

Resource

MARCH 2023 VOLUME 17

The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

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mediates 33 times

Spotting sick cows
with passport
photos

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FOREWORD

Drifting

One of the things I missed most in the Covid period was the bike rides from Ede-Wageningen station to campus and back. Along the Edeseweg, through Bennekom, down the Groenestraat and the Wildekamp and a right turn past Droevendaal. The crispy leaves of the tall trees along the route in the autumn. The bushes and verges in bloom and the lambs in the meadows in the spring. Rain or shine, rain trousers or shorts: it's always a treat.

For someone used to the chaos of Utrecht, Wageningen's bike traffic feels like a safe haven. In Utrecht, I have to swerve for cyclists going the wrong way, and slam on the brakes for scooters and people who video call (!) while cycling instead of paying attention. It goes well most of the time, and occasionally it goes badly wrong.

Back to the 'safe haven' of Wageningen. It goes wrong here too sometimes. I cycled around with someone from the Cyclists Union to look at cyclist safety (spoiler: 7/10) and how it could be improved (page 12). There's a poem in the bike shed at Utrecht station that is in the spirit of a bike-friendly university campus. An excerpt: 'Thinking is cycling without drifting - and cycling is drifting without thinking.' So keep on cycling.

Luuk Zegers

editor student and education





KEYS

Tenants at the brand new Costerweg complex got the keys to their rooms from Idealis on Saturday 25 March. Oscar Elizondo (26), a Master's student of Biotechnology, was one of them. 'As we couldn't see the room before applying for it, we were all nervous and excited. When Dutch people move, their parents can help them move in and paint. For international students, it can be quite complicated. Luckily, my friends helped me out and they made the moving process really *gezellig*.' LZ

Photo Sven Menschel

WUR wants a Data Science Bachelor's

A workgroup is investigating the options for a Bachelor's degree in Data Science at Wageningen. Dean of Education Arnold Bregt: 'Internally, we've been thinking about a programme like this for a while, and there is a demand for it from the job market.' With Bioinformatics, Geo-Information Science, Biosystems Engineering and Data Science for Food and Health, there are already four data-oriented Master's programmes. Bregt: 'It would be great to add a Bachelor's that prepares students for the Master's.'

The new BSc degree is to be a broad-based programme and the working title for it is Data Science for Life Sciences. Bregt: 'We are just getting started on the process. First, the workgroup will formulate a plan: what should the programme be like, what courses should it include, and what are the learning goals? An external company will do market research on the potential demand for such a programme. Then the ministry will study our plans and the market analysis. Is the programme distinctive? What would it add to the existing range of Data Science Bachelor's degrees in the Netherlands? As the working title suggests, the programme is unique in its focus on WUR's domain of life sciences.'

If The Hague gives the go-ahead, the programme can be developed further. 'September 2025 is the earliest possible starting date, but 2026 is more realistic.' LZ



Photo Erik van 't Hullenaar

WUR greenhouses are illegal

Overbetuwe municipality has no intention of granting planning permission for two excessively tall WUR greenhouses at Randwijk Research Station near the Linge River. The greenhouses are a thorn in the side of Frans van Lynden, estate manager of Hemmen Estate, which lies right across the Linge from the site. To protect the estate's immediate surroundings from unsightly construction, buildings are not allowed to exceed three metres in height. The greenhouses erected there by WUR a year ago are almost twice that height, at 5.5 metres. Over the past 30 years there have been frequent disputes between Hemmen Estate and WUR about building heights. In response, the three-metre limit was laid down in the zoning plan. Even a temporary permit, which would allow an exemption from the building height, is out of the question. WUR now has a choice between taking the greenhouses down altogether, moving them elsewhere on the site, or appealing against the decision.

DG/Bernardo van Hal

Ombudsperson: 'Conflict management skills may be missing'

In WUR's first year with an ombudsperson, 93 people reported 56 incidents. Of these, 33 were cases that did indeed need intervention by the ombudsperson.

These figures come from the ombudsperson's first annual report, covering the period from mid-September 2021 to 1 November 2022. There is no baseline measurement or comparison as the function of independent ombudsperson (currently Jacqueline Schoone on an interim basis) is new for WUR.

Most of the incidents concerned personal safety. Management was often part of the problem, according to the report. Management failures can be explained partly by the fact that managers at WUR are under a lot of pressure and have to juggle too many tasks — as Schoone already told *Resource* in an earlier inter-

view. Another reason is that not all managers were selected for their managerial skills or have received training for the role. Schoone therefore recommends putting all managers on management training programmes.

'Train managers to hold employees to account for undesirable behaviour'

The ombudsperson also recommends training managers to hold employees to account for undesirable behaviour. 'Managers often find that hard,' she writes. 'Behavioural issues are excused, for example because someone has done

a lot for the group or degree programme, the manager is afraid to hurt their feelings, or they simply lack conflict management skills. As a result, problems continue for too long before they are resolved.'

Source of reports

Most of the reports of incidents came from employees. Students accounted for only 16 per cent of the reports, although their share is now increasing. PhD candidates, who are described as 'a vulnerable group in the university because of their dependence on their supervisor', account for 9 per cent of the reports. A majority of the people reporting incidents (63 per cent) are women. According to the intranet, the Executive Board 'has read the annual report with interest and takes the recommendations seriously.' ME

8392

That's how many preferential votes International Land and Water Management student Jiska Taal (20) got in the March 15 water board elections. Enough for a seat, which means Taal will become the youngest member ever of the Valleien Veluwe water board. 'More than eight thousand people voted for me. Those people are saying: we trust you. Now it's up to me to live up to that trust. It feels amazing – almost unreal.' ^{LZ}

Is WUR's best teacher the best in the Netherlands?

Wageningen's Teacher of the Year, Birgit Boogaard, is one of the four finalists in the national Teacher of the Year competition for 2023.

The competition is organized by the Dutch National Students' Association (ISO) and the Comenius network of university teachers. The focus this year is on stimulating students' development, says ISO chair Terri van der Velden. 'Some teachers are remembered for years because they meant so much to a student.' Boogaard certainly seems to fit that description if the *Resource* report in issue #10 on her African Philosophy course is anything to go by.

The winning teacher will get the accolade Teacher of the Year, an honorary position in the Comenius network and a grant to be spent on innovation in education. The winner will be announced on 24 April. ^{ME}

'Peer assessment would be good'

The WUR Council is critical of the Executive Board's plans for a new assessment method for academics.

The current system is to be overhauled to facilitate an increased focus on societal impact, teamwork and academic services. 'In itself, that is positive,' says WUR Council chair Jelle Behagel. 'But it means that

'We want the committees to be a better reflection of the university staff'

recognition and rewards are once again put into an assessment framework. And that doesn't change the current culture of jumping through hoops and aiming to be best.' Recognizing and rewarding good work is about more than just assessing, according to Behagel. 'Many colleagues

who are anywhere between PhD and professor feel underappreciated by the higher echelons of the management. The question is how you appreciate people outside their career path. What else will the Executive Board do besides this plan?'

Better reflection

There is strong criticism of the makeup of the assessment committees. Behagel: 'Hierarchy will continue to play an important role. The BACs (appointment advisory committee, ed.) are currently mostly made up of older, white males who have always been used to the old system. Now they are expected to apply a different assessment framework. That is not the way to bring about a change in culture.' The WUR Council calls for assessment by peers. 'In any case, when it comes to the members of the committees responsible for assessing content. They could be people who are a little further along in their careers, but not necessarily. We want



Illustration Valerie Geelen

assessment committees to be a better reflection of the university staff.'

Scientists and teachers are going to be expected to spend at least 70 per cent of their time on research and teaching activities, respectively. 'That is too high, and it will preclude them from switching between career paths should they wish to', Behagel states. 'We want that to be cut back to 60 per cent, which is what it is in the current Education Career Path. Under the new systems, people would suddenly have to teach more hours!' ^{RK}

New NWO research programme on academic equity and inclusion

The Dutch Research Council (NWO) is putting 1.3 million euros into a new research programme aimed at increasing equity and inclusion in the academic world. It entails four studies, notably including one that looks at quotas for teachers and researchers of colour.

This group is underrepresented in Dutch academia, especially in permanent posts, according to the project description. Quotas for this group are therefore ‘indispensable, as has been scientifically proven in other contexts.’ The project aims to collect the building blocks for rolling out these quotas on a large scale. One study will examine the opposition to them in the Netherlands. The successful implementation of quotas in other contexts will be studied.

The other studies in the new NWO program are primarily about how so-called norm groups can help break through the lack of diversity in Dutch academia. And secondly, they are about creating a platform for sharing knowledge and expertise around justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, and how to apply them within institutions. A third focus is on evidence-based intervention strategies for making academic institutions more inclusive.

On the defensive

WUR’s Diversity & Inclusion programme manager Eva Siebelink acknowledges the need for more in-depth knowledge on these issues, which she notices are present on the Wageningen campus too. ‘Hopefully, this programme’s scientific approach can help people distance them-

selves from the strong emotions that now often dominate the discussion about academic diversity and inclusion. People are quick to go on the defensive when it comes to the question of why Dutch academia lags behind in terms of diversity and whether quotas are called for. Seeking to understand why people feel so strongly about it seems to me to be a very helpful

‘Seeking to understand why people feel so strongly about it seems a helpful way forward’

way forward. Because now resistance is holding up any real progress. I think it is a good thing that the NWO is going to do some solid research into the matter.’ ME

OF COURSE RESOURCE CAN BE FOUND ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS WELL

Tip from the editors: follow us on Instagram and TikTok too - where we post short films about students and science every week.

