sdu.dk
Project Duration	January 2023 - December 2026

Deliverable No.	D5.2
Dissemination level*	Public
Work Package	WP5 - WP Dissemination, Exploitation and Communication
Task	T5.4 - Awareness
Lead beneficiary	SDU
Contributing beneficiary/ies	-
Due date of deliverable	31/03/2023
Actual submission date	30/03/2023

v	Date	Author(s)	Reviewers	Comments
0.1	27/03/2023	Mathilde Møldrup, Elzbieta Pastucha	Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist	Minor suggestions. Should we also mention twitter?
0.2	28/03/2023	Mathilde Møldrup, Elzbieta Pastucha	Natalie Lundquist	Minor suggestions.



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Executive Summary

This report provides information on the first WildDrone press release and describes its aim, purpose, and content. The report also gives an overview of which media the press release has been distributed to and provides a status of the media impact to the current date of writing.

Keywords: Press release, communication, media.



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1. Introduction

The initial press release was created by SDU in cooperation with the WildDrone partners. It was released on the 23rd of March in an English and a Danish version and distributed to 148 international and Danish media agencies.

The initial press release describes the aims and ambitions of the WildDrone network and aims to raise awareness of the project in the general public and in professional communities.

2. Initial Press Release

The initial press release has been created by TEK Communication, University of Southern Denmark, in cooperation with the WildDrone partners. It was released on the 23rd of March 2023 in both English and Danish versions (see appendix 4.1.).

2.1. Aim and Content

The aim of the press release is to describe the ambitions of the project; the background of the current biodiversity crisis and how the project partners will try to solve the challenges by introducing autonomous drones in wildlife conservation. The press release also contains a fact list mentioning the funding, the project period, and the partners.

2.2. Purpose and Target Groups

The purpose of the press release is to raise awareness of the WildDrone project in the general public as well as in relevant professional communities.

2.3. Distribution

To assure a good impact, the press release has been created in both English and Danish versions. The English press release has been distributed through ViaRitzau and sent to international correspondents in Denmark and international press agencies such as AP and Reuters. The Danish version has also been distributed through ViaRitzau and additionally sent to 148 media including the major Danish news media and a selection of smaller niche media within the areas of environment, nature, and technology.

All partners have been encouraged to distribute the press release to their national media through their custom communication channels.

SDU has featured the story on its own website here:

https://www.sdu.dk/en/om_sdu/fakulteterne/teknik/nyt_fra_det_tekniske_fakultet/28-millioner-til-stor-forskningsatsning

The press release has also been posted on LinkedIn through the profile of the SDU Faculty of Engineering and shared by the Coordinator:



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https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ulrikpaghschultz_large-scale-research-network-receives-37-activity-7044656180794654721-Escl?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Additionally, the press release has been posted on wilddrone.eu and announced on WildDrone's Twitter profile.

2.4. Initial impact of the press release

At the time of writing, the press release has only been picked up by some smaller media outlets:

<https://www.suasnews.com/2023/03/the-university-of-southern-denmark-sdu-wilddrone/>

https://www.electronic-supply.dk/article/view/1020046/28_millioner_kroner_til_stor_forskningsatsning_i_droner

<https://www.maskinbladet.dk/artikel/79318-28-millioner-kroner-forskning-i-droner-og-naturbevarelse>

However, the Coordinator has been approached by a well-known Danish popular science media that is interested in featuring the story on its website (Videnskab.dk).

On LinkedIn, the press release has currently received 58 likes (as of 28 March). The press release was also announced on WildDrone's Twitter profile, where it has been seen 620 times, and users have engaged¹ with the tweet 60 times (as of 28 March).

The project partners will use their existing communication channels to assist with the distribution of the press release.

3. Conclusions

The first press release has been created and distributed internationally using ViaRitzau, LinkedIn, Twitter, and WildDrone.eu.

¹ 'Engagements' cover the total number of times a user has interacted with a Tweet. This includes all clicks anywhere on the Tweet (including hashtags, links, avatar, username, and Tweet expansion), retweets, replies, follows, and likes.



4. Appendixes

4.1. English Press Release

Large-Scale Research Network Receives 3.7 million Euros to Revolutionize Wildlife Conservation Practices with Drones

We are in the middle of a biodiversity crisis, and the consequences may very well be unmanageable. Now, a group of universities and organizations have launched the interdisciplinary research network WildDrone to find out how autonomous drones can be used for wildlife conservation.



Photo: Blair Costelloe

It will revolutionize the way we do wildlife conservation. Nothing less.

At least, that is the ambition behind the new large-scale research network WildDrone, which is led by the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). The network has received 3.68 million euros in funding from the EU, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), and the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI).

19 partners are involved in the network, including several European and African universities, numerous research institutions, nature reserves, private companies, and



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major global institutions such as BBC. The research will take place both in Europe and in Africa.

And the researcher coordinating it all is Professor Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist from the drone center at SDU in Odense, Denmark.

