

Resource

JUNE 2023 VOLUME 17

The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

New teeth
for Barry the
Haarweg cat

Bioblitz finds
over 1000
species

**Highest winter
mortality**
for bees since 2010

**New coffee
machines:**
higher cholesterol?

WUR still 'best uni'
say students

**Professor
Liesje Mommer**
Obliged to stay
optimistic | p.12

GOODBYE
to Annie's bar
p.22



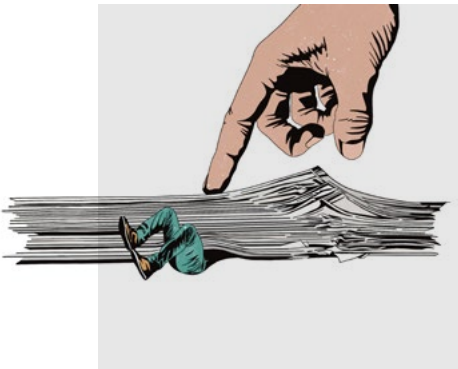
Contents

NO 18 VOLUME 17



18

Point of view:
Can we cope if
pesticide use is
halved?



20

Intimidation
by fellow
scientists



24

New perspective
on slavery history

5 WUR drops in
sustainability ranking

8 Live & Learn: 'Don't
accept unreasonable
criticism'

9 Searching for
surgeons

28 Seven tips for your
thesis defence

30 The side job: Vincent
helps organize the
TOTY election

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background stories at
resource-online.nl



FOREWORD

China

767 signatories to the petition '*Loaded with discriminatory and one-sided views, Resource owes the WUR Chinese community an apology!*' A formal complaint to our Editorial Board. Two demonstrations against *Resource* on campus. As far as I know, no previous story has caused such a commotion. During the first demo, I mainly listened to the organizers. We take criticism seriously, and as I wrote afterwards in my foreword, we now realize things could have been done differently. Last Friday, another group of demonstrators appeared demanding an apology from *Resource*. Once again, I listened and talked to them, and we had a good discussion, and we listened to one another's viewpoints. I found the people I spoke to sincere and up front. The demonstrators made it clear they feel our article has damaged their reputation. That article also mentioned an evaluation in which research directors express concern about Chinese PhD students who they feel lack academic and social freedoms. I was told we should have asked the Chinese PhD students themselves about this. We regret it deeply if we have upset the Chinese community in any way whatsoever with our story. Among other things, I have offered to go through the article with them and reformulate words that were deemed offensive, for instance. If there were any errors, we can of course rectify them. 'Talk with us' was the message on the banners. Let's do so soon: next Tuesday is the deadline for the final issue of this academic year.

Willem Andréé
Editor-in-chief





ON THE MOVE

On Sunday 11 June, nine volunteers set up a temporary gym in sports hall 4C so the 4200 users of the gym in De Bongerd sports centre can carry on with their workouts while the gym is being renovated. The renovation work is due to be completed by 23 July. Ellen van Kalsbeek of the sports centre: 'The volunteers had already been working for days on the Great Dutch Universities Championship (GNSK), and then they spent another three hours moving fitness apparatus. It was tough work, but I'm so proud and pleased with the result. Hats off to the volunteers!' LZ

Photo Guy Ackermans

Kenny B at new Summervibes campus festival

Next week will see the first Summervibes festival on the terrain between Atlas and Forum.

The festival is for 'campus residents' (students and staff) and admission is free. The idea is to make it an annual festival to mark the start of the summer on campus. Omnia manager Chris van Kreij took the initiative for the festival. 'During the pandemic, students organized the Globus festival. There was supposed to be a

'Live music, lazing on the lawn and a ride on the swing carousel'

second edition of Globus but it didn't go ahead. I thought that was a shame. Then I thought: what if WUR takes over

some of the tasks to do with permits and security from the students? That frees the students up to concentrate on the programme and other aspects.'