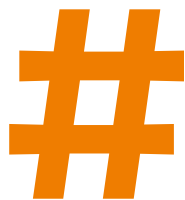
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Resource

WUR from within: straight, sharp, transparent

Reform the BSA?

Preferably not, says Student Council

Education Minister Dijkgraaf wants to change the binding study advice (BSA), which currently requires students to obtain a minimum number of credits in their first year.

Students’ mental health is under pressure and, according to Minister Dijkgraaf, this is ‘partly because the reins have been tightened in higher education.’ So the BSA should be overhauled. Quite what it should then look like is not yet clear.

‘We are sceptical,’ says Maartje van den Bosch of WUR’s Student Council. ‘In Rotterdam you have to pass 60 out of 60 credits, here in Wageningen 36. We see that as a realistic pace to work at.’ The student council wrote to the minister asking him not to change the situation in Wageningen. They think that abolishing the BSA would end up causing more stress. Van den Bosch: ‘If you don’t get enough points in year one, you’ll start falling behind and have to catch up in year two, and the problem doesn’t go away. Falling behind and the higher student debt you then end up with are bad for student welfare.’ LZ

See resource-online.nl for Education Dean Arnold Bregt’s response

Pineapple leather? Yes, as long as it looks like leather

Xin Gao will receive his doctorate from the Department of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour early next month, for a study on the acceptance of new sustainable materials in the fashion world. His dissertation, which is about pineapple leather, is called *Wearing Pineapple Leaves*.

Pineapple leaf leather is what is called a repurposed material: existing material given a new use. 'Typical backpack material is cotton or leather. Pineapple leaf differs from that,' Gao says. 'I call that atypical. I researched why consumers find something atypical and what questions and

emotions that raises.'

'Tell people how much water was saved'

Gao used a series of tests to figure out the influence of functional-

ity, durability and originality on people's choice of purchase. The test subjects had to make do with text, without pictures. 'That way you exclude the aesthetic factor. If consumers see pictures, personal taste starts to play a role. I specifically wanted to see what other factors play a role.'

Mentioning advantages

The work yielded three clear recommendations. 'The first is that the quality of sustainable products must be at least as good as that of conventional products. Otherwise, consumers will not choose them. Moreover, you also have to emphasize that quality explicitly! The second lesson is that it helps to specify sustainable features. Like how much water was saved in the production process, for example.' Gao also advises designers to make the products similar to conventional products. 'That is especially important to people who don't care that much about the environment. People who do care about the environment don't care whether the product looks conventional.' RK



Two working bird flu vaccines, so what next?

Major news across Europe: Wageningen Bioveterinary Research (WBVR) has established that two vaccines have shown good results in the lab, providing protection against avian flu and stopping it from spreading. What does and doesn't this mean for the 100 million chickens in the Netherlands and the threat of a pandemic?

The European poultry industry eagerly awaits bird flu vaccines. All the more so since 12 March, when new legislation allowed vaccinating against avian flu in Europe. Strict surveillance measures are required, however. After vaccination, weekly tests must be done and a veterinarian must visit every four weeks. Completely unworkable rules, said the Utrecht professor of Poultry Health Care Sjaak de Wit on the TV show *Een Vandaag*. 'We don't have enough vets to do that.'

A field trial of the two vaccines will follow this summer at a commercial poultry farm. Vaccines do not always work so well on such farms. Researcher Evelien Germeraad: 'In a large barn, chickens face more factors that can affect their health and resilience. Such as the presence of certain pathogens and the administration of other vaccines.'

Hundreds of millions of vaccines

Would the vaccine also require annual boosters, like the human flu shot? Not initially, Germeraad says. 'Both these HVT-H5 vaccines offer broad protection against various influenza virus strains of the H5 subtype. If the H7 subtype virus enters the Netherlands, another vaccine will be needed.'

There are always about 100 million chickens in the Netherlands, so several hundred million vaccines will be needed annually if the vaccine enters the market. There is no telling yet how much it will cost. But gasping around six million poultry birds in 2022 cost more than 44 million euros.

If the vaccines prove to work in the barn, they will only be used on commercial poultry farms. So the virus will remain present in the wild, affecting wild birds and also mammals such as dolphins. RL

A misfiring experiment, a rejected article: these things are soon labelled as failures in academia. As for talking about it – not done! But that is just what WUR scientists do in this column, because failure has its uses. This time we hear from Leo Nagelkerke, assistant professor and senior researcher in the Aquaculture and Fisheries group.

Text Milou van der Horst • Illustration Stijn Schreven

'The labour market was really bad when I graduated in the 1990s. Fortunately, I was able to stay on for a PhD. My fellow scientists became academic nomads in a merry-go-round of temporary jobs abroad, which led them to put off important decisions like having a family. My wife and I didn't want that insecurity. I also wanted to carry on working in the same field, so I looked for a job in

the private sector.

I was taken on by a consultancy firm, but I was desperately unhappy

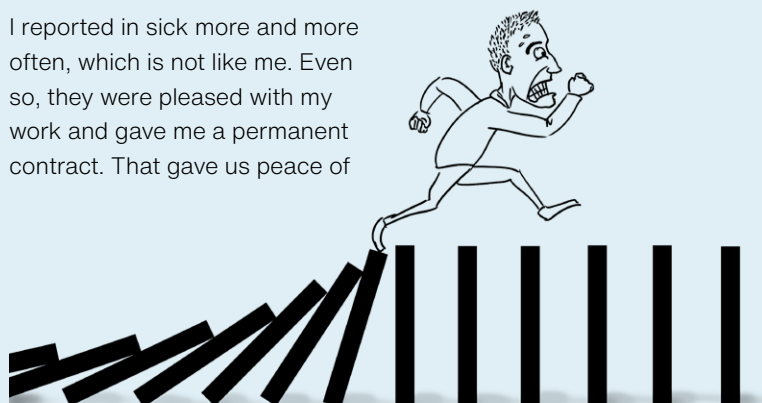
there. I felt under so much stress because of the short projects and commercial pressure. Just when it started to get interesting, I had to move on. They aimed for "good enough", which isn't my style. I got migraines, started to hyperventilate and suffered other vague ailments.

I reported in sick more and more often, which is not like me. Even so, they were pleased with my work and gave me a permanent contract. That gave us peace of

mind because we had a baby and wanted a mortgage.

Then one of my former teachers asked me whether I could do an 18-month stint to complete a postdoc project. I confided in an older colleague, who said, 'What's stopping you?' Only the fear of the insecurity of temporary contracts. He said, 'Fear is a bad motive. Do what your heart tells you.' Pretty clichéd really but they became two wise lessons for my life.

I took the job and was open about my concerns and wishes from the start. I did the work as well as I could in the hope they would keep me on. They did and even gave me a permanent contract. My experience with that ex-colleague taught me you're more likely to accept advice from outsiders. Whenever I run into problems now, they're the ones I turn to. It's something I also try to teach my students, as well trusting your intuition and being open about your wishes. Now I have the best job in the world.'



Vocational schools as testing grounds for healthy behaviour

Enticing young people to adopt healthy behaviour is difficult. And even more so if they have a mild cognitive disability. With a 1.4 million Dutch Research Council (NWO) grant, WUR health scientist Kirsten Verkooijen's research team is going to work on this in four vocational training schools, together with pupils, teachers, and hopefully parents too.

In September, four PhD students from WUR, TU Eindhoven and Utrecht University will start working with pupils in the project Healthy LiFestyle for low liTerate teenagers (LIFTS). They will conduct trials using things like pedometers and challenges, to see how the pupils can be enticed to exercise more and eat more healthily. Mental health will also be addressed. Existing mindfulness apps might for example be adapted to see if they can contribute to wellbeing.

The researchers will start by discussing with pupils, teachers, healthcare advisers and parents, among others, what their wishes and needs are, says project leader Kirsten Verkooijen, associate professor in the Health and Society chair group. 'For example, if most children are brought to school by car, should we challenge them to cycle or walk?'

Challenge: involving parents

Verkooijen specializes in health education among vulnerable groups. 'One of the biggest challenges is going to be getting parents involved. About 30 per cent of the parents have mild cognitive disabilities themselves. They don't have a great network, and are not in the habit of going to sports clubs or eating a healthy diet. Traditional health education doesn't get through to them so effectively.'

Existing health curricula are not appropriate for these vocational schools. In five years' time, Verkooijen hopes to have a programme ready that is a good match. 'The vocational schools sector council is involved too, as are others such as the Special Heroes Foundation. They think this is important and, when we have our results ready, they will do their best to get them applied.' RL



THE FACTS

WUR'S FOSSIL INDUSTRY LINKS

WUR hardly does any business with the fossil industry, claims the Executive Board President, Sjoukje Heimovaara. *Resource* has checked the facts. WUR doesn't want simply to stop collaborating with the fossil industry, as it can be part of the necessary transition to a post-fossil fuel society. That's the argument, anyway. In other words, don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. But how big is the baby?

