

# Resource

JUNE 2021 VOLUME 15

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## FOREWORD

### Freedom of choice

%&\*!@\$!, why has WUR missed the opportunity to be the first university to go completely vegetarian? That was my first thought when I heard that Delft University is no longer serving meat on its campus. But is Wageningen really the right place for such a drastic decision? Our columnist Vincent wrote in a previous *Resource* in defence of not going 100 per cent meat-free. He argues for a canteen 2.0 in which the WUR community continuously contributes ideas so that the menu reflects a slowly evolving array of sustainability strategies (read his column on our website). Online too, the views of staff and students were divided. Freedom of choice is highly prized. So in this *Resource*, we asked two experts to discuss the matter (page 18).

Elsewhere in this number are the results of our survey in which we asked students and staff how they are doing, and how they see the future (page 20). Two conclusions are drawn: we are longing for contact again, and we want to keep an element of working from home. Both right, if you ask me. And when I was walking across the campus on a sunny Friday and saw students combing the grass near Atlas for insects during a practical, I thought wistfully: Let's learn from the crisis and enjoy each other's company again...

**Willem Andréé**  
Editor-in-chief







## FIRE

Starting a fire, climbing trees and looking for animal tracks — all in the name of science. Around 40 students got to do this over the past two weeks in the Anthropology of Basic Nature Skills course. The new course, taught by Forest and Nature Conservation Policy lecturer Koen Arts, even featured on the Dutch nature programme *Vroege Vogels*. But do note that the fun and games in the woods was accompanied by a study of profound anthropological texts on different worldviews and ways of interacting with nature. RK





## Student Council elections around the corner

Between 7 and 10 June, students can elect their representatives for next academic year. Three parties (VeSte, S&I and CSF) are contesting 12 seats. Currently VeSte has seven seats, S&I four and CSF one. Sterre Hoek van Dijke (23) is the leading candidate for VeSte (United Students). VeSte's main goal is for students' time at university to be action-packed, she says. 'We think that most of your development takes place outside the classroom.' She also wants to make a stand for small-scale education. 'That is one of the reasons I chose Wageningen.'

Stefanus Mega Prabwa (26) is the leading candidate for S&I (Sustainability & Internationalization). 'There are 108 different nationalities in Wageningen. I want to represent their points of view on the council. Joël Kampen (21) is number one for the CSF (Christian Student Party). 'I want to help think through various issues on the council. For example, how students who now lack practical skills training because their practicals were online or were cancelled can catch up again.' LZ

*You'll find longer interviews with the party leaders online.*

 [resource.wur.nl](https://resource.wur.nl) **FULL STORY ONLINE**



XR protesters chained themselves to the gate at Upfield. Photo Roelof Kleis

## Dialogue starts on collaborating with private sector

**A dialogue has started between opponents and supporters of WUR's collaborations with the private sector. In the run-up to this programme, action group Extinction Rebellion (XR) made their views clear with a protest at the Upfield building site.**

RUW Foundation and Otherwise are organizing three events together with Wageningen Dialogues on the impact of WUR's collaboration with the private sector. The first was on Tuesday 25 May: an online talk show with guests ranging from student and XR activist Solina Diallo to Manfred Aben, head of the Unilever Foods Innovation Centre on campus. Bram Büscher (professor of Sociology of Development and Change) and Ernst van den Ende (general director of the Plant Sciences Group) also took part. Büscher claimed that the collaborations threaten the university's independence. Van den Ende, however, argued that working with a wide range of partners in fact offers a good way of tackling such major challenges as food security and climate change.

On 20 May, just before the dialogue event, members of Extinction Rebellion chained themselves to the entrance gate leading to the Upfield building site. 'We don't agree with the way WUR collaborates with multinationals,' said spokesperson Kamiel Verhelst on behalf of XR Wageningen.

### Crane

Five protesters climbed up a crane, from which they hung a banner. The protest had been announced beforehand and lasted all morning. Most demonstrators only left around midday when an official order came to end the protest. Three of the five protesters in the crane refused to come down, so they were brought down by a special police unit and then arrested. LZ and RK

*Use this QR code to see a longer article about the dialogue.*

*You will also find a link for registration for the next two events on 8 and 22 June.*



# 33

Thanks to the WUR emergency fund, 33 students who got into financial difficulty due to the Covid crisis have been able to graduate after all. The emergency fund was established last year and now has 120,000 euros in its coffers, after two crowdfunding campaigns. 'The whole Wageningen community joined forces,' says Arianne van Ballegooij of the University Fund. Students can receive a maximum of 5000 euros from the emergency fund. [wur.nl/project/noodfonds](https://wur.nl/project/noodfonds)

## VeluweLoop back after Covid

Work has started on VeluweLoop 2021 after the relay race was cancelled last year.

Interestingly, seven of the eight people in the organizing committee have never run in the VeluweLoop themselves. But chair Yvet Renkema says they make up for that lack of experience with their 'fresh perspective'. The aim is to let the VeluweLoop go ahead in the usual format. A new aspect is the improved set-up at restart point Vredenoord near Arnhem. The VeluweLoop passes through that point twice. 'We want to give it more of a festival atmosphere,' explains Renkema. 'With music and more food and drink options.' They have also introduced some new winning categories, such as the fastest student house, study association and so on, to encourage a competitive spirit. RK

## Guidelines for research in China

### WUR has drawn up 'Guidelines for WUR business in China' to give collaborations with China a firmer foundation.

From now on, all WUR researchers have to report any research with and in China to the WUR China Platform. The research groups' business developers are responsible for carrying out a preliminary check to see whether a project poses potential risks to WUR. If they have any doubts or questions, they can get advice from the lawyers and financial experts in their science group. To help them, WUR has drawn up guidelines on doing business in China with the aim of reducing the risks to its reputation and revenue. Regarding the reputational risk, WUR uses the integrity code for Wageningen researchers, which states that they must protect research data and that they must be honest, accurate, independent and responsible. WUR also considers whether the potential Chinese partner has links to the Chinese military, the development of facial recognition equipment or the

violation of human rights. If that is the case, the China Platform and the WUR Executive Board will assess whether the research can go ahead and if so, in what form.

### Creditworthy

The decision to draw up these guidelines was prompted by queries from researchers concerning the legal and financial handling of partnership contracts in China, explains Xiaoyong Zhang, WUR's China coordinator. Researchers wanted to know for example how they could draw up a contract that clearly states the responsibilities of both parties. The check is also needed to assess Chinese partners' creditworthiness and determine whether they



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can do business with WUR directly and make payments into WUR's account directly. AS

*The China Guidelines can be found at [intranet.wur.nl/Project/China](https://intranet.wur.nl/Project/China).*



## Concerned about colleagues in Myanmar

**Wageningen researchers and students who have worked in Myanmar have been very worried since the army seized power there early this year. More than 19,000 university staff are said to have been sacked, and people have been arrested. How can you help from here?**

Researcher Bas Verschuuren could only look on in horror as one of his Burmese colleagues was arrested and sentenced to three and a half years in prison for protesting against the junta. 'This man always helped us tremendously with arranging research projects. Now you really want to do something in return for him and others there.' Scholars for Myanmar is trying to help by distributing an open letter calling on governments to recognize the National Unity Government, the democratically elected government of Myanmar. That would bring the civil war to an end, says the letter, which has been signed by more than 100 academics with links with Myanmar.

Until recently, Master's student of Forest and Nature Conservation Shamyi Lanjouw was in Myanmar for an internship. 'Just yesterday they broke into the office looking for someone. No one can do field-work at the moment; it is just too dangerous. If you know anyone in Myanmar, send them a message and ask how they are doing. Then at least they'll feel someone sees their plight. Or donate to funds that offer help locally.' c.j

# New student platform to clear your head

**Frisse Gedachtes ('fresh thoughts') is a new platform for students who are feeling low. The platform was set up by some students in Nijmegen during the Covid crisis, explains WUR student Lennart Menssink (21).**

'Research shows that students' mental health has deteriorated in the past year,' says Menssink. 'Many students are struggling to stay motivated, miss the social contacts and feel low.' Frisse Gedachtes (frissegedachtes.nl) started as an online platform run for and by students, where depressed students can use the chat feature to talk anonymously to psychology students and people with direct experience. All the volunteers working at Frisse Gedachtes have received extensive training in a programme that was

developed together with psychologists, explains Menssink. 'It is not a treatment, but it does let you share your problems.'