- In short, WildDrone aims to bring together three different areas of expertise: biology, drone technology and computer vision. The goal is to develop drone technology so that it becomes more useful in wildlife conservation, says Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist.

Autonomous Drones

Drones are already widely used in wildlife conservation to collect information about endangered species. But it is a relatively labour-intensive manual tool that requires a drone pilot to control the drone and afterwards someone who can closely study and interpret the recordings.

In WildDrone, the researchers will automate the process so that the drones fly by themselves while collecting data, and the resulting information is processed automatically. This will allow biologists to gain entirely new knowledge about wildlife that would otherwise be practically inaccessible.

- We expect to be able to collect a significantly larger amount of data compared to what is possible now, and we also expect to get data at a higher level of accuracy because we can process it automatically, says Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist.

The network will carry out several specific research projects. For instance, the drones will monitor lions in Kenya to avoid conflicts with cattle herds. They will also observe porpoises, seals, and birds in the Wadden Sea along the west coast of Denmark and the north coast of Germany. The migration of storks between Northern Europe and Africa will also be investigated.

A Triple Planetary Crisis

WildDrone addresses one of the most important global agendas right now. Wildlife is disappearing globally at a worrying pace, so worrying in fact, that scientists are talking about a sixth mass extinction.

To address this biodiversity crisis, we need the right information. And some of that information could be obtained with the help of autonomous drones.

- It might be information that can be used directly to save endangered animals, but it could also be information that can qualify decisions at a political level. For example, when we are establishing new offshore wind farms, it is very relevant to know something about the wildlife in the area, says Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist.

Drones will not replace existing technologies such as GPS transmitters or field observations. But they can be a very important supplement, says the professor.



- For example, technology for tracking birds already exists, but this technology doesn't give us precise enough information about what the birds are doing at a given location. And it could be important to know whether the birds are at a specific place because they are foraging or because they are resting.

New Interdisciplinary Skills

Even though the goals of the network are ambitious, we should not expect a commercially ready drone product for wildlife conservation when it is finished in 4 years.

- It's basic research, but even if just half of our goals are achieved, we will have accomplished quite a lot, in terms of what drones can be used for in nature. And in any case, we will have much more knowledge on the subject, says Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist.

- I also expect that we will be able to use the results in other areas, such as in agriculture and for monitoring wildlife in European rewilding efforts.

The network is part of the EU's so-called Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, and will train 13 PhD students in ecology, drone technology, and computer vision during the network's lifespan. And the educational and interdisciplinary scope of the network is key, says the coordinator:

- Both ecologists and engineers will develop brand new interdisciplinary skills that may be vital when it comes to solving future challenges.

FACTS

WildDrone is an interdisciplinary training network funded by the EU's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. The goal is to investigate the use of autonomous drones and automatic image processing for wildlife conservation.

The network is active from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2026 and is funded with a total of 3.699.680.14 million euros. During this period, 13 PhD students will carry out research projects within the areas of ecology, drone technology, and computer vision.

The project is led by a consortium of 19 partners. The partners hosting doctoral candidates are University of Southern Denmark, Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, WIPSEA, Wageningen University & Research, University of Bristol, Fondazione Bruno Kessler (FBK), Avy and Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL).

There are also several associated partners: OI Pejeta Conservancy, the Wadden Sea National Park, Bristol Zoological Society, Kenyatta University, Universität Konstanz, the Danish Ministry of Environment, Kuzikus Wildlife Reserve, Danish Agriculture & Food Council, BBC, and WWF Switzerland.

Link: <https://via.ritzau.dk/pressemeddelelse/large-scale-research-network-receives-37-million-euros-to-revolutionize-wildlife-conservation-practices-with-drones?publisherId=12056383&releaseId=13674920>



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4.2. Danish Press Release

28 millioner kroner til stor forskningsindsats i droner og naturbevarelse

Vi befinder os midt i en biodiversitetskrise, og konsekvenserne kan blive uoverskuelige, hvis vi ikke gør noget ved det. Nu skal Syddansk Universitet stå i spidsen for det interdisciplinære forskningsnetværk WildDrone, der vil undersøge, hvordan autonome droner kan bruges til naturbevarelse.



Photo: Blair Costelloe

Det vil revolutionere måden, man bedriver naturbevarelse. Intet mindre.

Det er i hvert fald ambitionen bag det nye stort anlagte forskningsnetværk WildDrone, som Syddansk Universitet (SDU) står i spidsen for. Netværket har fået 3,68 millioner euro - eller knap 28 millioner danske kroner - i støtte fra EU, den britiske forskningsfond UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) og det schweiziske sekretariat for uddannelse og forskning (SERI).

Med i netværket er ikke færre end 19 partnere, heriblandt en række europæiske og afrikanske universiteter, adskillige forskningsinstitutioner, naturreservater, interessereorganisationer, private virksomheder og store globale aktører som BBC. Selve forskningen kommer til at foregå både i Europa og Afrika.