The claim

WUR's collaboration with the fossil industry is 'substantially less than 0.1 per cent of all revenue'. (Board President Sjoukje Heimovaara previously in *Resource*)

The facts

Where does that percentage come from, various readers asked *Resource*. Can it be checked? Anyone wanting to know how much WUR research is funded by companies in the oil, coal and gas industries won't find anything in the official annual reports. They tell you how much money WUR gets from the private sector, but no more than that. The private sector accounted for 3.5 per cent of the revenue of Wageningen University (WU) in 2020 and 17 per cent at Wageningen Research (WR). WU mentions a few financiers but doesn't give amounts per company. WR says nothing about who its clients are.

So the annual reports can't give us the answer. The document *WUR's collaborative projects with the fossil energy sector* does though. That document was compiled by WUR after it got questions from the press, including *Resource*. The document summarizes nine projects that were carried out last year (or are still ongoing) and gives the partner and the funding party.

In most cases, these are small projects worth less than 100,000 euros. Examples are a desk study by Shell on biobased polymers for bioplastics, and research for Gasunie into microbial metabolization of hydrogen gas stored underground. The petroleum company NAM spent slightly more than 100,000 euros on researching the effects of gas extraction on the development of vegetation on the island of Ameland.

Shell is involved in five of the nine projects. An important disclaimer is that the list was drawn up by WUR itself, so it cannot be verified and might not be complete. The document ends with an upbeat: 'If you think a project is missing, please let us know!' Because 'Wageningen University & Research finds transparency and corporate social responsibility important'.

The nine projects have a combined value of 7.2 million euros, which is 1 per cent of WUR's overall revenue. Although it

should be noted that two larger projects are multi-year projects, so the amount covers multiple years too. However, the list is definitely not complete. A professor by special appointment who is funded by Shell is not included, for instance.

Conclusion

It is true that the projects for the fossil industry only make up a small percentage of the annual revenue. It is not possible to verify whether it is 'substantially less than 0.1 per cent of all revenue'.

PS

When *Resource* produced its calculations, WUR re-examined the projects and discovered an error. The largest project (6 million euros) turned out to be a factor 21 smaller. This error by the WUR number crunchers has now been corrected online. That puts the collaboration with the fossil industry at under 0.08 per cent of the revenue, which is indeed less than 0.1 per cent. RK

Detecting disease in cows with passport photos

Like a human face, a cow's face speaks volumes. But can you read those 'volumes'? Can you detect disease in a cow's facial features? And can you teach a computer that skill? Yes you can, according to research conducted by Ronald Petie together with students from the HAS and Avans universities of applied sciences in Den Bosch.

The dreaded bovine foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) was taken as proof-of-principle. Wageningen Bioveterinary Research, where Petie works, does research into the effectiveness of vaccines against FMD. Petie took several photos of the faces of the heifers used in those trials: some before and some while they were infected with the disease. Then the students set to work on

that material.

They scored the photos on nine selected characteristics, ranging from watery eyes, sniffing and drooling, to the position of the ears and any wounds or skin abnormalities. The computer was then trained to pick up these signals from a photo and assign a value to them. After some calculations, a verdict was reached as to whether the cow was sick.

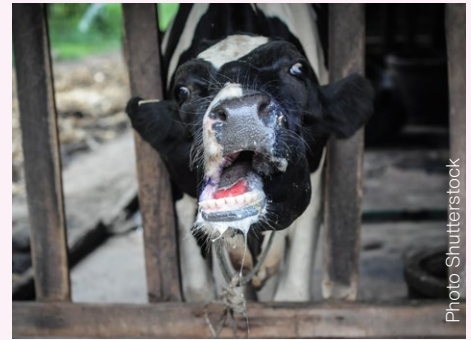


Photo Shutterstock

Early detection

The computer is not as good as a human. But the program does come close, Petie says. The computer picks out 94 out of 100 sick cows. 'For tracking trends, that is adequate. You may miss a few cases, but you do measure changes in disease symptoms. That is useful for an early-warning system in our trials.'

According to the researcher, the program is still in its infancy. Improvements could be made by, for example, adding more indicators of the presence of disease. And video footage could be used in addition to photographs. But direct application on the farm is still just a future possibility. RK

THE PROPOSITION

PhD candidates explain the most thought-provoking proposition in their thesis. This time it's **Chunzhe Lu**, who obtained a PhD in Bioprocess Engineering on 17 March. He investigated options for using *Pseudomonas* bacteria as sustainable cell factories.



'Once you lower your expectations, life becomes much easier'

'Like most PhD students, I did a Time and Project Management course. But I discovered that expectation management is also very important. When I started as a PhD student, I expected to make rapid progress with my project, but that did not happen. It was nobody's fault; I just needed more time. At first, it made me anxious and I started doubting myself, until I realized that my expectations were just too high.

There are two worlds: the real world and the world you expect. In between is the expectation gap. Too big a gap has a big influence on your feelings. I saw this with some of the students I supervised: their happiness with a particular assessment depended on what grade they expected.

Apart from your own expectations, you also have to deal with the expectations of others. Actually, sometimes it's more the expectations you think others must have. My parents and supervisors didn't put any pressure on me, but I still wanted to make them happy and proud. That can make you put unnecessary pressure on yourself.

It is better to just be yourself and *think* about your own expectations, and whether they are realistic. In my new job as a postdoc in Groningen, that's going to be fine. I'll be working in a slightly different field, so I'm allowing for the fact that I will need time to become familiar with it.' RL

Bird language

Spring is in the air! We cycled from Wageningen to Hooilanden in the Binnenveld nature area, where we were overwhelmed with the sound of lapwings and the jubilant song of curlews. We saw five photographers with lenses as long as my arm standing on a mound. That tells you something special is out there. It turned out to be a water rail, a rare breeding bird. The bird watchers said it looked like a moorhen only smaller, but not as small as the little crane, let alone the least sandpiper. Huh? Many birds get called 'great' and 'little': think of the great

' I conclude that current bird names are lazy, offensive, and needlessly complex '

tit (not an anatomical designation), or little stint (not a short project). But what kind of bird gets called 'least'? What if you were to find an even littler sandpiper? We also saw a lesser spotted woodpecker. It is just as multi-coloured as the great spotted woodpecker, but it is the size of a sparrow. 'There's also a middle spotted woodpecker,' said my husband, who knows about such things. It reminded me of the Romans, who used to name their children Primus, Secundus, Tertius and so on for reasons of convenience. We were happy as a lark because we also

tit (not an anatomical designation), or little stint (not a short project). But what kind of bird gets called 'least'? What if you were to find an even littler sandpiper?

We also saw a lesser



Sjoukje Osinga

saw two bearded reedlings. Well, they were females. Females with beards?!

My husband reckons we also saw a feral greylag goose. That's like going on a wild goose chase. Only not quite, because these geese are descendants of domesticated geese that escaped - hence the 'feral'.

Names get even more confusing when you try to translate them. *Goudvink* translates literally as 'goldfinch' so surely it must mean goldfinch? No such luck: a goldfinch is a putter and a *goudvink* is a bullfinch. Then there is the *koolmees*, translating as 'coal tit', but does it mean 'coal tit'? Of course not, that's the *zwarte mees*. The *koolmees* is our friend the great tit. It's complicated! But to suggest we only use the Latin names from now on might be going too far.

I conclude that at present bird names are not scalable, not inclusive, lazy, offensive, needlessly complex and unnecessarily difficult to translate. This needs to change.

With linguistic freedom of translator Clare Wilkinson and her bird watching husband.

Sjoukje Osinga (55) is an assistant professor of Information Technology. She sings alto in the Wageningen chamber choir *Musica Vocale*, has three sons who are students and enjoys birdwatching with her husband in the Binnenveldse Hooilanden.

The Cyclists' Union checks it out

HOW SAFE IS THE CAMPUS FOR BIKES?

In late February, a cyclist was hit by a bus on campus near Orion. That raises the question of how safe the campus is for cyclists. At the invitation of *Resource*, the Cyclists Union came on a tour of the campus. Photos Guy Ackermans

There is nothing more irritating than useless posts, says Leo van den Berg, an active member of Wageningen Cyclists' Union and

a former researcher at Alterra. 'There are so many accidents due to cyclists hitting posts, they just don't make the news.'

He points to a post close to the crossing point between Atlas and Gaia/Lumen, on the bike path on Droevendaalsesteeg. 'You could easily cycle into it if you aren't on the lookout. That post is completely pointless. Just get rid of it.'

Van den Berg has joined *Resource* on a cycling tour of campus to take a critical look at the traffic safety situation. He has plenty of comments about the layout of the WUR grounds. About the aforementioned crossing, for example. 'There are dragon's teeth stopping the cyclists and a zebra crossing for pedestrians. So cars have priority over cyclists but not over pedestrians. That's crazy. You should really say cyclists and pedestrians have priority over cars

everywhere on campus. But now they do in some places but not in others.' Further along Droevendaalsesteeg, opposite Helix, he says, 'Look, this bike path is a "main route" from Mansholtlaan to here, meaning that the cyclist always has priority. But that changes suddenly at Helix, without any clear signposting of the change. That's confusing.'

Warning lights

Van den Berg sets off towards Bronland and the intersection behind Orion where buses, cars, cyclists and pedestrians converge. On 28 February, a 22-year-old woman was hit by a bus here. She survived

but suffered injuries, according to *De Gelderlander* newspaper.

'In principle it's a clear situation,' says Van den Berg. 'You can see the bus coming. But buses are getting quieter, so if you're having a conversation or not paying attention, you can still be caught out.'

Van den Berg sees two options for improving road safety at this intersection.



Text Luuk Zegers



Ambulance on the bus lane near Campus Plaza.