Van Kreij approached Sjeff Moling with his idea. Moling has a lot of experience with organizing festivals on the campus through his position as AID project manager. Last March, Van Kreij got together



Kenny B • Photo HeukersMedia / Shutterstock.com

with Moling and four students to organize the Summervibes festival.

ABBA and a swing ride

The idea is for Summervibes to have broad appeal, which is reflected in the wide-ranging programme. 'It starts with the cover band THUNK. Then the successful Surinamese-Dutch singer Kenny B will be performing with a live band. That will be followed by an ABBA tribute band. In the evening, student party band Jazza-

like will take to the stage; they previously played at the Zwarte Cross festival. In between and at the end, Wageningen DJs will be playing music.' There will also be a swing carousel. 'Live music, lazing on the lawn and a ride on the swing carousel: we want it to be a really nice festival atmosphere. Now all we need is some good weather.' LZ

Summervibes: 22 June from 15:00 to 23:00. Tokens: 2.25 euros.

Eline Ampt wins Hugo de Vries award

Plants help or hinder one another in the fight for survival and in combating pathogenic fungi. In Eline Ampt's PhD research (she got her doctorate in October 2022), she revealed some aspects of how that underground battle works. That research won her the Hugo de Vries prize.

Ever since 2000, the prize has been awarded annually to the best botanical thesis. Ampt (Plant Ecology and Nature Conservation) was presented with the award in Leiden last week during a symposium of the Royal Dutch Botanical Association. The prize went to a Wagen-

ingen thesis last year too. It almost seems to have become a WUR prize.

According to her supervisor Liesje Mommer, Ampt combines methods and concepts from both phytopathology and plant ecology. 'The standard view is that biodiversity improves plants' performance. She has refined that viewpoint by showing it's not so much the diversity as such as having the right combination of plants.'

Wall

Ampt used ingenious experiments to show plants too benefit more from a good

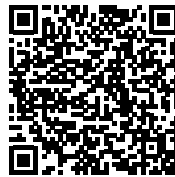
neighbour than a far friend. Some neighbours speed up the spread of a fungus while others inhibit or prevent infection.

The structure of the plants' root systems plays a key role. For example, the roots of a neighbouring plant can act as a kind of wall to hold off infection.

This fundamental insight into underground interactions has practical uses too. According to Mommer, it can be used to develop cultivation systems that are more resilient to destructive fungi. 'You need to think hard about which species to combine with one another.' NK

5

Five teachers are still in the race for the title of Teacher of the Year. In alphabetical order, they are: Julia Diederer, Jessica Duncan, Ignas Heitkönig, Klaas Metselaar and Anneke Valk. The winner will be announced on 20 June. Scan the QR code for interviews and more information about the contest.



WUR drops in sustainability ranking

WUR no longer leads Dutch higher education institutions in sustainability. Wageningen had to make do with a modest sixth place in the 2023 SustainaBul. The winner was Van Hall Larenstein university of applied sciences. Since 2012, the SustainaBul prize has been awarded by the Students for Tomorrow association to the academic or applied university that scores best in sustainability. The ranking is based on the achievements in education, research, business operations and best practices. WUR obtained the maximum score for research and best practices.

Indeed, in absolute terms WUR only did slightly worse than in previous years. Its lower position is mainly because other universities have improved considerably. RK

Over 1000 species in Bioblitz

Ilse Koks has just cycled back from the Grebbeberg. She has time for a quick chat between her field trip and a lecture. Although this will undoubtedly cost her the opportunity to spot a couple more species. The Forest and Nature Conservation first-year is one of Bioblitz 2023's top spotters.

In fact, the Bioblitz is really only an additional reason to do something she was already fully occupied with, says Koks. 'I used to spend a lot of time in nature anyway, but since I started uni, I've learnt a lot more about plants.' Bioblitz uses the *Waarneming.nl* platform to keep track of the counts. That site shows who spotted and recorded what, where and when. 'Sometimes my mum says if she wants to know what I did that day, she just looks at *Waarneming.nl*.' The target of 1000 species has now been reached. There aren't many rare species on campus. But Koks thinks the hybrid she found of the white campion and the red campion is rather special. 'The hybrid has these perfect baby-pink flowers. They're quite unusual.' RK



Photo Resource

More cholesterol with new coffee machines?