Menssink started the Wageningen branch about two months ago with some other students. They have now organized their first event on

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**'It is not a treatment, but it does let you share your problems'**

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burn-outs and depression. They also organize the Wageningen Walks together with Thuis. 'Did you know that walking is good for your memory and creativity? It's also an ideal opportunity to get to know new students. To sign up, go to [www.wageningenwalks.nl](http://www.wageningenwalks.nl).' LZ



## 'F\*ck the loan system

A national student protest against the loan system takes place on the day this Resource comes out (3 June). The student union Student Alliance Wageningen (S.A.W.) distributed condoms and toilet rolls to student houses last week. 'On the condoms it says "fuck the loan system" and on the toilet rolls, "the loan system is crap"', explains S.A.W.'s Steven Snijders (photo). Snijders is planning to join the protest on the Malieveld in The Hague together with a few dozen other students. LZ





## SOLDIER FLY IS WHAT IT EATS TOO

**The black soldier fly's diet in particular affects the microbes and consequently its safety as animal feed.**

The larvae of the black soldier fly produce a lot of protein and they can be reared on waste streams from the food industry. That makes them a sustainable alternative to animal feed such as soymeal and fishmeal. But the insects grow better on some waste streams than others. And you don't want the larvae absorbing pathogenic or toxic substances from the waste. So PhD candidate Stijn Schreven assessed which microbes have the biggest impact

**What the insects eat determines how safe they are as animal feed**

on the food safety of the larvae. His conclusion: the safety of the larvae as animal feed is mainly determined by the

microbes in the substrate (what the insects eat).

Several Dutch companies are already producing black soldier fly larvae on a large scale. The larvae are used as animal feed and fish feed. The farmers rearing the larvae use vegetable waste streams from the food industry such as brewer's grains, or apple or beet pulp. They are safe.

### Manure and cake

Schreven tested two alternatives: chicken manure and camelina cake. The manure leads to bacterial changes in the larvae. Further research is required to see whether this affects food safety. Camelina is a by-product of camelina oil, which is an alternative to palm oil in the human diet. This high-protein waste product contains toxic substances but the insect larvae grow well on it as long as the cake makes up less than 50 per cent of the substrate. AS



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## Banana fungus increasingly resistant to fungicides

**Black Sigatoka, which is caused by a leaf fungus called *Pseudocercospora fijiensis*, affects banana plantations across the globe. Banana farmers use fungicides to protect their harvest but are finding they need increasing quantities. This is because the leaf mould is becoming resistant to the fungicides**

This finding has been reported by Wageningen researchers in the journal *Pest Management Science*. They have made the first extensive analysis of the sensitivity of isolates (variants) of the leaf mould to three fungicides that are frequently used in banana-producing countries. Their research shows that the fungus is rapidly developing a resistance to fungicides as a result of the liberal use of these chemicals. Research leader Gert Kema, professor of Phytopathology in Wageningen, concludes that banana producers must break the vicious circle of increased use of fungicides which is making the devastating fungus increasingly resistant. For many years, he has called for research and development of new banana breeds

resistant to Black Sigatoka and the development of alternative methods of disease control.

### Resistant varieties

More bananas are eaten in the world than any other fruit. Banana plantations are dominated by the Cavendish banana, which makes up about 95 per cent of global exports. The variety is highly susceptible to Black Sigatoka, so banana plantations are sprayed with fungicides weekly. To make matters worse, some banana growers are faced with a new threat: the aggressive soil fungus that causes the Panama disease. Kema joined a consortium last year with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Wageningen biotech company Keygene, with the aim of developing banana varieties resistant to Panama disease. And, with the help of international funding, he launched a business to develop varieties resistant to Black Sigatoka. Kema's group has previously mapped the resistance of hundreds of wild and domestic banana varieties to fungal diseases. AS



## A Little Wiser

# Turmeric – hype or panacea?

Turmeric has a long history of use in traditional Chinese medicine. And in the Netherlands too, its status has risen beyond that of an ingredient in curry powder. Where its main use has always been in curries or to make rice yellow, nowadays influencers like Rens Kroes chuck some in their porridge, you can get a turmeric latte in coffee bars and it's in countless nutritional supplements at the pharmacy. There are claims that the 'miracle root' helps against complaints ranging from baldness and erectile dysfunction to cancer, diabetes and Alzheimer's disease.

'If you believe what some people say, it comes close to being a universal remedy' says professor of Nutrition Renger Witkamp, who has been following turmeric research for years. The positive effects are said to come from the substance curcumin. 'Inflammation appears to play a role in many conditions such as diabetes, overweight and cancer,' says Witkamp. 'It might be inhibited by curcumin.' With an emphasis on 'might'. Because thousands of publications later, there is still no conclusive evidence for the effectiveness of curcumin. Most of the studies have been done in test tubes in the lab.

The problem is that curcumin is a tricky substance that confounds tests. 'Curcumin seems to sort of stimulate some cells. They then show an effect that can't simply be translated into an

effect on health, although this is often done in publications. Also, curcumin can disintegrate into substances with very different characteristics.' And even if it does work in a test tube, that doesn't mean it will work in the body. The gut does not absorb it well, for instance. 'But there are some clinical studies that show positive results, in the treatment of Crohn's disease for example. And at both the Erasmus and the Amsterdam Medical Centres, there has been serious research into the use of curcumin for cancer.' So the jury is still out on the effectiveness of curcumin. 'Some researchers think it's a waste of research funding, but personally I am curious,' says Witkamp. He does think the spice must be good for something. 'But that goes for nearly everything in your spice rack, actually.' TL

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## 'NEARLY ALL THE SPICES IN YOUR SPICE RACK ARE GOOD FOR SOMETHING'

Renger Witkamp,  
professor of Nutrition

Every day we are bombarded with masses of sometimes contradictory information on pressing issues. In this feature, a WUR scientist gives you something to hold on to. What are the facts of the matter?

Every question makes you a little wiser. Do you dare to ask yours? Email us at [redactie@resource.nl](mailto:redactie@resource.nl)

Illustration Marly Hendricks





# World map of medicinal molecules

PhD graduate Satria Kautsar identified genes in plants and bacteria that can be used medicinally.

Plants, bacteria and moulds produce natural molecules that can be used as medicines. One example is penicillin, which comes from a mould and serves as an antibiotic. Now that more and more pathogens are becoming resistant to antibiotics, we need new medical drugs. Satria Kautsar searched through 200,000 genomes of plants, moulds and bacteria and has indicated where we can find those new natural medicines. He started by collecting all the gene clusters and plants that made interesting molecules, using software provided by the Bio-informatics chair group. Then he wrote an algorithm – a set of instructions for the computer – with which he could compare over a million gene clusters and evaluate and

**Now that more and more pathogens are resistant to antibiotics, we need new medical drugs**

compare the unique molecules they contributed. 'By doing so he created a world map of genes that could be involved in

making medicinal substances,' says his supervisor Marnix Medema of Bio-informatics.

It has long been known that plants and bacteria produce useful molecules, but Kautsar particularly wanted to find molecules in plants that we do not yet know about. Originally he wanted to focus on plants from his home country, Indone-

sia, but he later expanded his study to include a database of global genome collections of plants and bacteria. In this database, he found 200,000 gene clusters that code for the manufacture of natural molecules. And that enabled him to document the diversity of gene clusters for manufacturing natural molecules almost in its entirety.

## Popular database

The Bio-informatics group's free database and software are very popular, says Medema, because a lot of research groups and pharmaceutical companies are looking for new medical drugs from plants. The server on which one of the computer programmes operates will soon have been searched one million times by researchers. In his thesis, Kautsar also gives an overview of open-source and commercial data-



Photo Shutterstock

bases that are relevant to the search for natural molecules.

Kautsar has described the potential of medicinal molecules but has not yet identified any specific molecules for a medicine. That is the next step after his PhD graduation, which took place on 25 May. Kautsar now works at a research institute in Florida in the US that has one of the largest collections of bacteria in the world. There he is tasked with finding a new antibiotic. WUR will not be looking for new medicines, says Medema, but is going to do further fundamental research. For example, he wants to be able to predict the functions of natural molecules better and understand their role in nature more fully. AS

# WHAT CLOUDS DO TO SUNSHINE

The weather determines how much energy you get from solar panels. WUR meteorologist Wouter Mol wants to figure out that interaction.

Clouds cause big fluctuations in the energy produced by solar panels. Those fluctuations are a problem for energy companies. Wageningen meteorologists are trying to get a better understanding of this issue. PhD candidate Wouter Mol recently carried out the first pilot project on radiation measurements in a field next to the Cabauw meteorological mast. In the tall grass, 25 radiation detectors are arranged in a grid 50x50 metres apart. The small grey boxes about the size of a lunch box measure the intensity of the sunlight 10 times a second. What is more, the devices measure the

entire visible spectrum from 350 to 900 nanometres at 18 different wavelengths.

Nothing gets past the sensors. 'Birds, flies, ants – every little disturbance is captured in the measurements,' explains Mol. So when walking close to a device, he is careful to make sure he doesn't cast a shadow on it. After

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## 'We want to figure out the relationship between the weather and radiation'

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all, every reading counts. Mol is one of the PhD students working on meteorologist Chiel van Heerwaarden's Vidi project. This measurement session is

the first pilot, which got delayed by the pandemic.