There are warning lights at the bus lane crossing near Campus Plaza. There should be such lights at every bus lane crossing, says Leo van den Berg of the Cyclists Union.

'BIT OF A PATHETIC JOB, BUT IT'S IMPORTANT'

'You can restrict bus speeds. At the moment, buses are allowed to go at up to 50 kilometres an hour. You get the impression they tear along sometimes, and they're up to full speed when they reach the crossing.' He doesn't expect the provincial authority, which is responsible for the bus lane, to do that though. 'They would get into an argument with the bus company.' The second option is to have warning lights that flash when a bus is

coming. 'Preferably with an acoustic signal that is loud enough to give a warning but not so loud that it disturbs people in Orion. And do that for every crossing on the bus lane.'

Crossing attendant

We get back on our bikes and cycle west on the path along Bronland. When we reach Campus Plaza — which does have warning lights for the bus — we

turn right down Bornsesteeg and take an immediate left past Impulse, cycling parallel to the Akkermaalse wood towards Aurora. 'That has a very dangerous crossing,' says Van den Berg. 'They even employ a student to stop cyclists if a bus is approaching.' When we get to the crossing, we find student Jasper de Graaf at work as the traffic warden. 'Bit of a pathetic job





The crossing near Aurora is the most dangerous one on the campus, says Jasper de Graaf, one of the students who do shifts as traffic controllers there.

really, but it's important,' says De Graaf. 'There have already been a couple of near-accidents. The bicycle path slopes downwards and you don't always have a good view as a cyclist. The buses tend to speed up here and the cyclists often brake too late. I once had to grab a cyclist's handlebars to stop them just in time. Fortunately, most of the people who cycle along here are used to the situation now, but we'll have to be extra alert again in period 1 after the summer.'

Dassenbos

The Cyclists' Union is cynical about the Aurora crossing, says Van den Berg. 'There used to be a perfectly good crossing opposite the main entrance to Aurora, 50 metres back. It was much safer than the current crossing, but it was closed.' WUR wants to extend the bicycle path past Aurora to the north of the bus lane as far as Mondriaanlaan, but is facing opposition from the nature and landscape society Mooi

'YOU GET THE IMPRESSION THEY TEAR ALONG PAST THIS CROSSING SOMETIMES'

Wageningen because it felled 14 trees in Dassenbos wood that were on the proposed bike route. The province of Gelderland has ruled that the trees have to be replaced, but it is not clear whether that has to be in the same spot. Van den Berg: 'WUR has deliberately created an unsafe situation here to exert pressure on the politicians. They hope that will speed up the bike path process.* Anyway, there was no need to fell trees illegally for that bike path.

You could have created a "bicycle boulevard" that cars are allowed on too, but only at slow speeds.'Graaf.

Barriers

A little later, Van den Berg exits the campus and cycles towards Nijenoord Allee at Hoevestein. This is the crossing near the campus where an 18-year-old student suffered a fatal collision in January. 'They used to have barriers cyclists had to get round first. They were removed to improve traffic flows. We – the Cyclists' Union – helped do that to make this crossing more attractive to cyclists. But the downside is that the situation has become a lot more dangerous because you

‘IT IS CONFUSING TO HAVE PRIORITY IN SOME PLACES BUT NOT IN OTHERS’

are no longer forced to slow down.’ Something needs to be done to make the situation safer, says Van den Berg. In Gelderland province’s *More Accessible Wageningen* plan (aimed at smoother traffic flows in Nijenoord Allee and Mansholtlaan, ed.), the crossing where the fatal accident occurred will get traffic lights. ‘Implementation of that project is scheduled to start in 2024,’ says Van den Berg. ‘The Cyclists’ Union thinks they should order those traffic lights and set them up now. You can always move them when you start on the project in two years’ time, but at least it will be safer now.’ Finally, we visit the campus entrance from the roundabout on Mansholtlaan. ‘In theory that is incredibly safe,’ says Van den Berg. ‘Everyone is forced to go slowly.



A bus approaches the bus lane crossing behind Orion, where a 22-year-old cyclist was hit by a public service bus at the end of February.

WUR: ‘Campus is safe for traffic in principle’

Lex Roders of Facilities & Services is responsible for the infrastructure on campus. ‘The campus is an unusual environment: most of the land is owned by WUR, but it is open to the public. That means you have not only the 13,000 students and 7,000 staff but other people too using the roads, paths and cycle tracks, and public transport on campus. We monitor the infrastructure and work continually to make it safer.’ The tricky spots are where several traffic flows converge, says Roders. One of those places is the crossing at Aurora, where cyclists don’t have a good view of the bus lane. Crossing attendants have been appointed for now for safety reasons. ‘Eventually we want to create a cycle path north of the bus lane. Once that is in place, the situation will be safer. Cyclists will also then be on the correct side of the bus lane.’ In principle the campus is safe for traffic, says Roders. ‘But unfortunately you can still have accidents even in a place with good traffic safety. Luckily it doesn’t happen often. If people feel a situation is unsafe and report it, or if an accident happens like recently, we review the traffic situation and investigate whether changes are needed and if so, what.’ The accident on the bus lane near Orion came as a surprise, says Roders. ‘As it happens, that crossing was changed last year. We put in separate crossings for cyclists and pedestrians, and we added dragon’s teeth and a zebra crossing to make it clearer who has priority. According to the article in *De Gelderlander* newspaper, the cyclist was hit by the bus on the bus lane. Buses always have priority on campus; that is shown clearly by signs and dragon’s teeth. At that crossing, you also have a good view of the bus lane. It nearly always goes fine. Thousands of cyclists pass every day and this is the first time I’ve heard of an accident there.’

The cyclist has to look the car driver in the eye, show they’re waiting and hope the driver says “OK, you can cross”. It’s safe and you communicate with other road users. I think the roundabout should stay.’ However, in the *More Accessible Wageningen* plan, the roundabout is replaced by traffic lights because Mansholtlaan is set to be widened. WUR

and the municipality are also considering eventually building an underpass for bikes and pedestrians.

Final report

Time for the final report. What mark does the campus get for traffic safety? ‘7 out of 10,’ says Van den Berg. He sums up the main points for improvement one last time. ‘Install warning lights with sounds at every crossing of the bus lane. Change roads for cars into “bicycle boulevards” that cars share with bikes, which also means you need less asphalt. Force cars to drive slowly. Make things clearer by giving cyclists and pedestrians priority over cars at all times.’ And finally: ‘As few posts as possible’.

In response to Van den Berg’s comment, Facilities & Services says WUR is not pleased with the bike path situation either. Spokesperson Inge Buitink: ‘It’s really important for the campus to be safe. WUR does everything it can within the current possibilities to ensure safety at this crossing, for example by employing crossing attendants during peak hours. Suggestions on how to improve campus safety further still are always welcome.’ ■



FROM VOLENDAM TO KENYA

The catwalk during One World Week was not the usual showcase for the latest fashion, but for traditional clothing from different countries. Pictured here is Linda Juma from Kenya, wearing a traditional Maasai shuka and beads. The red color is said to scare off wild animals. The clothes modelled on the catwalk came from all around the world – India, Nigeria, China, Mexico, Liberia, and even the Dutch fishing village of Volendam. [CU](#)



Plastic grows back together

Building materials, car tyres and laptop parts all contain hard plastic. It has lots of benefits but is very hard to break down. Now researcher Sybren Schoustra has developed a new kind of hard plastic that can be recycled and is even self-healing. 'I threw together some chemicals and it was an instant success.'

Text Nicole van 't Wout Hofland

Schoustra takes some scissors and cuts a rubbery piece of dark-red plastic through the middle. Like a magician, he holds the two pieces up to show his audience they really are separate, then pushes them together. A few minutes later, the two pieces have become one again. At the start of March, Schoustra got a PhD for his work on this new, recyclable plastic. 'If you look carefully, you can still see the line where I cut the plastic,' says the researcher, pointing to the small piece of plastic. But there is almost no sign of the cut 24 hours later. And that is just one of his designs. 'We can make the plastic softer or harder, more elastic or more flexible by changing the mix of ingredients,' says Schoustra.

The piece of plastic looks perfectly normal, but it is quite unusual at the molecular level. In ordinary plastic, the smallest building blocks form long chains that are kept in shape by strong crosslinks. 'You could compare it to how the strands of a football goal net are knotted together,' says Schoustra. Those knots are

permanent in ordinary plastic, but not in Schoustra's new plastic. 'We can undo those crosslinks and put them back again.' In fact, the plastic itself restores the crosslinks. So broken pieces of plastic can grow back together spontaneously.

These flexible football nets, which organic chemists call vitrimers, have been around since 2011. 'They have mainly been described in the literature, but there was already a prototype,' explains Schoustra. Like ordinary plastics, vitrimers come in all shapes and sizes. 'In my PhD research, I concentrated on one type. I wanted to make small modifications to give it new properties.'