The new coffee vending machines being installed throughout campus this month by the manufacturer Maas use metal filters. That means more cafestol, a compound that increases cholesterol levels, will end up in the coffee. Is that a problem?

Coffee is healthy, according to the Netherlands Nutrition Centre website. But ‘the more the coffee has been filtered, the healthier it is because it then contains less cafestol’. WUR vending machines have metal filters and use the popular espresso brewing method. The same applies to the new vending machines. According to the Nutrition Centre, that coffee will have a measurable effect on your cholesterol levels if you drink two or more cups a day.

Nightly meatball

Mark Boekschoten knows a bit about this topic. He is responsible for the labs of

the Human Nutrition and Health department at WUR and also did research himself on cafestol in around 2005. ‘If you consume 10mg of cafestol a day, your total cholesterol level will increase by 0.13mmol per litre.’ That’s an increase of 0.13 in something that should be under 5 in healthy people but is too high in many people.

So should we be taking that cafestol into account? ‘It’s one of the inputs you can play with if you want to reduce your cholesterol level,’ says Boekschoten. ‘You can go without butter on your bread, give up your nightly meatball and/or change

what kind of coffee you drink and how much.’

Brewing time

Boekschoten: ‘In addition to the type of filter, the time the coffee spends brewing also determines how much fat and cafestol end up in the coffee. We don’t know exactly how much cafestol is in a WUR cup of coffee, but the manufacturer can easily test this. If the amount is too high, the vending machine settings could be adjusted, although that may affect the taste.’

WUR contract manager Marcha Sperna Weiland says she would be happy to discuss measurements of the cafestol content with Boekschoten and Maas. To be continued! RL



Help! Barry needs the dentist

At 18, Barry the Haarweg cat is a respectable senior, which unfortunately also means he suffers the ailments associated with old age. He has a bit of a belly, recently needed an abscess removed and now requires a check-up with the vet dentist. His carers, about a dozen students who make sure he gets fed and can sleep indoors on cold nights, have recently started a GoFundMe. If you want to make a contribution or are interested how Barry came to be the Haarweg cat, read more online. CJ



Students still rate Wageningen ‘best uni’

Over 289,000 students completed this year’s National Student Survey. The results have a big influence on the university’s performance in the *Keuzegids*, the student guide to Dutch universities. Wageningen University has once again scored better than the other major universities in almost all aspects. Dean of Education Arnold Bregt: ‘Compliments are due to our outstanding teachers.’

Even so, he has noticed something in this year’s results.

‘The general picture given by the survey is good. But it’s a large sample so we always look at whether we can spot any trends over the years. If you look at 2021, 2022 and 2023, you can see a slight decline in the scores for our Bachelor’s programmes – although they still score well.’

Even if the difference is small, Bregt wants to talk to the programme directors and the Board of Education to see what could be causing that decline. He also wants to look with them at the options for getting Bachelor’s students to turn up to campus more often for lectures. LZ

Highest winter mortality of bee colonies since 2010

More than a quarter of Dutch honey bee colonies did not survive last winter, according to reports from Dutch beekeepers. This puts the winter mortality at a level we haven't seen for more than a decade. These findings come from WUR's annual monitor. ♦ Photo Shutterstock



Resource enquired in 2019 as to what had happened to all the bee deaths. The answer this year seems to be: they're back with a vengeance. Of the 2779 Dutch beekeepers who were surveyed, 280 said they had lost all their colonies, while 1075 had not had any winter deaths. Mortality was highest in Utrecht province, at 41.6 per cent, while the beekeepers of Limburg reported the lowest mortality (16.6 per cent).