Mol is able to test his equipment for two weeks, in between scheduled mowing. There is a reason for using the Cabauw site for the measurements; radiation measurements are not much use unless you have additional information about the local area, and there is a lot of equipment surrounding the mast. Mol: 'There are cloud radars, an aerosol meter and a camera that takes photos of the sky once a minute.'

### Cloud shadow

All the information about the sky is linked to the radiation measurements. The sun tracker is a particularly important device as it distinguishes between direct and indirect sunlight. Mol: 'Those two components are crucial because they show what part of the radiation comes directly from the sun and what comes via the clouds.' The boxes have GPS so shadows cast by clouds can be tracked to the nearest microsecond thanks to the link with the sensors. The devices were developed by fellow meteorologist Bert Heusinkveld. They are made in house, cheap and effective. Mol points to a commercial device further along. 'The material for our 25 radiation detectors cost as much as that one device.' The fieldwork forms the basis but the eventual aim is to get a better understanding. Mol: 'We want to figure out the relationship between the weather and radiation. That information should also help improve our models so that we can make reliable forecasts in practice too.' RK



Wouter Mol checks one of the radiation detectors. Photo Roelof Kleis



# Vertebrate bias



**Lisa Becking**

Diversity was colourfully celebrated in recent weeks with the International Biodiversity Day, the Day against Homophobia & Transphobia and the Eurovision Song Contest! Within all this diverse festivity, I would like to reflect on the invertebrates.

Ask anybody to draw an animal and generally you'll get a species with a spine. Statistically, that's quite strange, given that vertebrates only represent about 2

**'The spineless animals are ignored or abhorred'**

such as spiders, insects, worms, shrimp, crabs, snails, mussels, sponges, corals and sea anemones. The invertebrates are also dominant in terms of biomass.

Yet humans, as vertebrates, have an unconscious preference for other vertebrates. We do more research on them and we prefer to take selfies with large vertebrates in nature. The spineless animals are ignored or abhorred, while these 'uncharismatic' species are also crucial to the functioning of our ecosystems. Invertebrates have different solutions for survival than vertebrates and react differently to disturbances. How can we derive general principles and establish effective biodiversity conservation strategies when so many species are ignored?

A broader popular knowledge of invertebrates is important for choices in nature policy. And maybe even beyond. I sometimes wonder if people would be more

per cent of the animal kingdom. Most of the 2-3 million described animal species are actually invertebrates

open-minded if the true spectrum of gender fluidity and reproduction in the animal kingdom were common knowledge. If we also heard stories about sponges that are simultaneously both mothers and fathers. At least 10,000 animal species are hermaphrodites. Enough to be called 'normal'. Or if you want to stick to vertebrates, let kids know that the clownfish Nemo starts out as a man, then becomes a woman and can become a man again. Now I don't intend to draw a simple line from sponge to human. This is about becoming aware of the beautiful diversity of life forms, in order to create a kind of openness. Biology classes on the transitioning of Nemo and the sex life of sponges, followed by social science classes discussing diversity and inclusion. Just a thought.

For now, *douze points* to the Icelanders for supporting the invertebrate cause with the unbeatable jellyfish dance during the Eurovision Song Contest!

Lisa Becking is an assistant professor at the Marine Animal Ecology Group, a researcher at Wageningen Marine Research and a board member of the national Young Academy, partly under the auspices of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts & Sciences. She has an eye for art above and below sea level.

# African economies hold each other back

Why has economic development in Africa lagged behind that of the rest of the world for the past 50 years? The Wageningen historian Ewout Frankema has been doing research into this question. 'Regional integration is the key to success.' Text Albert Sikkema



Text Albert Sikkema

There are big differences between African countries, but we can nevertheless make some generalizations about their sluggish economic development, says Ewout Frankema, professor of Rural and Environmental History at Wageningen. 'It seems as though African economies do not boost each other. There are no dynamics that enable them to benefit from each other.'

And that is something that has happened in the past century in other parts of the world. The formation of the European Union, for example, was crucial for the fast increase in trade and the movement of capital between European countries after World War Two. The poorer European countries benefitted from this in particular. A similar process took place in Asia, led by ambitious economies such as Japan and China. Frankema: 'Even countries in Southeast Asia that suffered from long-term dictatorships and were economically isolated started to grow once they opened up to regional integration.' But why didn't a similar process of regional integration come about in Africa? In 2012, Frankema received a Vidi grant from the Dutch Research Council (NWO) to answer this question. Last month he received a further grant, a Vici (1.5 million euros), to explain the massive difference in development between Africa and Southeast Asia since 1970.

## How do you assess regional development?

'I start by looking at the trade between countries. It is striking that African countries export less than 10 per cent of their products to their neighbouring countries, which is extremely low. The figure in Asia is 50 per cent

on average. Secondly, I look at capital flows, meaning the investments in the economy. Where do they come from and which sectors are invested in? And thirdly, I have a look at long-term migration patterns, an enormously underestimated factor. In Southeast Asia, from the mid-19th century there was mass labour migration out of China and India into tropical regions with a labour shortage. These settler communities did not have an easy time, but they brought knowledge with them and set up companies and commercial networks that were reinforced by their links with their fatherlands. Some of these communities now occupy key positions in the regional economy.'

## Surely there were enterprising migrants in Africa too?

'Migration in Africa was of a different kind. Around 1850, migration was often still part and parcel of the slave trade. In the colonial period there was a big increase in voluntary labour migration, but after independence a lot of "foreigners" were kicked out.

'After independence, a lot of "foreigners" were kicked out. That was not good for trade and development'





Photo Duncan de Fey

Nigeria, for instance, deported an estimated three million people in the early 1980s. In Uganda and Tanzania, the Indian community, which occupied those key positions in the economy, was deported. That was not good for trade and development. We'll be publishing a book about African migration shortly, outlining some of this migration history.'

### **Why is there so little trade among African countries?**

'In many cases, that regional trade was suppressed in the colonial period. Under colonial rule, African economies

were led even further in the direction of export of minerals and tropical crops, and most of those products went to the colonizing country.'

### **But there was a lot of development aid after independence, wasn't there?**

'We shouldn't exaggerate the scale of that aid, much of which took the form of loans. After many African countries gained independence, there was a decade of optimism about the development of Africa. Many African leaders proclaimed the Pan-African ideal, the notion that everyone was equal, but that idea didn't



last long. One after the other, political leaders turned out to be autocrats. In countries where the opposition was suppressed and persecuted, people fled to the neighbouring country. That didn't do relations between the countries any good, so the colonial borders became harder. To add to the problems, the new governments borrowed large sums of money at low interest, due to the surplus of oil dollars in the 1970s. But in the 1980s, interest rates went up, exchange rates dived, and most African countries got caught in a long-lasting debt crisis and were forced to implement neoliberal reforms.'

### Did that impede development?

'Just at the point when the Green Revolution\* in Africa should have been given a final impetus, the funding tap was turned off. Asian countries invested in agricultural development with better seeds and pesticides, and they subsidized the rural areas. Yet the emphasis in African countries, on the advice of Western policymakers, was on industrial development in the cities. That was a disaster for rural Africa. The market that was supposed to solve everything shifted towards large-scale food imports rather than enabling local farmers to feed the growing cities.'

### Are there African countries that could give the region a boost?

'In Africa there are two large regional powerhouses: South Africa and Nigeria. But they hardly take on the role of economic leaders at all. South Africa doesn't do so because it's got too many internal problems due to its complex racial history. South Africa has the most industrialized economy in Africa, and has a highly developed service sector, but the poor black majority is wary of opening the economy up to labour migrants who will compete for jobs. So South Africa has closed its borders to labour migrants. It is hampered by the massive inequality there.'

'Nigeria, Africa's largest economy with its population of 200 million, has dragged its feet for a long time about signing the treaty for the African Continental Free Trade Area, which has been ratified by 44 African countries. The treaty is aimed at removing trade barriers and it could potentially provide a massive boost for regional trade. But it remains to be seen whether the treaty will lead to further diversification in African economies, so that their business model broadens out from the export of mining products and tropical crops.'

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'That extensive money-lending is a classic example of imperialism'

### But the economy is growing in Africa.

'The African economy has grown in the past 25 years, and relative poverty has gone down. But in absolute numbers, poverty has gone up because population growth in Africa outpacing the decline in relative poverty. At this rate, we are not going to manage to eradicate poverty in Africa by 2030. Africa needs a long period of fast growth such as China has had over the past 40 years.'

### What is China's influence on the African economy?

'It is often compared with the European colonization of Africa, but that is not entirely correct. China is in Africa primarily for its own benefit, but it is not drawing new boundaries across the continent, or taxing anyone or pursuing a policy of mass forced labour, as the European colonialists did. But there are some parallels. The Chinese invest in roads and railways that lead to the seaports (just like in the colonial era), which benefits trade with China but not with neighbouring countries. What is more, China sends a lot of Chinese labourers to Africa, where they do jobs that Africans could have earned a living with. My biggest concern is the loans that China is offering African governments. That bill will have to be paid one day. I don't rule out a new debt crisis in Africa. That extensive money-lending is a classic example of imperialism.'