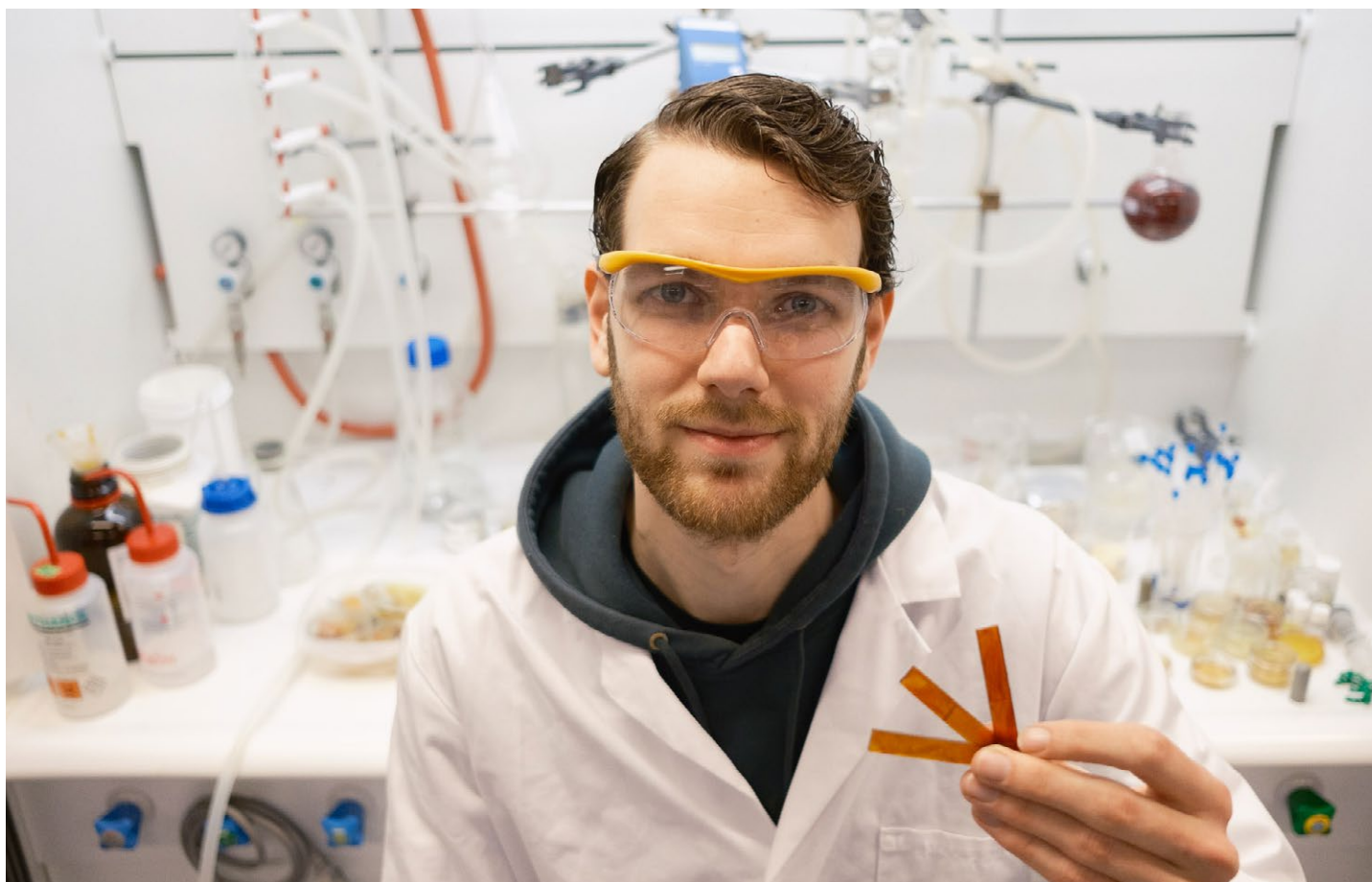
Instant success

His plans were ambitious. Schoustra started four years ago with nothing more than a head full of ideas. 'I combined the molecular structures of vitrimers that had been described in the literature with my own ideas.' As an organic chemist, he thinks in terms of molecular structures. 'I can tell from the structure what properties the material has and how it works. That's also how I pictured the molecular structures of the plastic in my mind.'

The PhD candidate walked into the lab some six months after the start of his research thinking of that picture and mixed four chemicals to make the plastic he had in mind. 'It was an instant success.' Schoustra is still astounded by this, three-and-a-half years later.

'It was a combination of luck, hard work and lots of options'

'I pictured the molecular structure of the plastic in my mind'



Researcher Sybren Schoustra with the self-healing plastic he developed. • Photo Guy Ackermans

‘The plastic formed automatically without me having to apply heat or pressure or any additives.’ He used that first version as his starting point. ‘I came up with tricks to make the plastic more elastic or flexible, for example by replacing one of the ingredients.’

Now, at the end of his PhD project, Schoustra has a box full of ingredients. ‘I call it my Lego box: I can use a handful of basic building blocks to make an endless range of new products.’ He might make a plastic that is malleable at room temperature, or one that stays hard up to temperatures of 150 degrees Celsius. The latter is useful for components that are exposed to heat, such as car parts. ‘The shape of the molecular network determines the maximum temperature at which the plastic remains solid.’ Schoustra refers again to the football net example: ‘You get a sturdy result with lots of knots, and more flexibility with fewer knots.’

In future, this new plastic could help reduce the amount of plastic waste. ‘At present plastic waste is incinerated, and sometimes even buried in countries outside Europe,’ says Schoustra. If you apply heat, you can remould the Wageningen plastic into a new

shape and reuse it. And there will no longer be a need to replace the plastic in shoes or car tyres because of tears or minor damage. But it will be a while before this is possible, warns Schoustra. ‘Our plastic looks fine in the lab and works as we want it to, but we need to investigate whether the material behaves the same way when we incorporate it into cars, for example.’

Plenty of ideas

Looking back over the past four years, Schoustra admits the research went remarkably smoothly. ‘It was a combination of luck, hard work and lots of options. And I always had crazy ideas and Friday-afternoon experiments. My co-workers would say, “Sybren’s got another one of his ideas”. And if it didn’t work, I’d have the next idea lined up.’ Schoustra is taking a break from science for the next while. ‘This is the time for spontaneity. I’m moving to Sweden next month and I’ll see what life brings me.’ That doesn’t mean Schoustra is hanging up his lab coat for good. ‘In the future, I see myself combining creativity and science to make the world a better place.’ ■

Sybren Schoustra received his PhD in Organic Chemistry on 7 March. His supervisors were Maarten Smulders and Han Zuilhof.

Mien Visser among professors

There is no portrait of Mien Visser, Wageningen's first female professor, in the Omnia Hall of Fame. She never had her portrait painted. But as *Resource* discovered, there *is* a picture of her. This is her story.

Text Roelof Kleis

On International Women's Day, the President of the Executive Board Sjoukje Heimovaara hung up a mirror on the Omnia 'wall of men'. It was a light-hearted action aimed at highlighting the importance of inclusiveness at WUR. Diversity is sorely lacking in the Hall of Fame with its professors and rectors. The mirror symbolizes self-reflection. Heimovaara could have made a start with that inclusiveness by hanging up Mien Visser's image. Because there is one. As of last autumn, WUR's Art and Heritage Committee has had a little painting in its storage room. Well, actually it's a photo of Mien Visser with a painted border. It is not known who made the artwork. On the right edge is written 'Labor sine nomine X III MCMLXIX', i.e. unnamed work, 10 March 1969. The text and date refer to a milestone in WUR's history, as this was the date when Mien Visser became the first woman to give the Founders' Day Address, 50 years after the Agricultural College was founded. Of course, her address was about her discipline, domestic science. The unpaid work of the housewife, nameless work. Certainly in her day, it was mainly the woman's task. And that needed to change. According to Visser, nameless



Without title ♦ Maker unknown

work 'should be everyone's work in our modern society, regardless of whether we are men or women, married or unmarried.' That was the final sentence in her address. We are now more than 50 years further but even in 2023 an equitable division of housework tasks is still a pipe dream in many Dutch homes.

Daughter

The story of how Clara Wilhelmina Visser, born in Amsterdam on 8 June 1907, became a professor of Rural Home Economics is rather interesting. She grew up in Amsterdam and studied pharmacy after finishing secondary school. Her life changed after she married Pieter Leonard Willinge Prins in 1930. He had studied in Wageningen and wanted to be

a farmer. The couple moved to Anloo in Drenthe, where they rented Schipborg farm on reclaimed land. 'That's how my mother ended up in the countryside,' says her daughter Clara (Ernestina) van den Ban, now aged 91. She grew up on the farm but has spent the past 40 years living just down the road from De Dreijen in Wageningen, in the house her mother had built when she became a professor. Her mother's life story can be found in the Dutch Wikipedia and the Huygens Institute's Digital Lexicon of Dutch Women. Visser worked for a pharmacy in Groningen for a while but soon became involved in local organizations that gave home economics advice to rural households. After the war, her husband became mayor of Anloo. Visser herself became president of the Dutch Association of Rural Women in 1948. She was also a member (Labour Party) of the Drenthe provincial council from 1949. Her husband Prins died during a drag hunt in 1950. By this point, Visser was involved as the rural association president in investigations into the possibility of starting a rural home economics degree course in Wageningen. The Wageningen professor Ede Brouwer had been to America, where he had learned about Home Economics as a subject. This led to a study trip to

America in the summer of 1951, which included Visser as the association president. That same year, she was nominated for the position of professor of the new degree programme at the Agricultural College, a position she held from 1952 to 1977.