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Og forskeren, der skal koordinere det hele, er professor Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist fra dronecenteret på Syddansk Universitet i Odense.

- Kort sagt går WildDrone ud på at samle tre forskellige fagområder: biologi, droneteknologi og computer vision. Målet er at udvikle droneteknologien, så den kan blive mere nyttig inden for naturbevarelse, siger Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist.

Autonome droner

Allerede nu bruger man i stor stil droner ude i naturen, bl.a. til at indsamle information om truede dyrearter. Men det er et relativt arbejdskrævende manuelt værktøj, som kræver en dronepilot, der kan styre dronen, og efterfølgende nogen, der kan nærstudere alle optagelserne.

I WildDrone vil forskerne automatisere processen, så dronerne flyver af sig selv, og informationerne bliver behandlet helt automatisk. Dermed vil man kunne indsamle helt ny viden om dyreliv, man ellers ikke ville kunne få adgang til.

- Vi forventer, at vi kan indsamle en større mængde data, end man kan nu, og vi forventer også at få data på et højere niveau, fordi vi kan behandle det automatisk, siger Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist.

Netværket skal gennemføre en række konkrete forskningsprojekter. For eksempel skal dronerne overvåge løver i Kenya med henblik på at undgå konflikter med kvægbesætninger. De skal også observere marsvin, sæler og fugle i Vadehavet og undersøge storkes migrationsruter mellem Nordeuropa og Afrika.

Den tredobbelte planetære krise

WildDrone rammer lige ned i en af de allervigtigste globale dagsordener lige nu. Dyrearter forsvinder over hele verden i et så bekymrende tempo, at forskere taler om en sjette masseuddøen. Ifølge FN befinder vi os lige nu i en tredobbelt planetær krise: klimakrise, forureningskrise og biodiversitetskrise.

Men for at kunne sætte ind overfor biodiversitetskrisen er vi nødt til at have den rette information. Og den kan vi blandt andet få ved hjælp af autonome droner.

- Det kan være information, som kan bruges direkte til at gå ind og redde truede dyrearter, men det kan også være information, som kan kvalificere beslutninger på politisk niveau. For eksempel når vi skal etablere nye havvindmølleparker, kan det være relevant at vide noget om dyrelivet i området, siger Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist.

Det er ikke tanken, at dronerne helt skal erstatte eksisterende teknologi som GPS-sendere eller observationer i felten. Men de kan være et særdeles vigtigt supplement, lyder det fra professoren.

- Man har for eksempel masser af teknologi, der kan spore fugle, men den teknologi kan ikke give os præcis information om, hvad fuglene laver dér, hvor de opholder sig. Og det kan være vigtigt at vide, om fugle befinder sig et sted, fordi de fouragerer, eller bare fordi de holder pause.



Helt nye kompetencer

Selv om der er sat nogle meget ambitiøse mål for WildDrone, skal vi dog ikke regne med, at der ligger et færdigt droneprodukt til naturbevarelse, når det er færdigt om 4 år.

- Det er grundforskning, det her, men hvis bare halvdelen af vores mål lykkes, har vi opnået rigtig meget, i forhold til hvad man kan bruge droner til ude i naturen, og vi bliver under alle omstændigheder klogere, siger Ulrik Pagh Schultz Lundquist.

- Jeg forventer også, at vi vil kunne bruge resultaterne inden for andre områder, for eksempel landbruget og overvågning af dyr i naturparker.

Netværket er en del af EU's såkaldte Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, hvorfor der undervejs skal uddannes i alt 13 ph.d.-studerende fra hele Europa inden for biologi, droneteknologi og computer vision. Og som koordinatoren for WildDrone siger:

- Både biologerne og ingeniørerne kommer til at stå med nogle helt nye tværfaglige kompetencer, der kan blive centrale i løsningen af fremtidens udfordringer.

FAKTA:

WildDrone er et interdisciplinært forskningsnetværk under EU's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. Netværket skal udvikle brugen af autonome droner og automatisk billedbehandling til naturbevarelse. Netværket vil være aktivt fra 1. januar 2023 til 31. december 2026 og er samlet set støttet med 3.699.680,14 millioner euro, hvilket svarer til omkring 27,7 millioner kroner.

Bag projektet står et konsortium med 19 partnere. Kernepartnerne er Syddansk Universitet, Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, WIPSEA, Wageningen University & Research, University of Bristol, Fondazione Bruno Kessler - FBK, Avy B. V. og Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne.

Derudover er der også en række tilknyttede partnere: Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Nationalpark Vadehavet, Bristol Zoological Society, Kenyatta University, Universität Konstanz, Miljøministeriet, Kuzikus Wildlife Reserve, Landbrug & Fødevarer, BBC og WWF Schweiz.

Link: <https://via.ritzau.dk/pressemeddelelse/28-millioner-kroner-til-stor-forskningssatsning-i-droner-og-naturbevarelse?publisherId=12056383&releaseld=13674897>