A clear cause has not yet been identified, says honey bee researcher Harmen Hendriksma. 'In fact, all the usual suspects are in the dock.' Weather conditions are among the possible causes he mentions: 2022 had a very dry summer and a mild winter. The long-lasting dry conditions may have negatively affected the local food supply. Then persistent high temperatures in the autumn meant that it took a relatively long time for colonies to go into hibernation mode. 'They kept producing new broods even though there was no longer enough food for them,' the researcher explains.

Hornet

The odds on a big role for the Asian hornet — currently in the news because the exotic species has now spread to nearly all Dutch provinces — seem low to Hendriksma. 'An Asian hornet can cer-

tainly harm a colony. If a predator hangs around the hive, the bees won't be so keen to fly out and back to forage. But the Asian hornet is not as common here as it is in Belgium, which already has hundreds or even thousands of nests. What is more, Limburg and Brabant have

'All the usual suspects are in the dock'

relatively low mortality rates whereas that is where the Asian hornet is most prevalent.' He thinks the Varroa mite is more likely to have been a significant factor in the winter mortality. This parasite reproduces in the bee brood and often carries pathogens. An example is the deformed wing virus. The mite also harms bee development indirectly. 'If a hive is already weakened when it goes into winter, the risk of mortality is much higher. Varroa is known to be highly correlated with winter mortality,' Hendriksma says.

He does not rule out other factors as well, such as how the beekeepers

manage their colonies. 'New beekeepers don't yet have that gut feeling for the health of their colony that more experienced beekeepers have. Some also deliberately don't use mite control products but try instead to increase the resistance of the colony through natural selection — which leads to higher mortality as a side effect.'

The data from the monitor will be analysed in further detail to get a better picture of the winter mortality and its causes. Those results are expected later this year. Hendriksma also hopes to get funding for multi-year research. 'I'm itching to get to work on figuring out the puzzle of winter mortality.' ME

[Live&Learn]

A failed experiment, a rejected article: in academia such things tend to be labelled failures. As for talking about it? Not done! But that is just what WUR co-workers do. Because failure has its uses. This time we hear from Arthur Mol, rector magnificus and professor of Environmental Policy. Text and illustration Stijn Schreven

'As professor of Environmental Policy, I once supervised a Master's student from Indonesia. Her analyses had produced an extraordinary result, so we wrote an article about it together. The article was good and a contribution to further theorizing, but it was rejected by the journal on the basis of the reviewers' comments. Shame, I thought, poor reviewing, but it can happen, on to the next journal.

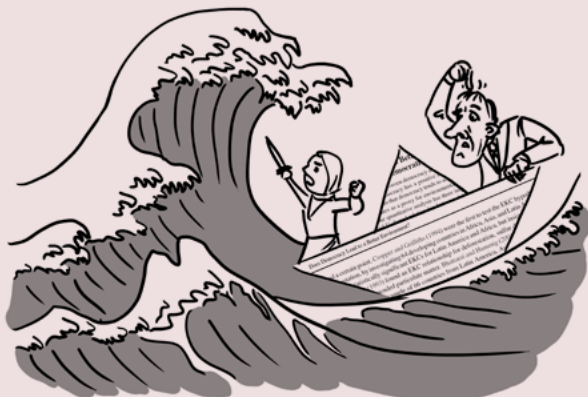
But the student wasn't leaving it at that, as the reviewers had no strong arguments for their criticism. She persuaded me to submit a joint rebuttal, but the editor stood by the decision: rejection. My student was still not convinced. I was starting to enjoy her stubbornness, and we submitted an objection to the editorial board, an unprecedented step. In the end, the editorial board sent our manuscript to two more reviewers and it was accepted after some light editing. I learnt a lot from that. First, that you should not be too ready to accept unjustified criticism.

Secondly, that you can learn a lot from young and less experienced scientists. I myself had never challenged such a rejection. I now considered it a "failure" on my part that I had been too quick to take the easier option of submitting to another journal.