### Are there opportunities for Africa?

'There are always opportunities. Now, for example, Africa can respond to the energy transition. Solar panels are a great solution for millions of rural households in Africa. And thanks to the digital revolution, Africans can more easily gain new knowledge and arrange their finances without being dependent on banks. Even the population growth offers new prospects: more people means more brainpower.' ■

\*The Green Revolution is the major agricultural revolution that mainly took place in Asian agriculture between 1960 and 1980.



# Typical Dutch Mouth mask

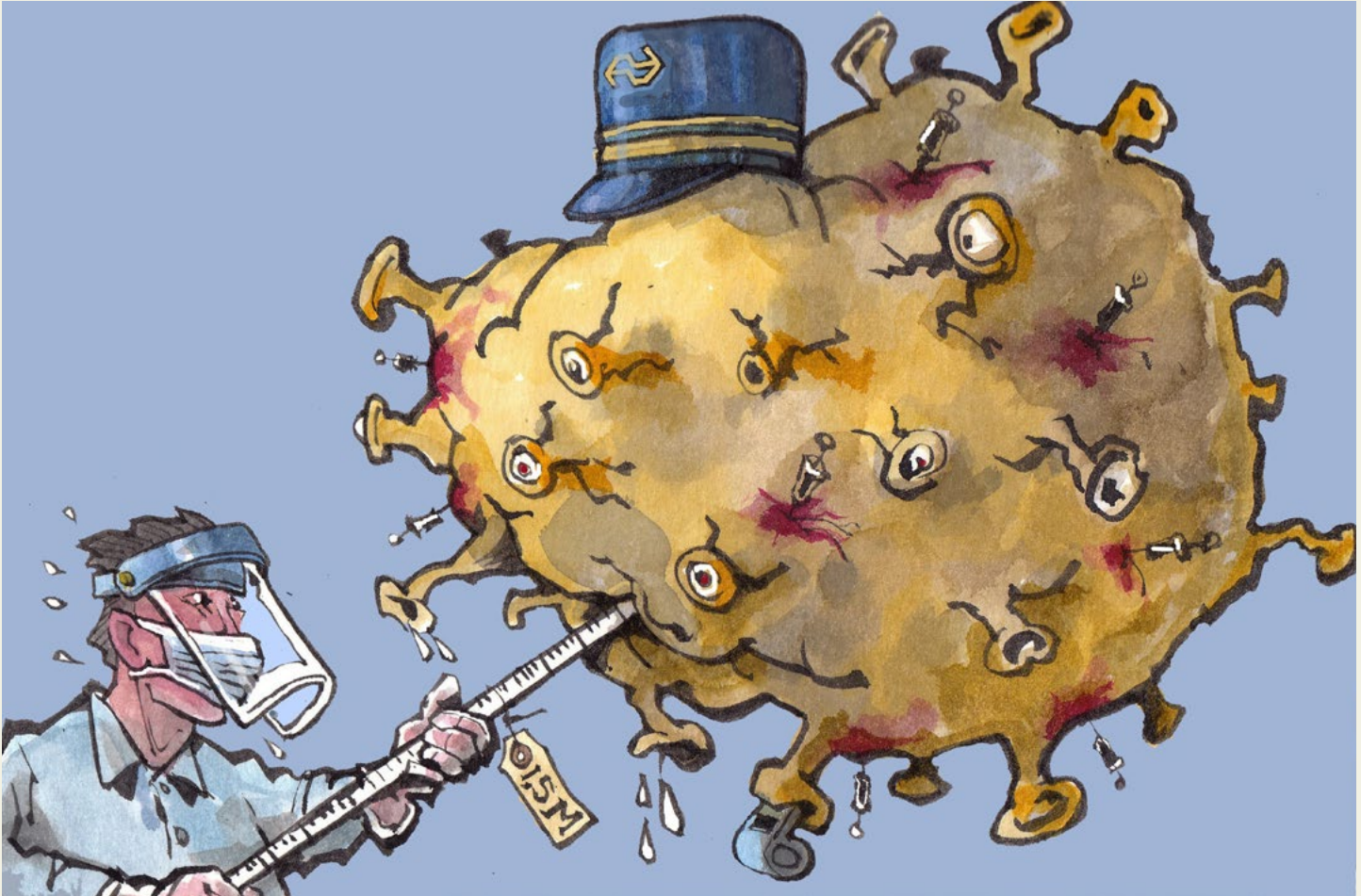


Illustration Henk van Ruitenbeek

One day, I wanted to go to Amsterdam by train and I checked the Covid-related rules on the NS website. It says that the use of a face mask on the

## 'It was an example of the Dutch getting lost in translation'

train is mandatory, and that these face masks can be purchased from various shops at train stations and in many station vending machines. When I read 'face mask', I thought they probably meant a face shield. But I wasn't sure. Then I did some research about it on Google. I found websites

mentioning face masks, but also websites about 'mouth masks'. Ah, I thought, maybe the face mask is like a face shield and the mouth mask is the one that covers the mouth and nose. So on the day I was travelling, I went to a vending machine at the train station. But I couldn't find any face shields, only mouth masks. I looked around and in the hall and on the platforms I saw only people wearing mouth masks. No one was using a face shield. So I thought that the rule probably no longer applied. After the trip, I asked Dutch friends about it and they said face masks and mouth masks are actually the

same thing: people use the terms interchangeably. The term 'mouth mask' is just an example of the Dutch getting lost in translation. Later, I did further research about it on Google. And it is true, it is only the Dutch who use the term '*mondkapje*', or 'mouth mask'.

Do you have a nice anecdote about your experience of going Dutch? Send it in! 300 words max. Send it to [resource@wur.nl](mailto:resource@wur.nl) and earn 25 euros and Dutch candy.

PICTURE



2 °C



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2021/04/14





## CAUGHT

PhD candidate **Saminathan Sivaprakasham Murugesan** (Laboratory of Entomology) found a new hobby during the pandemic: taking photos with a wildlife camera of animals in the woods and floodplains around Wageningen and Nijmegen. Together with his friend Filippo, he spent hours scouring the mud, thorny bushes and dense thickets in search of animal tracks and a promising site for his camera trap. And this is the result: a collage of the ‘wildest’ animals he captured on camera — a fox, a badger and a pine marten.

Photo Filippo Guerra, PhD candidate at the Laboratory of Entomology

Two sides

## The meat-free canteen

Delft University's Faculty of Architecture recently banned meat from the menus in its canteens. A great idea that deserves to be copied by Wageningen without delay? Or a dubious bit of gesture politics that unacceptably infringes on the right to decide what you eat? Professor Cor van der Weele and researcher Hans Dagevos mull over the pros and cons.

Text Marieke Enter Photos Guy Ackermans



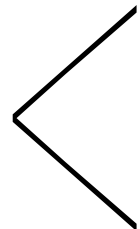
**Dagevos:** 'Whether there's any point in a measure like that depends on what you're aiming at. In terms of behaviour, it is general knowledge that people adapt their eating habits more easily once they have got to know something new. You can see that with the consumption of insects, something I happen to have just finished a review on. But whether you are more likely to give up meat at home if you don't get served it in the canteen anymore is anyone's guess. We just don't know.'

**Van der Weele:** 'The protein transition is going quite slowly, so I understand the desire to take big steps. But that doesn't always go well. I remember a farm occupation by animal activists in 2019, which led to the formation of the Farmers Defence Force. The nitrogen crisis then put the wind in their sails. Overall, fewer farmers are now open to going sustainable than were then, and a tremendous polarization has developed. A backlash like that is not unthinkable with meat-free canteens, either.'

**Dagevos:** 'People can display compensatory behaviour, for example. That's called self-licensing – when you reward yourself after an act of "self-denial". Even more recalcitrant reactions are possible too – meat as the desirable forbidden fruit, or as an act of protest. You can call that juvenile if you like, but these are the sorts of reactions you get with bans and rules.'

**Van der Weele:** 'Although it could change in the right direction too: people might actually appreciate getting a kick up the backside to join the meat transition. It is unpredictable. But just the fact that people are talking about it shows that change is in the air. It's true, there is not much change in our consumption levels yet, but meat-eating is much less a matter of course.'

'We mustn't duck the question of whether food should always be available everywhere'





# > ‘How do you justify taking away freedom of choice?’



**Dagevos:** ‘Our society has a strongly liberal tradition. Freedom of choice seems to be ethical principle number one. But in view of the massive diet-related problems of health, sustainability and animal welfare, we mustn’t duck the question of whether food should always be available everywhere. As a university, we have a responsibility to tackle these kinds of controversial questions, I think.’