Unexpected

And no, she never had her portrait painted, says her daughter Clara. ‘That was no longer the rule by then.’ She did not even get a formal farewell, which could have been an occasion for a portrait — she died unexpectedly in spring 1977. One year later, the book *Huishoudkunde in Nederland* (Home Economics in the Netherlands), a collection of essays by her students, was published as a posthumous farewell gift. But Clara does have some

fine photos of her mother that *Resource* has been allowed to use. She has a subscription that lets her keep up to date with campus affairs. Like her father, Clara van den Ban studied in Wageningen. She started in 1950, before her mother became a professor, and graduated in 1957 as one of the first in the new degree subject. Mien’s granddaughter, Clara’s daughter Greetje, also studied at Wageningen: Human Nutrition rather than Home Economics though. But those three generations of Wageningen students (father-daughter-

daughter) are not the end of the story. Mien Visser remarried in 1959; her new husband was fellow professor Willem Frederik Eijsvogel (Road and Hydraulic Engineering). Her daughter Clara had just married Jan van den Ban, an Agricultural Plant Breeding student. In 1983, he became a professor of Land Development at Wageningen. His brother Anne van den Ban (of Anne van den Ban Fund fame) had been a professor of Rural Extension for nearly 20 years at that point. And to complete the picture, Mien’s one year younger sister Lies Visser also became a professor. In 1947, she became the first female professor of Dutch History in Groningen.

Art Committee

Clara van den Ban never wanted an academic career. After graduating, she spent a year in teacher training in Zetten. ‘Then we had children and I did a lot of committee work in the voluntary sector.’ Her committee activities date from her student days. The book *Vrouwen, Wageningen en de Wereld* (Women, Wageningen and the World) has a photo from 1952 of her congratulating her mother on her inaugural address. She was president of the women’s students club WVSU. Clara van den Ban is aware of the artwork the Art Committee has. She has a copy in her office, given to her at the time by the person who made the original, although she no longer remembers who that was. She is, however, certain the artwork was not made back in 1969 at the time of the Anniversary Address. ‘It dates from when the department moved from Dreijenborch to Leeuwenborch.’ That was in 2007. Until recently, the original version hung there in a professor’s office. ■



Own Photo

‘Having your portrait painted was no longer the rule by then’

'WE GO ON BELIEVING IN A FAILING SYSTEM'

Robert Fletcher, associate professor of Social Sciences, has written a book about why we continue to believe in market solutions for environmental problems. It is called *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Conservation*. Text Tanja Speek • Photo Eric Scholten

As soon as he had graduated, the American anthropologist Robert Fletcher set off for Costa Rica to work as an eco-guide, like many of his Californian classmates. Ten years later, he returned as a researcher at the University of Peace. He studied ecotourism and ways of generating income from nature conservation.

What did you learn in Costa Rica?

'Costa Rica is known for being a country that does well at combating poverty and has efficient environmental protection. But people often don't hear the real underlying story. After a crisis in 1980, the country adopted neoliberal policies. The idea was that the state would become less interventionist and leave more to the markets. But in practice, the state stayed in control of a lot of things. When the country recovered from the crisis, neoliberalism was cited as a reason for its success. It was seen as the first example worldwide of successful neoliberal nature conservation. But that is incorrect. Its success was mainly due to state regulation.'

What do you mean by neoliberal nature conservation?

'Neoliberals assume a government can never have enough information to know how to divide everything up fairly.

That is why they leave the division to the markets, so you get deregulation, decentralization, privatization and space for capitalism. Nature conservation too has to pay its way through market mechanisms.'

Can you give an example?

Costa Rica has a programme where landowners are paid to keep woodland and not turn it into fields, for example. It is seen as a major success. The income is supposed to come from the international trade in carbon credits, compensation for CO₂ emissions elsewhere. But only one per cent of the income comes from that; the rest is from donations, loans, taxes and grants. Those are not market mechanisms. It actually shows that state regulation works. They carry on investing in the hope it will eventually work on a market basis. My book is about why that belief in the market persists.'

Why do people continue to believe in it?

'Some people are guilty of greenwashing. They realize the capitalist approach doesn't work but they don't care because it gives them a golden opportunity to ignore harmful practices. But I also spoke to people who hope it will work and are full of good intentions, for example sustainability managers in large multinationals and people who work for nature conservation organizations.'

'PEOPLE FIND IT EASIER TO IMAGINE THE END OF THE WORLD THAN THE END OF CAPITALISM'



You arrived at insights that explain the psychology.

‘Yes. That was partly thanks to my research on adventure tourism. An activity like white water rafting is a weird contrast: on the one hand, you’re doing something that could kill you, on the other it feels like a trip to Disneyland. As an anthropologist I couldn’t understand it at all. Until I considered the concept of disavowal, from psychoanalysis. You understand something at one level but deny it to some extent at a deeper level.

I suddenly realized that also applies to people’s approach to environmental problems. People work hard to solve the problem and that makes them feel they are doing the right thing — almost a blind conviction. They continue to believe in the fantasy of future success, which lets them overlook all the failures in the present.’

What is people’s response to your insights?

‘It’s hard to get discussion going about the options I suggest. People claim they aren’t realistic. There’s a deep-rooted conviction that there is no alternative to neoliberalism and capitalism. I once heard a nice quote: “People find it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.” That often seems to be the case.’

Is there a good alternative?

‘Absolutely. There are lots, in fact. People think you have to choose between capitalism and communism. And communism has not proved a suitable alternative. But

there are communities that use nature without relying heavily on the state or on market mechanisms.’

In your book, you give ‘degrowth’ as an alternative.

‘By degrowth, I mean a more equitable division worldwide of what we already have. The wealthy countries can manage with less, to leave scope for sustainable growth in poor countries.’

Is that feasible?

‘Degrowth is the only thing that can save us. The sooner we stop believing in fairy tales, the sooner we can get on with doing what’s necessary. The notion that there isn’t enough yet for everyone is a myth. After the banking crisis in 2008, America invested so much money that if they had divided that amount among the world’s population, everyone would be a millionaire. But it went to just a few companies. And about a quarter or third of all the wealth on Earth is hidden away in tax havens. You can’t really keep on insisting there isn’t enough money. It’s a question of priorities.’

How do you personally stay positive?

‘By saying what I think needs saying. By telling people the market mechanisms they believe in don’t work. And we can only save the planet by making really big changes. That isn’t easy. But we need to stop believing capitalism can be sustainable.’ ■

Six ways in which scientists engage with public debates

Which type of scientist are you?

From fierce climate demonstrations to farming magazines that cherry-pick your research, scientists face a polarizing society. How do you deal with that polarization and with disputes about your own expertise? Researcher Nina de Roo recently finished a study on the roles a scientist can play in the public debate. De Roo, a researcher in the Public Administration and Policy Group and the Centre for Development Innovation, has identified six roles, with increasing degrees of involvement in society. Text Rianne Lindhout • Illustration Valerie Geelen

1 Don't get involved

Imagine you are doing fundamental soil research. You're looking for new species of soil creatures or new chemical compounds out of pure curiosity. You aren't interested in communicating about your research to a broad public, you don't do private-sector research and you attach a high priority to academic freedom. That makes you a **pure scientist**: you don't get involved in the heated debates about nitrogen and biodiversity. Such researchers still have value for society, says De Roo, even if they don't join in the debate. 'Fundamental research yields important results, such as penicillin, artificial intelligence and electricity.'

2 Get all possible scientific evidence

Imagine a lobbying organization wants to use research to show that organic farming has lower yields than conventional farming. They therefore stipulate that the researchers must only look at the short term. According to De Roo, the **science arbitrator** would turn that project down. 'They'd want to do a broader study that also looks at the longer term and includes other relevant factors. Scientists who adopt

this role want to impartially present all the scientific knowledge that is required for making well-founded policy choices.'

3 Help the best party

Suppose you do broad research as a scientist but lobbying organizations like the above example only publicize the short-term results. The media then pick up the message that switching to organic agriculture would endanger food security. De Roo: 'If only one side of the story makes the media, you can be dismissed as an **issue advocate**, essentially an activist. Some ecologists can fall into this category, or researchers who comply with a request to perform very specific studies without considering the broader picture. An

example could be researchers who provide evidence that can be used in favour of — or against — abortion.' Some scientists regularly complain about farming magazines cherry-picking their research. What should you do then? Constantly demanding rectifications costs a lot of time. De Roo: 'Always tell your manager or institute. They too have an interest and a responsibility in ensuring and promoting impartiality.'

4 Present the entire menu

'The **honest broker** comes up with a menu of all the possible options,' says De Roo. 'In addition to the science, this researcher also includes conflicting facts, uncertainties and social requirements in the menu, but leaves the final choice up to the politicians or society at large. That choice depends on the values that are given priority at that time.' In this role too, you need to be careful the media doesn't paint you as biased. 'ASG director

'Always warn your manager if someone starts cherry-picking from your research'

Ernst van den Ende does that well. If he's asked to take part in a debate in the media with an environmental organization, he refuses the invitation. That's because there is a risk he will be painted as an issue advocate for the farming lobby, whereas he wants to tell a nuanced story.'

5 Reinvalidate a stalled debate

When starting a study or dialogue about a controversial subject, it is good to present yourself as a **knowledge broker**. 'You identify the hot potatoes, the tricky issues, what we do and don't know, and where knowledge conflicts with values. That can be a good starting point for a dialogue where everyone is on an equal footing. It also helps determine what research is needed and what else is needed besides science to force a breakthrough

in a debate that has stalled. Examples are the debates about nitrogen and highly processed food.'