'Have the guts to challenge content-related decisions by renowned scientists'

That sends the wrong signal to a budding scientist. It's part of our job to teach young scientists to be confident and stick to their guns: have the guts to challenge content-related decisions by renowned scientists.

After this incident I have questioned reviewers' reports on other occasions when there was a sound basis for doing so. Content should come first, and not someone's status. And this relates to my role as rector too: I try to be aware of my position. What I say can carry a certain weight for someone else, regardless of the strength of the arguments. And that is generally undesirable.'



Structure determines eating rate

Eating one raw apple takes longer than eating apple puree made from one apple. That is mainly due to the differences in texture. Lise Heuven, a PhD candidate in Sensory Science & Eating Behaviour and Food Quality & Design, investigated how the eating rate works and what you can do to influence it.

Eating rate is an important factor in food and energy intake. The texture of the food largely determines how fast you eat: mushy food is easier to swallow. When you're eating, your brain and stomach send signals indicating how full you feel. The slower you eat, the less food (and therefore energy) you consume before getting that 'full' signal.

Heuven: 'In this study, we looked at the effect

'Adding a sauce increases the eating rate by about 30 per cent'

of the hardness of individual components of a pasta meal and the addition of a sauce on the eating rate.' Test subjects

were given various dishes with al dente or well-cooked pasta (penne) and carrots, with or without sauce.

The study shows that how fast you eat a meal is an average of how fast you eat the individual components. Heuven: 'Previously we thought the eating rate was determined by the component you spend longest on. That turns out not to be the case. You take longer eating individual pieces of crispy carrot than a pasta meal with crispy carrots and soft penne. If you add a sauce, the eating rate increases by about 30 per cent.'

According to Heuven, 'If you want to design a meal with a certain eating rate, for example for someone with obesity, this means you need to tackle all the components.' She recently published her first paper on this study. DV

TRACKING STURGEONS

A trial with 29 young sturgeons (*Acipenser sturio*) that have been released into the Biesbosch nature area will show whether the sturgeons can survive and find their way to sea via Rotterdam in a few months' time. PhD candidate Niels Brevé is doing this experiment in the hope of making his dream of having sturgeon in the Rhine again come true.

There have not been sturgeons in the Rhine for almost three quarters of a century. Apart, that is, from Brevé's previous experiments in 2012 and 2015. Those trials showed the sturgeon can survive in the Rhine and find their way out to sea. But those sturgeons were five years old. The new experiment will show whether young sturgeon that grow up in the Biesbosch can also manage this.

Sturgeons are sea creatures, explains Brevé. 'But they spawn in fresh water, for example in the Rhine mainstream. Hundreds of sturgeons were caught in the Biesbosch every year until 1931, with an average weight of 80 kilos. The last sturgeon was caught in 1952.'

Bordeaux

The Biesbosch has traditionally been a place where migrating sturgeon of all sizes gather. Brevé therefore expects the sturgeon he is releasing will move on too. 'I hope and expect they will have sufficient salt tolerance in a few months to swim out to sea. Because that's their natural behaviour.'

To track their movements, the sturgeons have been fitted with tiny transponders (8mm, 2 grams) in their stomachs. The signals are picked up by 80 antennae along the route, attached to buoys belonging to the Directorate-General for Public Works.



Niels Brevé, PhD candidate in Marine Animal Ecology, releasing sturgeons into the Biesbosch nature area. Photo Arthur de Bruin

'I EXPECT THEY WILL HAVE SUFFICIENT SALT TOLERANCE IN A FEW MONTHS TO SWIM OUT TO SEA'