**Van der Weele:** ‘When freedom of choice is taken away, there is also the question of what justifies that. It’s best to talk about it together. For food issues, it is relevant that food is a major topic in Wageningen, and that we find ourselves in an occasionally uncomfortable balancing act between traditional and innovative food production. At WUR, it wouldn’t be very consistent to ban meat only from the canteens and then close the subject. A recalibration of the range of options in our canteens should be the

starting point for a broader rethink of our priorities, including in our education and research.’

**Dagevos:** ‘As a signal from the university, the canteen menu is quite important. Delft scrapped meat for the sake of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> – very functional, very technological, fits Delft perfectly. But not WUR. We are working on food issues so intensively and diversely, and that should be a reason to tackle the issue more creatively and comprehensively.’

**Van der Weele:** ‘If they are concerned about CO<sub>2</sub> in Delft, they should ban not just meat but dairy products too.’

**Dagevos:** ‘Exactly. If Delft replaces meat with cheese rolls, that won’t make a big difference to their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.’

**Dagevos:** ‘In my opinion, WUR should not restrict the discussion about canteen menus to whether or not meat should be on them. I am in favour of a kind of flexitarian canteen, with all the types of food we work on in Wageningen: local, organic, bio-dynamic, and with all sorts of alternative sources of protein. Showcase all that diversity, literally, and transform our canteens into an advert for the breadth we have to offer at WUR.’

**Van der Weele:** ‘It would also be so inter-

esting to do experiments. Not just with restricting freedom of choice, but also with interventions aiming to get people on board. Put up the price of meat, for example, reduce the amount of it on offer, provide a lot more information, and plan veggie weeks. And let research show what works and how it works. We are still really looking for room to manoeuvre. And for ways of speeding up, because we’ve really got to change our diet. Hopefully we are now in the run-up to making bigger strides.’

**Dagevos:** ‘Yes, those questions are rapidly becoming more urgent. The transition to healthier and more sustainable food is going slowly, whereas its importance is increasing fast. If we stick to existing structures and dogmas, we will never, ever achieve the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.’ ■

## Who’s talking?

Cor van der Weele is extraordinary professor of Humanist Philosophy (Social Sciences) and is known for her research on public reactions to *in vitro* meat. Consumption sociologist Hans Dagevos (Wageningen Economic Research) is closely involved as a senior researcher in the annual survey of meat consumption in the Netherlands.

## Student life can start up again too

# 'IN THE BAR AGAIN AT LAST'

Now the Dutch Covid figures are improving, things are looking up for student life as well: more classes are allowed on campus and student societies can start up some activities again. Like having a beer outside. 'You can definitely call it a blessing that that's allowed again.'

**E**ight people at a time, sitting two at a table with the tables suitably spaced. The Covid rules are strictly adhered to on the terrace at Unitas, says chair Erik van der Velde (23). 'Our terrace seating is open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, the days when we used to hold members' nights. We run four shifts, so 32 students can come per day.' These may seem like modest numbers, but they are happy with them at Unitas, says members' coordinator Wouter Fennema (23). During the lockdown, Fennema was in close contact with the members. 'Especially with first-years, to check how they were doing: psychologically, in their studies and in their connection with the

society. They held out very well, but they were really longing to be able to drop in at the clubhouse, to socialize and just to have a drink again with other members. You can definitely call it a blessing that that's allowed again.'

Unitas members got through the lockdown with online activities and walks, says Van der Velde. 'The walking was so popular in the end that the society joined in The May 50K, a stunt to raise funds for MS research. Our members were sponsored to walk 50 kilometres in May, and raised about 2000 euros that way. So something good came out of it.'

Fennema and Van der Velde are hoping further easing of measures will be possible soon. Van der Velde: 'We are working on a new bar in the party basement. We'd like to open it with the members this academic year.' Fennema: 'It would be nice if we



Text Luuk Zegers

could throw a really good party during the AID introduction week. That would be a great way to mark the end of this crazy year.'

### Full roof terrace

KSV Franciscus is looking a lot livelier than it was during the lockdown too. The roof terrace has space for 40 visitors at a time. 'We're really not full all the time,' says chair Emiel Dijkstra. 'That is partly because of the weather. But sometimes member sit and have a drink in the pouring rain.' Like at Unitas, there are several shifts per day. 'It's lunchtime from 12 to three; drinks time from three to six, and so on. Members have a beer and can get a simple snack like a croquette roll.'

Franciscus is still in the first phase of reopening. 'We are testing what works,' says Dijkstra. 'Last week we were open every day. We'll probably cut down a bit soon, but we'll stay open on the most popular days. We have asked our members

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'SOMETIMES MEMBERS SIT AND HAVE A DRINK IN THE POURING RAIN'





It's a lot livelier on the roof terrace at KSV Franciscus than it was during the lockdown. There is room for 40 visitors at a time.  
Photo Sven Menschel

## 'A REALLY GOOD PARTY WOULD BE A NICE END TO THIS CRAZY YEAR'

on which days they would like to make use of the roof terrace, whether they feel safe in terms of Covid, and whether they have suggestions for improvements.'

It's been a difficult academic year for the societies, says Dijkstra. 'Last summer you could do quite a lot, but towards the end of 2020 the country locked down more and more. Students are very happy now that they can come to the terrace again. It means you can see people who are not in your Covid bubble. I hope we'll be allowed to do a bit more every month now, and that it will all soon start to look like student society life as it was, so that next academic

year is as good as normal. Of course, it all depends on the Covid figures, but it would be very nice for everything and everyone in the society.'

### For real

In the study associations too, people are glad to be able to meet 'for real' again. Anne van der Velde (20) is on the board of Genius Loci, the study association for Landscape Architecture and Spatial Planning students. 'Since measures were eased, I have classes on campus every day and Genius Loci members had lunch together recently. Such things do make student life a lot nicer.'

During the lockdown, Genius Loci switched to online activities. 'There

simply is less interest in those activities, so we are happy that we can organize things in-person again. It's nice to see each other in the flesh again. It gives you new energy.' So the study association has no shortage of plans, says Van der Velde. 'Together with the teachers, we at least want to run a nice end-of-year activity for the first years, because starting university life during this past Covid year was really quite extraordinary. And we still want to go on a first-year weekend with this cohort, even though that will probably take place during the next academic year.' ■

Results of *Resource* survey: 'How are we feeling?'

# LONGING FOR CONTACT

How are you feeling, what did the past year bring you, and how do you see the future? To get answers to these and other questions, *Resource* sent a survey to staff and students. An analysis of the results shows that what people have missed most is personal contact, and that they would like to see working part of the week at home become the norm.

It's obvious that Covid-19 has affected our lives. Working and studying at home became the new normal over the past year and, by trial and error, online education was established at astonishing speed. How are staff and students feeling after all these months? And: what are their expectations of the future? The survey contained over 25 questions, and the open questions were answered at length. 79 students and 236 staff members took part in the study. So particularly for the students, we must see the figures as a rough indication. They give us an impression but they are not representative of the WUR population as a whole.

## Five conclusions

Broadly, we can draw five conclusions. About one quarter of the staff have found the Covid crisis very difficult, partly because of having to work at home so

much. And yet 48 per cent see exactly that as a positive development. Less commuting time and more freedom to plan their work their own way are the main plus points, and that applied to students and online education too. A second conclusion is that nearly three out of every four staff members are working entirely from home. They say they are not very happy with the work pressure and the work-life balance. But they would like to go on working at home for two days a week: nearly two out of three staff members want to combine a home office with going into work. The third conclusion is that the respondents believe that higher education has been permanently changed by the Covid crisis. They expect that home-based education will continue to be an element in higher education. 66 per cent of the respondents think that digital home-based education is a good addition to

in-person classes and lectures. Only 27 per cent of the students who took the survey think that their education should go back to the way it was before the crisis.

## Attention problem

There were some reservations about studying at home, though. The students warn that the lack of informal contact before, during and after the online classes is a problem, and so is the lack of interaction during the class. 'Online classes just don't work for everybody,' writes one teacher, 'especially not for people with attention problems. I know students who have fallen badly behind or are underachieving without face-to-face classes.' Another teacher: 'I am concerned about my students' mental health. As a teacher, I can only look on helplessly, which is very frustrating.' The fourth conclusion is that more than six



Text Willem André

out of 10 students have found the Covid crisis very or extremely difficult, due to low mood, worries or stress. Positive points they see are that they appreciate their families more and that they have taken up new hobbies. But students give studying at home very low marks: that is the fifth conclusion we can draw. One in three have also been doing less work since the crisis.