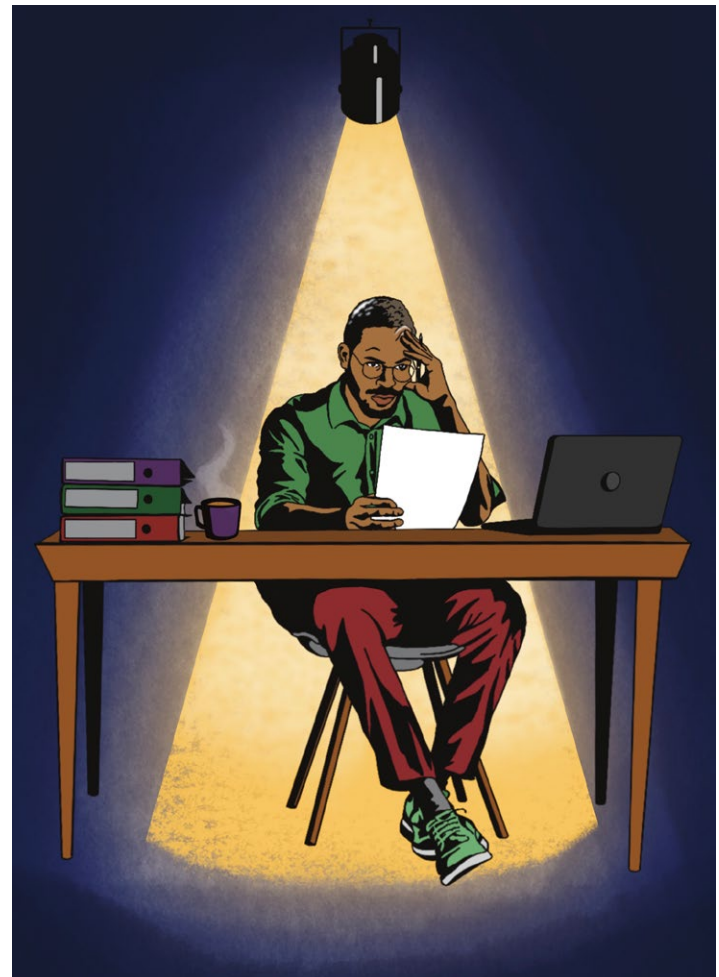
6 Take part

De Roo works with WUR as an organization to help it adopt an appropriate role in the public debate when WUR-related issues are discussed. In that project, she herself is the final type of scientist in her list: a **participatory knowledge co-creator**. You stand alongside the people you are studying and co-create new knowledge with them as equal partners. This role is becoming increasingly popular, De Roo is pleased to note. There are more living labs, for example, where scientists work with the individuals and organizations directly

involved on topics such as local energy, a healthier lifestyle and sustainable agriculture. 'If the topic is controversial, this can be a productive way of arriving at innovative solutions with social actors.' De Roo hopes her research will get scientists and institutes thinking about their roles, how others see them and how they can conduct a dialogue with people in society as equal partners. ■

What do you think?

What role(s) do you adopt in your research and when communicating about it in the public debate? Do you struggle with this at all? Email resource@wur.nl.



THE BLOCKING POWER OF LITIGATING CITIZENS

Whether it's about nitrogen emissions or where to discharge contaminated groundwater, members of the public are increasingly turning to the courts — despite the priority given to public participation by politicians and administrators in the past 15 years. So is that participation helping the general public? WUR and nature and landscape society Mooi Wageningen are organizing a symposium on this topic on 1 April.

Text Marianne Wilschut

It is not yet as bad as in America, but members of the public in the Netherlands are increasingly going to court, often in cases against government bodies. Last year, the highest court in the country, the Council of State, reported that the number of lawsuits dealing with zoning plans and building permits had risen by 75 per cent between 2019 and 2021. In 2021, the Council of State's Spatial Planning Chamber had to deal with over 2300 new lawsuits, compared with 1800 in 2020.

That is despite public participation becoming a buzzword in local government in recent years. The general public has been given more of a say in plans, with citizens' panels, thematic meetings and local ambassadors. The new Environment and Planning Act, due to come into effect next year, is one aspect of this. Members of the public are getting the opportunity to provide input for policy plans for their local area. In theory, their involvement should lead to fewer lawsuits, but that does not seem to be what happens in practice. On Saturday 1 April, Mooi Wageningen and WUR are organizing the symposium 'Citizens go to Court', where they discuss whether and how public participation can prevent such court cases about nature issues.

The speakers include representatives of organizations with experience of lawsuits against government bodies, such as Johan Vollenbroek from Mobilization for the Environment and Jaap Dirkmaat from the Dutch cultural landscape organization VNC. Scientists, lawyers and politicians have also been invited.

Dirty ENKA pipeline

Co-organizer Mooi Wageningen has first-hand experience of legal proceedings. The society has taken cases to the Council of State concerning plans to build a golf course on De Dorskamp country estate, plans for a solar farm on Haarweg and the intended discharge of contaminated groundwater from the ENKA site into the Lower Rhine. 'The court ruled against us in two cases,' says Raoul Beunen, Mooi Wageningen board member and associate professor of Environmental Governance at the Open University, 'but our lawsuits still set things in motion.' In the example of the 'dirty ENKA pipeline', it led to additional investigations and ultimately the decision not to go ahead with the discharge. Beunen: 'In almost all the environmental and spatial planning issues, you see things only really start to change once advocacy groups go to court. It is that situation that made us decide to organize this symposium. We also wanted to discuss with scientists how you can design participation processes that genuinely give members of the public a role. That is often disappointingly limited at present.'

'In practice, public participation is often just for show,' agrees Roel During. He studies social innovation and the democratization of environmental issues as a researcher at WUR and is one of the speakers at the symposium. 'There isn't much scope for members of the public



Nature and Landscape Association Mooi Wageningen took ENKA to court to prevent it from discharging contaminated groundwater into the Lower Rhine. ♦ Photo Bert Spiertz/Hollandse Hoogte

to put forward their ideas about building plans in their local area, and the need for the plans and their supposed benefits are almost never questioned. That leads to frustration. It's really political impotency that drives people to turn to the courts so often.' One of the explanations During gives for this trend is the fact that public authorities have increasingly adopted the role of property developer. 'In that role, you are more likely to face members of the public who don't agree with your plans. They are then seen as an obstructive force. So the authorities try to enforce their plans by making processes as opaque as possible. That is called "black boxing". Take the example of Lelystad Airport. The Ministry of Transport hired various agencies to develop complicated models of the expected noise nuisance. But the government underestimates the knowledge and expertise of the general public.' In that instance, engineers living near the airport were able to show the ministry's numbers were wrong.

Losing out

Lelystad Airport was a victory, but members of the public who go to court usually end up losing. During: 'The Council of State assesses whether the procedures were correct, but it doesn't look at the substance of the matter. If citizens win the case, that is often only a temporary victory because the government then changes the plans to make sure they comply with the law. Advocacy groups regularly ask me for advice. I

'IN PRACTICE, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IS OFTEN FOR SHOW'

actually advise them not to go to court, but instead to come up with an alternative plan that is cheaper and better. That's a good way to persuade politicians.' During is positive about the new Environment and Planning Act. 'Municipalities have to draw up vision documents giving their core values in such matters as nature and health. Then an application to build a new data centre, say, can be assessed against that vision. There will be more opportunities for advocacy organizations to have input, as long as they are open to contributing ideas during the preparation of the vision document.'

Beunen is less optimistic. 'The real decisions are taken not in the vision document but in the environment plan and individual projects. And the new law gives government bodies more scope for applying the rules flexibly. That means citizens have fewer possibilities for objecting to plans that conflict with the established core values.' ■

'Going to Court', Saturday 1 April from 14:30 to 17:30, Impulse. Tickets: event.wur.nl/naarderechter



THE SIDE JOB

You've got to make ends meet somehow. We can all borrow from Uncle DUO, but there are also students who earn money from unusual side jobs, such as Melissa van der Lingen, a Bachelor's student of Management, Economics & Consumer Studies and Economics & Policy.

Text Ilja Bouwknecht

'I've been in the Wageningen municipal council for nearly four years. Council work is very worthwhile and I get a lot of fulfilment out of it. If you're interested in politics, you can send a party an email to ask whether you can come along to a council session. I'm a PvdA (Labour Party) member because

'I feel I'm a councillor first and student second'

I'm on the left of the political spectrum and the PvdA is a sensible party — not particularly sexy, but significant. The party has high standards and always answers for its actions. I think we should expect that from our representatives and councillors. The PvdA party in the council has three other members in addition to me. There are also a few support members. I started out as a support member and knew immediately this was my thing. Council work is a side job — meetings are usually in the evening — but it is still a lot of work. Actually, I feel I'm a councillor first and student second (and my grades reflect that). I'm doing a Bachelor's in Management, Economics

& Consumer Studies and Economics & Policy. Fortunately, a social sciences degree in Wageningen gives you plenty of freedom. As a councillor, I get a lot of practical experience in topics that come up in my lectures. That gives a different perspective on the course material and the degree subject.

There's a really good atmosphere in the municipal council and the town as a whole. National politicians often get threats but there is none of that here. I like the fact that we can get things done in Wageningen's council despite the inevitable differences of opinion. We are all very dedicated. A lot of time is spent on preparation: reading documents, lots of meetings. That can be stressful and quite a high proportion of councillors end up with a burnout. We're currently going through a somewhat quieter period. I want to carry on working in public administration later, but I'm not yet sure how or what exactly. It will be a while before I graduate, so I'm not worrying about that yet.'