The 29 sturgeons come from a breeding farm near Bordeaux, the only one in Europe for the European sturgeon. The number is too small to draw statistical conclusions. 'You can't use this study to confirm whether the Rhine is suitable for the reintroduction of the sturgeon,' says Brevé. 'But it certainly gives an indication.' There will also be a follow-up if the breeding farm has success with its spawning efforts. The study, a collaboration between WUR, the Dutch angling association, the ARK rewilding association, WWF and the Directorate-General for Public Works, will take four months. That is how long the batteries in the mini transponder last. Then the fish will be off the radar and Brevé will be dependent on chance

bycatches and reports from professional fishers for news on his sturgeon. One thing Brevé knows for certain: these sturgeons will not be returning to spawn any time soon. 'They are French sturgeons and they're not used to the water in the Rhine.' If they do return, it will be a long wait: female sturgeons only reach sexual maturity after 15 to 22 years. The males are a bit quicker. A lot can happen at sea in that time. RK

Pregnancy after stomach surgery has risks

About 12,000 stomach weight-loss operations are performed annually in the Netherlands. Eighty per cent of the patients are women, a quarter of whom want the operation because they want to get pregnant. But a stomach operation poses risks for pregnancy.

Women suffering from obesity often find it difficult to get pregnant. Stomach surgery can help them lose weight. The resulting change in the anatomy and physiology of the gastro-intestinal tract leads to weight loss of up to 25 per cent, most of it in the first 12 months after the operation. 'Patients can't eat so much after the surgery as before, and what they do eat is not digested and absorbed to the same extent,' explains Laura Heusschen. She got a PhD at the end of May on the 'Nutritional consequences of bariatric

surgery', the medical term for weight-loss operations.

Malnourishment

A pregnancy shortly after a stomach operation poses risks. 'When women are pregnant, we actually want them to gain weight. But these women are in the weight loss phase,' says Heusschen. If the weight gain during pregnancy is insufficient, this can lead to malnourishment in the mother and is associated with premature births and low birth weight. Pregnancies after this operation tend to result in a lower birth weight anyway, 'so you have a double risk,' says Heusschen.

Now Heusschen has a postdoc position where she will study how the children of women who had stomach surgery grow up. 'We know from previous research that children with low birth weight are at



Photo Shutterstock

a greater risk of obesity in later life, but we don't know if that is also the case for the children of these women. It would be rather sad if these women get stomach surgery to tackle their obesity and as a result have children with low birth weight who in turn have a greater risk of obesity. If that is case, we need to figure out how to break the vicious circle.' DV

THE PROPOSITION

PhD candidates explain the most thought-provoking proposition from their thesis. This time, a proposition from Tom Theeuwes, who obtained a PhD in Plant Science on 24 February. He studied the cyto-nuclear interactions in *Arabidopsis thaliana* (thale cress) to improve photosynthesis.



'Too much wisdom is bad for creativity'

'Wisdom is commonly associated with seniority and the knowledge and experience it comes with. We often think of an established professor as a wise person, and we tend to lend authority to their opinions and conclusions. In my opinion, the "I already knew that" mindset of established scientists can stifle the ability to think outside the box, whereas that's something they and other people wish to do. It inhibits any willingness to explore possible connections or test hypotheses. When I started my PhD on photosynthesis, I had very little knowledge of the field. When discussing my observations with fellow researchers, I was often told, "We already know a lot about this topic, and the explanation you are proposing won't work". As a

young novice, I did not have much "wisdom", but I had the ambition and curiosity to go on testing my observations. My research has actually proven the validity of some hypotheses that my senior colleagues had previously rejected. I think that if you are truly wise, you should always be prepared to think creatively and have the courage to study data that do not immediately make sense to you.' NF

Hoist the flag!

It catches my eye suddenly as I am leaving Orion after my thesis presentation: the rainbow flag flying on the Unilever building. What this has to do with Unilever is beyond me. But when I google 'Unilever pride', it becomes clear the company has joined Pride Month, which is June. This concept has made its way to Europe from — of course — the United States, where every million-dollar business adopts a rainbow-coloured logo in the month of June. Anything to make some sales. Well-intended, no doubt, and as a person who is part

'WUR could raise a green flag. That would be sure to cause some criticism'

a business gets by publicly supporting marginalized groups is good for profit.