### Longing

So much for the numbers and percentages. Equally interesting are the answers given to the open questions: these are personal, open and extensive. About 250 respondents answered the open question: What is the biggest problem you experience at the moment in relation to studying or working at WUR? The answer seems to be: we

long for contact. Half the respondents mention missing contact with their colleagues. Especially spontaneous encounters. Everything has to be planned now. 'I miss my colleagues, an inspiring environment and the surprise encounters,' writes one colleague. And: 'There is much less debate going on.' Or: 'Contact is the source of my job satisfaction.' One teacher writes: 'I want to be able to see from a student's face whether they are lost or the penny has dropped.' The problem for one manager is: 'how to keep on motivating

my team when they work at home.' A first-year student writes: 'Because of all the online education, I hardly know any fellow students. When I do see them on campus, it's always the same people, because all the groups are formed alphabetically.' Although the tone of a lot of reactions gives cause for concern, there are other responses too, of course. 'Don't emphasize problems so much. Convincing students, PhD researchers and tenure trackers that they're in danger of falling behind won't help. Life doesn't always unfold along straight lines. Stay positive, we're doing very well.' And: 'I am full of admiration for the efficiency with which IT infrastructure has facilitated working at home on a large scale.'

### Alternate

As for continuing to work at home, the survey respondents are pretty much agreed that it's a good idea. But they do want to alternate it with working on campus or at other WUR locations. 'Try to set up blended working as well as possible,' is one response. Opinions differ on hybrid education. 'We should avoid that as far as possible; the quality is much poorer than face-to-face education.' Or is it? 'Lectures can be online, while seminars and practicals should be on a small scale (a maximum of 15 students per teacher) on location.' What do you think? Add your comments on this story on our website resource-online.nl ■





# ROTTING ON A SANDBANK

On a sandbank called Rottumerplaat lies a slowly decomposing whale carcass. The decomposition and its effects on the surrounding nature are being monitored with scientific precision.

The carcass in question is that of a young male minke whale that washed up on the island on 25 November last year. At least, that is when it was spotted by a fisher and reported to the crew of the ministry of Agriculture's surveillance boat De Harder. 'They established that it was a dead whale and named it Godfried,' says Hans Verdaat, a researcher at Marine Research in Den Helder. 'After Godfried Bomans,' explains his colleague Martin Baptist. 'Precisely 50 years ago this year, the writers Jan Wolkers and Godfried Bomans both spent a week in a tent on Rottumerplaat. Godfried couldn't stand it. He didn't feel at home,' he laughs, 'any more than this whale does.' 'Groningen humour,' adds Verdaat, 'mixed with a sense of history.'

Beached whales usually have to be cleared away. That is not just a costly operation, says Baptist, it is also a pity. 'Dead animals are part of nature too. So why don't we leave an animal like this where it is? That is part of the story behind this pilot study. The other part of the story is that we've been talking for several years about letting a whale

carcass sink in the Waddenzee. A carcass underwater would be enriching for nature.' These two ideas suddenly came together when Godfried washed up on Rottumerplaat. Instead of sinking in the sea, his last resting place was on the island. In the dunes, safely above the storm line so that he couldn't be washed back into the sea.

## Recordings

And that is where Godfried has been lying since the end of November. In splendid isolation, but subject to constant surveillance, sampling and measuring. A total of seven cameras record developments. Baptist: Four of those cameras – one in each wind direction – take a photo every hour, day and night, with additional photos triggered by movement.' Those images are sent to a special email address via a 4G link. 'Godfried is the only dead whale with his own email address,' grins Baptist. 'But I'm not going to give you the address, because I don't want any spam.' He looks at the photos that come into the inbox. Three secondary cameras take additional photos. But there is a lot more going on, explains Verdaat. 'During



Text Roelof Kleis

## 'THAT SMELL IS NOT TOO BAD'

our monthly visits, we use three cameras linked to an altitude measurement to accurately determine the position of the carcass in 3D. That helps us measure changes to the carcass precisely. We record the vegetation in the immediate vicinity, there are three insect traps, and we take soil samples and fungus samples from the skin.'

Verdaat and Baptist have just come back from visiting Godfried. Thanks to Covid,

there was no room for passengers. But to give a whiff of the Godfried experience, Baptist gets out a bottle of soil soaked in juices from the carcass. ‘Smell it,’ he suggests, ‘Then you’ll know what it smells like when we’re doing field work there. It’s perfectly safe.’ The sample smells stale but bearable. ‘That smell is not too bad,’ says Verdaat. ‘People think you can smell a dead whale on the beach a kilometre away, but that isn’t really true. It travels 10 metres at the most.’

### Island in winter

So the smell isn’t a problem. Or perhaps it is, since after six months of decomposition there is remarkably little visible change. Godfried still looks amazingly presentable. ‘That surprises us too,’ says Baptist. ‘I thought the carcass would disintegrate a lot faster, that it would get torn open and bits of whale would be scattered over the beach.’ ‘In the winter I would certainly have expected 30 to 40 great black-backed gulls around

the carcass,’ adds Verdaat. ‘Last month there were two sea eagles sitting a couple of hundred metres away, but they didn’t even come and look! There are some smaller birds, but they can’t do much with this carcass. The peck at it but they don’t get through the skin. Not even at the places where we took a skin sample.’ ‘You mustn’t forget,’ Verdaat goes on, ‘that this is an uninhabited island. The only large mammals are rabbits and grey and common seals. There are no rats, foxes, mustelids or wild boar. The usual suspects that would devour a carcass like this are not here.’ ‘And don’t forget that it was winter,’ says Baptist. ‘Now it’s warming up, we are expecting a lot more developments. We are hoping for carrion beetles, for instance. They are spectacular species if you’re into beetles. Carrion beetles don’t fly in winter and they have

to come from the mainland, which is about 12 kilometres away. Will they smell this carcass, and can they reach it? That is interesting.

The Godfried pilot will go on at least until the summer. The experiment can be followed on the website [basismonitoringwadden.waddenzee.nl](http://basismonitoringwadden.waddenzee.nl) Where there are monthly reports and time lapse videos of the daily photographs. There is more information about stranded whales in the Netherlands on [www.walvisstrandingen.nl](http://www.walvisstrandingen.nl)



‘NOW IT’S WARMING UP, WE EXPECT MORE DEVELOPMENTS, LIKE CARRION BEETLES’



### WHALE BITS

Godfried the whale carcass has been lying in the dunes of Rottumerplaat since the end of November 2020. ‘I thought the carcass would disintegrate a lot faster, that it would get torn open and bits of whale would be scattered over the beach,’ says WUR researcher Martin Baptist. The photo was taken by his colleague Hans Verdaat.

Mayor Geert van Rumund steps down

# ‘WUR should invest more in the town’

Geert van Rumund was mayor of Wageningen for nearly 16 years. He was the mayor of ‘campus Wageningen’, as he sees it. He said goodbye at the beginning of this week.

**B**y the time you read this, Geert van Rumund – one of the longest-serving mayors in the country – will have retired.

Wageningen was his first and last post as mayor. Having served for some time as a municipal councillor in Nijmegen, he wanted to be mayor of a middle-sized municipality. ‘On a scale and with the kind of community I can understand, and where I feel an affinity with the people. I come from Zevenaar myself.’

## And then Wageningen came up. Just the job?

‘I should say so! Wageningen is a great city to be mayor of. It has an academic world, which I was familiar with from Nijmegen, it has the intimacy of a small town with the traditions and culture of the authentic *Wageningers*, and it is the City of the Liberation.’

## During your term WUR moved out of town to its current campus. Is that a pity?

‘I wouldn’t put it like that. My view is that the town is one big campus. In small

university cities, town and campus are so intertwined that you can’t talk in terms of a separate campus.’

## But didn’t it happen at the expense of the liveliness of the town centre?

‘That is undeniably so, and I am very pleased that the student societies are still located in the centre. But it was the university’s salvation. When I started here, the number of first-year students had hit rock bottom. At the AID at Duivendaal, I could shake hands with every single new student. Nowadays I stand on a large podium to address 2000 new students. In fact, you could say student numbers went up when I got here. Joking! One thing I do regret is that WUR has let the Aula go. There is something special about holding a PhD ceremony or inaugural lecture in such an iconic building in the town centre.’

## Has the relationship with WUR changed in your period as mayor?

‘That relationship has improved. An audit about eight years ago suggested

there was a need to strengthen the link between the municipality and WUR. Both parties have worked on that since then, exchanging visits annually, giving extensive presentations on numerous subjects, and holding open discussions. We work together on a city agenda. At a personal level, we are in easy contact, without pestering each other. I am very positive about it, but of course that are always things that could be improved.’

## Such as?

‘WUR could take more of an interest in the symbolism of Wageningen as the City of Liberation. It’s even more important here than in other municipalities to realize that we mustn’t take freedom, safety and peace for granted. I would call on WUR to address those values more. WUR should stick its neck out for them more than it does. How? But joining the conversation and action on how you can give substance to the theme of freedom. By investing time and money in it, and by joining the foundation





‘WUR could take more of an interest in the symbolism of Wageningen as the City of Liberation.’ Photo Guy Ackermans

Stichting 45. That’s a way of making clear that WUR too sets store by the title City of Liberation.’