Melissa has a say

Who: Melissa van der Lingen

What: Labour Party councillor for Wageningen

Why: collaborating to make Wageningen a better place

Hourly wage: none; monthly allowance of €1096 for a 16-hour week



Melissa van der Lingen (second from the left) in the Wageningen council chamber ♦ Own photo

Do you have an unusual side job or know someone else who does? Send an email to steven.snijders@wur.nl

You encounter all the flavours of the world in our WUR community. Environmental Sciences student Natali Gomez and Development & Rural Innovation student Paula Tejada Guzman share their recipe for Colombian patacones.



Flavours of WUR

Patacones

‘This dish, made from plantains, originates from Colombia’s Caribbean coast. It’s a perfect snack or side dish and it can be enjoyed at any time of the day! In Colombia it is eaten with *hogao* (a kind of salsa sauce) and *suero costeño* (a kind of sour cream). Everybody

simply loves *patacones*. You can also find this dish in other countries like Ecuador, but those versions don’t include the *agua de ajo* or garlic water, which is the secret to an amazing *patacón!*’



Environmental Sciences student **Natali Gomez** (left) and Development & Rural Innovation student **Paula Tejada Guzman**.

Ingredients (for 2 people) :

- 2 green plantains
- Sunflower oil
- Cup of water
- 3 garlic cloves
- Salt

- 1 Crush the garlic cloves and add them to the water and 1 tablespoon of salt.
- 2 Heat the oil in a large pan (or use a deep fryer).
- 3 Peel the plantains and cut them into about 5 pieces.
- 4 Fry the plantain pieces in the oil until they are golden.
- 5 When the plantains are golden but still soft, take them out of the oil and let excess oil drip off. Then use two chopping boards to flatten the fried pieces of plantain into a disc. Covering them in plastic foil helps to stop them from sticking to the boards.
- 6 Soak the plantain discs in the garlic water for a minute or so. Then fry them again until they are golden brown and crispy.
- 7 Drain them on kitchen paper and add salt to taste.
- 8 Serve with *hogao* or *suero costeño*.
Enjoy!

(Advertisement)

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Irregular Opening Hours April | May 2023

Forum

		Building	Library	Student Service Centre	ServicePoint IT	Restaurant	Grand Café	Wageningen in'to Languages
Good Friday	7 April	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 10 pm	closed	8.30 am - 5 pm	closed	closed	closed
Saturday	8 April	10 am - 6 pm	10 am - 6 pm	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed
Easter Sunday	9 April	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed
Easter Monday	10 April	10 am - 6 pm	10 am - 6 pm	closed	8.30 am - 5 pm	closed	closed	closed
Thursday King's Day	27 April	10 am - 6 pm	10 am - 6 pm	closed	8.30 am - 5 pm	closed	closed	closed
Friday	28 April	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 10 pm	closed	8.30 am - 5 pm	closed	8 am - 5 pm	closed
Saturday	29 April	9 am - 7 pm	9 am - 7 pm	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed
Sunday	30 April	9 am - 7 pm	9 am - 7 pm	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed
Monday	1 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 11 pm	10 am - 2.30 pm	8.30 am - 5 pm	9 am - 3 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Tuesday	2 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 11 pm	10 am - 2.30 pm	8.30 am - 5 pm	9 am - 3 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Wednesday	3 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 11 pm	10 am - 2.30 pm	8.30 am - 5 pm	9 am - 3 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Thursday	4 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 11 pm	10 am - 2.30 pm	8.30 am - 5 pm	9 am - 3 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Friday Liberation day	5 May	9 am - 7 pm	9 am - 7 pm	closed	8.30 am - 5 pm	closed	closed	closed
Saturday	6 May	9 am - 7 pm	9 am - 7 pm	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed
Sunday	7 May	9 am - 7 pm	9 am - 7 pm	closed	closed	closed	closed	closed
Monday	8 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 11 pm	10 am - 2.30 pm	8.30 am - 5 pm	9 am - 3 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Tuesday	9 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 11 pm	10 am - 2.30 pm	8.30 am - 5 pm	9 am - 3 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Wednesday	10 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 11 pm	10 am - 2.30 pm	8.30 am - 5 pm	9 am - 3 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm
Thursday	11 May	8 am - 11 pm	8 am - 11 pm	10 am - 2.30 pm	8.30 am - 5 pm	9 am - 3 pm	8 am - 5 pm	10 am - 2 pm

Orion

		Building	Bike basement	The Spot	Restaurant
Good Friday	7 April	closed	closed	closed	closed
Saturday	8 April	closed	closed	closed	closed
Easter Sunday	9 April	closed	closed	closed	closed
Easter Monday	10 April	closed	closed	closed	closed
Thursday King's Day	27 April	closed	closed	closed	closed
Friday	28 April	8 am - 6 pm	8 am - 9 pm	8 am - 8 pm	11.30 am - 2 pm
Friday Liberation day	5 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Saturday	6 May	closed	closed	closed	closed
Sunday	7 May	closed	closed	closed	closed

Aurora

		Building	Bike basement	Your Barista
Good Friday	7 April	closed	closed	closed
Saturday	8 April	closed	closed	closed
Easter Sunday	9 April	closed	closed	closed
Easter Monday	10 April	closed	closed	closed
Monday	24 April	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm
Tuesday	25 April	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm
Wednesday	26 April	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm
Thursday King's Day	27 April	closed	closed	closed
Friday	28 April	8 am - 6 pm	8 am - 6 pm	8 am - 5 pm
Saturday	29 April	closed	closed	closed
Sunday	30 April	closed	closed	closed
Monday	1 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm
Tuesday	2 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm
Wednesday	3 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm
Thursday	4 May	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 7 pm	8 am - 5 pm
Friday Liberation day	5 May	closed	closed	closed
Saturday	6 May	closed	closed	closed
Sunday	7 May	closed	closed	closed

Leeuwenborch

		Building	Library	Coffee Bar / Restaurant
Good Friday	7 April	7 am - 6 pm	8.30 am - 6 pm	8.30 am - 2 pm
Saturday	8 April	10 am - 5 pm	closed	closed
Easter Sunday	9 April	closed	closed	closed
Easter Monday	10 April	closed	closed	closed
Thursday King's Day	27 April	closed	closed	closed
Friday	28 April	7 am - 10 pm	8.30 am - 6 pm	8.30 am - 2 pm
Friday Liberation day	5 May	7 am - 6 pm	8.30 am - 6 pm	closed
Saturday	6 May	10 am - 5 pm	closed	closed
Sunday	7 May	closed	closed	closed

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IN MEMORIAM

AB VAN KAMMEN

Professor Ab van Kammen passed away at the age of 90 on 1 March. In 1972, Ab became the first chair-holding professor of the then new discipline of Molecular Biology. His research focused on CPMV, root tuber symbiosis, somatic embryogenesis and chromosome organization. So Ab laid the foundations for molecular biology research in Wageningen.

Thirty years ago, Ab was helped establish the Experimental Plant Sciences (EPS) graduate school, which he chaired between 1996 and 2002. Ab had a very successful scientific career which included membership of EMBO and KNAW and an honorary doctorate from the Università degli Studi di Padova.

Ab was a born leader and an exceptional professor. He

created a workplace without hierarchy, in which he was an inspiring mentor and gave us optimal career development opportunities. Last September we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Molecular Biology chair group. The large turnout of former MolBiollers was a clear demonstration of the importance of the chair group in their careers and lives.

On behalf of the Molecular Biology chair group,

Ton Bisseling and Joan Wellink

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. The magazine is published every fortnight on Thursday.

Contact Questions and comments for the editors:
resource@wur.nl | www.resource-online.nl

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UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH SWAP LABOUR AGREEMENTS

From now on, Wageningen Research (WR) staff will have the day off on Good Friday and 5 May, while Wageningen University (WU) employees will have to work on those days.

The change was initiated by new HR director Bertina Bright. When she was appointed, she was surprised to be offered a WR contract. 'I thought that was strange: the job ad was for an HR director at a university, so you'd have expected a WU contract based on that collective labour agreement. But when we discussed the terms and conditions, I was told that all new employees without teaching duties are given a WR contract, so I agreed. Later I discovered that because I had a WR contract, I would have to work on Good Friday and 5 May while my colleagues who had been working here longer and had a WU contract would have those days off. I don't see why I shouldn't have those days off for free too, so I took action.'

Bright engaged a software programmer to convert the terms and conditions in all the WR contracts to the WU terms and conditions. 'I thought that would be fine given that people are always claiming the collective labour

agreements are *more or less* the same. But it turned out not to be possible to give *all* employees the WU terms and conditions — for technical reasons I can't really go into — so we decided to migrate the people with WU contracts to the WR terms and conditions.' She is not afraid of criticism from those employees. 'They never complained about the difference before.'

Bright is pleased to have discovered other benefits too from swapping the employment terms and conditions. 'I don't just get 5 May and Good Friday off; I also get 61 extra holiday hours. OK, my working week has got two hours longer — full-time is now 38 hours rather than 36 — but I put in those hours anyway in practice.' The year-end bonus is also more than double, at 8.3 per cent instead of 4 per cent. 'That extra money plus those extra days leave mean I can go on an extra long holiday... fantastic! I can also use the sports allowance to buy a nice bikini, flippers and snorkelling equipment into the bargain.'