There is probably a drawback: if the rainbow has a negative impact on profit, the support wanes. See, again, the United States, where the conservatives attempt to boycott businesses that have rainbow-coloured logos and products. Some businesses respond by moving these products to a less visible spot in their stores. Which, in turn, causes even more criticism. Once an organization issues a statement of support, it must continue to do so when criticized.

The rainbow flag is a classic way to express your organization's values. The Dutch are crazy about flags: the upside-down national flag, the BBB flag and all manner of 'farmer's flags', the Ukrainian flag, provincial and municipal flags and so forth. Sadly, there is not yet a flag for people and businesses who support the climate. A flag to signal: I'm doing my best under the circumstances.



Ilja Bouwknecht

An inverted BBB flag, for example, or a flag featuring an oat milk cappuccino.

WUR is not flying a rainbow flag this month because the university is not a megacorporation with any rainbow-related products to sell. But it has a green product: green knowledge is our primary export product. WUR could fly a green flag. It would certainly provoke criticism. Good intentions are in abundant supply, but WUR dropped in the sustainable universities ranking this year. And friendly, spontaneous protests by climate activists are suppressed. Still, the green flag fits in perfectly with organizations wanting a positive image but failing to go all the way out of fear of losing profit. Returning to my thesis presentation: I have reason to hoist a flag, the Dutch flag, as I have now graduated with a Bachelor's degree!

Ilja Bouwknecht is 24. She got her Bachelor's in Forest and Nature Conservation last week. She is an active member of WSBV Sylvatica study association and likes to research bats at night.

In conversation with Professor of Belowground Interactions Liesje Mommer

‘I FEEL OBLIGED TO STAY OPTIMISTIC’

She is very worried about the decline in biodiversity, and yet Professor Liesje Mommer stays optimistic. ‘I have two children. If I give up, what are they supposed to do?’ Text Anne van Kessel • Photos Duncan de Fey

‘Biodiversity is in a very poor state.’ Professor of Belowground Interactions Liesje Mommer gets straight to the point. ‘Biodiversity is about all life on our planet. It is the variation in all organisms; from microbes in the soil to

blue whales in the sea. We need the entire ecosystem for our clean water, clean air, fertile soil and for food. In short, to stay alive. If the decline goes on like this, the planet will become uninhabitable,’ says Mommer, who also leads the Wageningen Biodiversity Initiative. ‘People are aware of the climate problem, but they don’t realize how bad the biodiversity situation is. And yet climate and biodiversity are two sides of the same coin.’

force each other. But a positive spiral is possible too. If biodiversity flourishes, things get better climate-wise too. For this reason, the last UN summit on biodiversity in Montreal agreed on the “30 by 30” rule: by 2030, 30 per cent of nature on both land and sea should be protected, all around the world.’

Liesje Mommer (1976)

2021-present

Lead, Wageningen Biodiversity Initiative (WBI)

2015-present

Professor of Belowground Ecology; first at the Plant Ecology and Nature Conservation group (PEN), currently at the Forest Ecology and Forest Management group (FEM), WUR

2005-2015

Digging deep as postdoc and associate professor to reveal belowground plant-fungal interactions, WUR

2000-2005

PhD, Radboud University Nijmegen

1995-2000

Master of Science, Biology, WUR

How are those two sides related?

‘The Amazon is a giant carbon sponge storing a substantial proportion of Earth’s carbon. Deforestation is now causing parts of the Amazon to release more carbon than it absorbs. Those emissions cause climate change. And climate change causes even more species to become extinct and soil to become less fertile. So we get into a negative spiral and the two sides rein-

‘I learned from plants that “you are better off together”’

‘I don’t understand why our politicians keep stalling like this’



'I would like to see that every student who graduates from here knows about the biodiversity crisis and has an action plan for doing something about it'

Your own research focuses primarily on soil. What did you learn from that research for your work for the Biodiversity Initiative?