### Is WUR too inward-looking?

‘There is too little knowledge of local policy issues within WUR. WUR has an ambitious agenda and vision of the future. But you are part of a city with its own history too. WUR ought to have more people with roots in the city, and it should pay more attention to what’s

going on here. WUR should invest more in the city. WUR needs the city whenever it wants to achieve something. If the university just pursues its own agenda, that puts people’s backs up and it becomes harder to get things done. You need two-way commitment and mutual understanding.’

### A recent report by Neo Observatory shown what a big economic impact WUR has on Wageningen. Is that a problem?

‘I always say to critics who think WUR is too powerful and dominant that we should be very happy with WUR and everything that goes on within it. We are richly blessed here thanks to WUR. In times of economic crisis, we never suffer huge dips because so many people work for WUR. True, the growth of WUR is

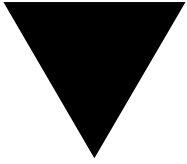
not doing anything to diminish the gap between rich and poor. But it’s also partly thanks to WUR that we are a left-leaning municipality that pays a lot of attention to people who are less well-off.’

### What advice do you have for your successor?

‘Keep your eyes open and listen. Show plenty of empathy and interest. Be approachable. You’ve got to win the confidence of the townspeople. Only if you are mayor for both the town and the university, can you reap a good harvest. If that balance is lacking, it’s risky.’ ■

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## ‘WE ARE RICHLY BLESSED HERE THANKS TO WUR’



## Key people: Hans de Rooij

They are indispensable on the campus: the cleaners, caretakers, caterers, gardeners, assistants – the list is long. *Resource* seeks out these key people. This time, meet Hans de Rooij (58), a development technician at the Technical Development Studio, Innovatron.

Text Milou van der Horst Photo Guy Ackermans

'If I were to tell people at a party some of the things I make, no one would believe me. We have made a machine for measuring the sweat of a cow, and a harpoon to catch a crocodile with. I make machines and apparatus for researchers and I'm there to trouble-shoot when someone needs a bolt, or a machine breaks down. That way the research doesn't come to halt: we really are the grease that keeps the wheels turning. The more complex an assignment is, the more I like it – working at the limit of what's possible. To give an example, I had to make a nozzle that was shaped like a 12-point star on the inside, and

had a diameter of 1 millimetre. That was a challenge, but I managed and that's satisfying. In the 30 years I've been working here, I don't think we've ever yet failed to make something. It helps that I've got a positive attitude and I'm creative. Very occasionally I just can't come up with an idea. That really annoys me, but then I consult my colleagues and you start to get somewhere together. And sometimes I suddenly think of something in the shower or at night.

You have to keep track of everything, because I do everything myself: contact with clients, sketching, designing, building, the finances, the orders, the outsourcing. I like the freedom and the responsibility. About half of my job is on the drawing side, and half of it is actually making the product. Before this, I worked

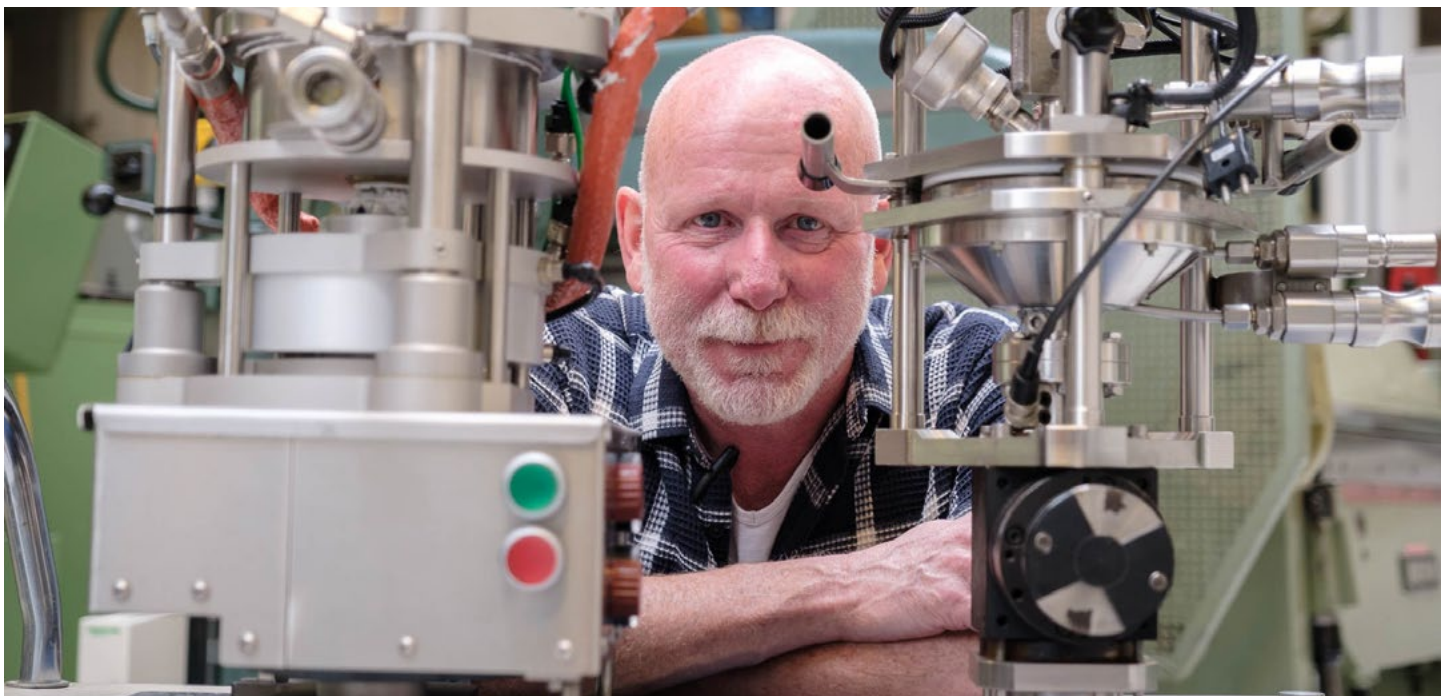
for a production company, with a lot of repetitive work. I'd had enough there after 10 years.

I was practically born fiddling with technology. As a child I would get old radios and clocks for my birthday, which I could take apart and use to make something new. That made me happy. Technology is progressing, and it's nice if you can follow it and make use of it. We went from a drawing board to a computer. Then came the switch to 3D drawing. Twenty years ago, there was no such thing as a 3D printer, and now I use this technique in my designs.

For 25 years I've been working on a machine that makes fake meat with the fibrous structure of real meat. It would be nice if this technique is in use in the production process before I retire. Then I'll have done a good job.'

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**'We've never yet failed to make something'**





## Campus ♦ residents

### IsoLife

A plant-breeding company wants to know whether it is allowed to make the claim 'healthier' for its new potato variety. To qualify for such a claim, it must prove that the potato contains less fattening carbohydrate and that this leads to a lower blood sugar level in the body. So the breeding company calls *IsoLife*, which makes carbohydrates traceable with an isotope.

*IsoLife*, based in Radix, is a uniquely specialized company that also works for research organizations in the Netherlands, Germany, Japan, China and the US. The company makes use of isotopes, of which every element has several. Take carbon, for instance:  $^{12}\text{C}$  is the standard isotope, and *IsoLife* uses  $^{13}\text{C}$ , carbon with an extra neutron. In the case of the potato variety, the company will put the potato plants in a climate chamber with certain carbon or nitrogen isotopes. After that, the potato tubers will contain

these isotopes and the digestion of the potato in the human body can be tracked. *IsoLife* has delivered more than 400 isotope products that provided the material

**The isotope products have provided the material for more than 200 scientific publications**

for more than 200 scientific publications.

Founder Ries de Visser was given a research question by the Biochemistry group 18 years ago for which he had to build isotopes into potatoes. Now his company has between 50 and 100 clients per year, although it only employs three people. *IsoLife* rents a lot of apparatus and lab facilities at WUR, collaborates with Wageningen researchers, and hires technical services from WUR. 'When something goes wrong you must act quickly because those isotope plants cost a fortune.' PhD and Master's students from WUR are always welcome. AS

There are about 100 companies on campus. We introduce them to you in *Resource*. This time: *IsoLife* in Radix.

All the flavours of the world can be found in the WUR community. Thijs Stegmann (23), an MSc student of Molecular Life Sciences, takes us to... the Netherlands.



Flavours of WUR

## Mushroom stew

'Any kind of stew reminds me of home. Nothing could be nicer than arriving home after cycling through the rain for an hour to see that your mother has a big pan of stew on the stove. The whole house smells of it, and that is what I call a homecoming. I like making stew myself too: it's tasty, easy to make and you can vary it endlessly. A delicious meal to make for your housemates.'

- 1 Chop the onions, cut the carrots into small pieces, slice the mushrooms and chop the garlic;
- 2 Fry the onions in olive oil in a large pan at medium heat (the pan must be suitable for long cooking). Once the onions are glazed, add the carrots and fry until they start to soften. Add the mushrooms and turn up the heat until they start to brown. Continue to stir well.
- 3 Add the garlic and the tomato puree and fry for two minutes. Add the bay leaves, thyme and oregano and turn down the heat. Simmer gently while you cut the leek into rings. Add the leek and fry it with the rest. Heat up the pan briefly and add the stock. Then turn down the heat and let the stew simmer until everything is soft and flavoursome. Add salt and pepper to taste.
- 4 Serve the stew with sauteed potatoes or bread. It's delicious with a side salad too!

### Ingredients (for 6-8 people) :

- 2 onions
- 2 carrots
- 500 grams button mushrooms
- 250 grams other mushrooms (chestnut, oyster - choose your favourite)
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- 1 small tin of tomato puree
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 2 large leeks
- 1/2 litre mushroom stock
- 2 bay leaves
- 5-6 sprigs of thyme
- 1 teaspoon of dried oregano
- Black pepper and salt to taste

tip: If you like your stew thickened, you can add some flour before you add the stock.



**Thijs Stegmann (23)**  
Master's student of  
Molecular Life Sciences



# IN MEMORIAM

## ERIK VAN ROZENDAAL

Very sadly, our former colleague Erik van Rozendaal passed away on 25 May at the age of 61. After earning his PhD on the synthesis of the anti-cancer drug Taxol, Erik joined the Organic Chemistry department in 1994 as a postdoc, to develop a method of isolating an ingredient of the scarce Taxol from the needles of the taxus tree. After that, he applied himself to the financial management of the department and he became the education coordinator for Organic Chemistry. He was the driving force behind the much-admired digital educational support on organic chemistry offered to first-year students

(OWL) and was involved in the early stages of the Academic Consultancy Cluster (ACT). In 2018, Erik was told he only had a few months to live. Luckily, and contrary to all expectations, he lived another three years, but that was still far too short. Erik loved life and we shall never forget his consistently good humour, his optimism, his commitment and his warmth. We wish Jeanne and Erik's family and loved-ones strength at this sad time.

*On behalf of the Organic Chemistry chair group,  
Teris van Beek, Maurice Franssen, Elly Geurtsen and Han Zuilhof*

## ALBERT PRINS

We heard the sad news this month that Professor Albert Prins has died at the age of 92. In 1977, Albert was the first chair-holding professor of the Physics of Foods at Wageningen. One of the research programmes was about the characteristics of liquid surfaces, such as are formed by emulsion drops and foam bubbles. He developed this field thoroughly with his assistants, students and PhD researchers, who benefitted from Albert's affable and inspiring leadership and his great interest in the person behind the researcher. Albert developed new measuring methods that took

account of the challenges facing companies in the food industry. He was therefore an early practitioner of Wageningen's motto 'science for impact'.

After his retirement, Albert remained – respectfully and modestly – very interested in developments in the chair group, now called Physics and Physical Chemistry of Foods. We shall miss Albert very much.

We wish his wife Lien and the rest of his family great strength.

*Erik van der Linden,  
Professor of Physics and  
Physical Chemistry of Foods*

## Vacancy

Do you have a passion for education? There is a vacancy for a student on the Board of Education from October 2021.

The Board of Education is the legal board of all accredited study programmes at WUR and consists of 4 professors and 4 students. The activities of the BoE take up about one day a week. This includes a meeting every two weeks on Wednesdays between 9:00 and 12:30.

### Your responsibilities / opportunities

- To represent students from Wageningen University in the board that decides upon the content and quality of accredited study programmes and advises the Executive Board on various educational issues.
- To deal with a variety of topics, such as new study programmes, quality of courses and teachers, new education policies and education innovation.
- To take an in-depth look at the management of your university;
- To enrich your curriculum vitae with education management experience.

You are proactive and you have a critical attitude. Preferably, you have prior experience on a (programme) committee, a board or similar. You study in the domain of Agrotechnology & Food Sciences (BAT, BBT, BFT, BML, BVG, MBE, MBF, MBS, MBT, MFQ, MFS, MFT, MML, MNH).

The appointment is for one year, with the possibility of two re-appointments. You are compensated with three months of FOS (financial compensation for board activities) per year.

### Your qualities

You have a passion for education and ideas to develop and innovate the WU education.

### Interested?

Apply by sending an email before 11 June, 2021 with your motivation and CV to: [boardofeducation.secretary@wur.nl](mailto:boardofeducation.secretary@wur.nl). The interviews with candidates will take place in the week of 14 June. Because of the Covid-19 measures, the interviews will be held online.

More info: [www.wur.eu/boardofeducation](http://www.wur.eu/boardofeducation)



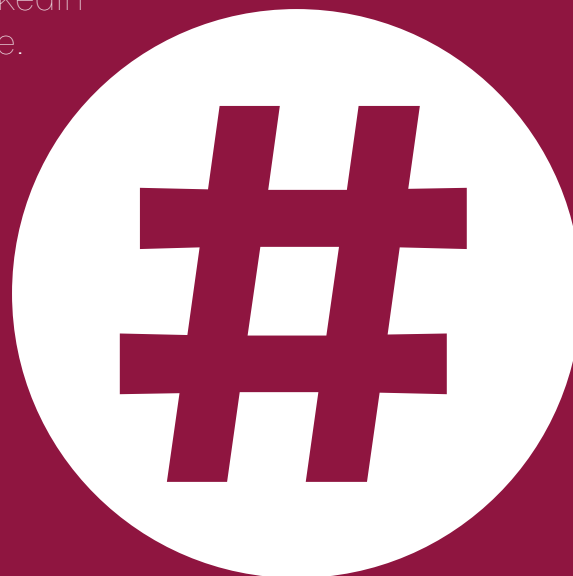
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## Colophon

*Resource* is the independent medium for students and staff at Wageningen University & Research. *Resource* reports and interprets the news and gives the context. New articles are posted daily on [resource-online.nl](http://resource-online.nl). The magazine is published every fortnight on Thursday.

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**'I will soon be starting work as a student assistant supervising practicals. Some of the students taking the course used to be my fellow students and we have enjoyed a beer or two together on occasion. In the classroom I will suddenly be supervising them and having to grade them. How should I deal with this new role?'**

Samantha Kristensen, Master's student of Environmental Sciences



## Assessment criteria

'During a practical it is important that students perform experiments correctly and safely. If you were selected to be a student assistant, you must be a talented student who is very capable of handling this responsibility. I think student assistants have an advantage over more senior lecturers, as they can relate to the students more easily; they know better which bits are challenging for the students and where they need some extra explanation. The grading can indeed be tricky. Ask the coordinator for a grading guide (rubric) that makes the criteria for each grade explicit. That way you will be sure to give an objective grade. Alternatively, ask to be assigned to a group without any of your friends.'

Jessica Vervalle, teacher

## Be yourself

'Your students probably feel a bit embarrassed too. So be open and honest. There's nothing wrong with showing that you're finding this new hierarchy a bit difficult, by making a joke for instance. Beyond that, I would say above all, be yourself and don't pretend to be someone completely different. A bit of acting is part of teaching, but too much of it leads to uncomfortable situations. What does seem strange to me is that you have to grade the students. I would have thought that was the teacher's responsibility, partly to avoid this kind of tension.'

Arie Nieuwenhuizen, Teacher of the Year 2020

## Be clear

'You already imply this is a case of changing roles. So be clear about it with the students: state at the start of the practical that you are there to teach and that you are in charge of content and assessment. Afterwards it's fine to have a beer together.

Of course it might happen that you end up failing someone, but if you've been clear about the criteria and in your support, then that grade is a reflection of the student's effort. Experience shows that everyone respects that. And if not, they wouldn't be very nice drinking mates anyway. Enjoy being a student assistant!'

Peter van den Berg, Biology teacher ELS

## Introduction

'Ask the course coordinator to introduce you and any other student assistants at the start of the practical. The coordinator can clarify what your role and task is on the course, so that your students know where they are right from the start.'

Saskia van Marrewijk, educational support staff

## Businesslike

'It's no problem that you know the students. If necessary, tell these students during the practical that you now have a professional relationship with them as a student assistant. They will probably soon notice that you know what you are doing with the experiments, and that they can learn something from you. Stay objective and communicate in a businesslike way. That will clarify the nature of your interaction with the students. It doesn't have to influence your relationship with them in your private life.'

Carlo van Mierlo, assistant professor of Biochemistry

## NEXT WURRY

**I am one of the few non-Dutch-speaking researchers in my group. During coffee and lunch breaks my co-workers mostly speak Dutch together. They argue that it is their free time so they can do what they want, in whatever language they prefer. As I don't understand Dutch, I feel left out and alone during these times. Who has a solution?'**

PhD student O (name known to the editors)

*Do you have advice for this Wurrer? Or could you use some good advice yourself? Email your tips or your question (100 words max) by 10 June to [resource@wur.nl](mailto:resource@wur.nl) subject noWURries.*