'When I started as a postdoc, I wanted to work on something relevant. At the time, the first studies on the role of biodiversity in ecosystem functioning were starting. I wanted to do something related to that, something no one else was doing yet. Since everyone was studying life above ground, I decided to focus on the soil. I saw that plants function better in amongst a lot of different plant species. They are more productive, more carbon gets stored in the soil, and they are more resistant to disease. So I learned from plants that "you are better off together." Lesson One.'

'I also learned the importance of mycor-

rhizal fungi; these fungi provide plants with nutrients in exchange for sugars. There is a very large network in action underground. You can't see it but it is vital to how plant communities function. Lesson Two.'

'I apply both those principles now in the Biodiversity Initiative. We are stronger if we include the perspectives of all science groups. And the initiative is a bit like mycorrhizal fungi: it's the connecting factor, the underground network.'

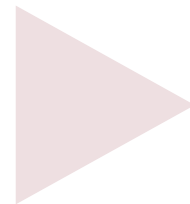
The idea of the Biodiversity Initiative was born three and a half years ago, when you read the IPBES report with its warning that a million species are in danger. Why did that report make such an impression on you?

'I thought: Oh my God, I have two teenagers, what kind of world are they

growing up in? I had two options: get depressed or do everything I could for a better world. My children had heard about the report on the children's news on TV and my son said, "Mum, you work at the best university in the world. Do something!"'

How are you going to do that?

'We've got to reverse the biodiversity loss. Now we are on a steep downward trend and we have to reverse that graph. That can be done through better nature conservation, and through sustainable food production and consumption. The latter two are uniquely strong points of



Wageningen research.’

‘I want WUR to scrutinize every research project for whether it contributes to a nature-inclusive world. I would also like to see that every student who graduates from here knows about the biodiversity crisis and has an action plan for doing something about it.’

Did you care this much about nature as a child?

‘Yes. I come from South Limburg and we went out walking every weekend. I picked flowers and made myself a herbarium with them, and used a flora guide to identify them. I still love hiking. Whenever I’m out hiking I feel I’m a bit closer to Mother Earth, and I can recharge my batteries.’

What is it you feel then?

‘Peace. I enjoy the beauty: of the colours of the flowers, of a squirrel hopping around or a woodpecker pecking at a tree. Of sleeping under the stars in the mountains. It is comforting and I find it encouraging – as a human being and therefore in my work as well. Art has the same effect.’

What kind of art?

‘Mainly music. To me, a capella choral music is the most beautiful. I have singing lessons but I don’t sing in a choir. But singing together is one of the most healing things we can do as human beings. I used to play the flute in the village brass band, and I would sit there listening to the warm sounds of the horn behind me. That taught me that you can all play your own part, but the whole is much more beautiful than the separate parts.’

Did you inherit a love of nature from your family?

‘I don’t think so, really. My mother comes from a farming family. In the holidays we used to camp in one of my relatives’ meadows. I saw for myself how those farms kept getting bigger and more efficient.’

Was there ever any discussion about that?

‘There certainly was. And you take in all those discussions, sitting at the coffee table as an eight-year-old girl. Because of those experiences, I understand farmers’ concerns. They don’t mean any harm. They have done their best to do things right within the frameworks they had. Now they are suddenly forced to change course radically, but it takes time to change. Some farms in my family have already made the transformation. One of them now has a food forest, for example.’

‘I think our responsibilities as scientists are changing’

‘Mum, you work at the best university in the world. Do something!’

Do you now see yourself as a scientist or an activist?

‘That’s an interesting question. I am definitely still a scientist and I have my own line of research. I do think our responsibilities as scientists are changing. There is so much disinformation and lobbying from corporations. It’s our job to produce the facts, and to sketch and elucidate scenarios.’

Improving the world sounds quite activist.

‘The future of humanity is under threat. It is code red. But I won’t be gluing myself to a talk show table or a painting. My approach is different, I prefer to work underground. That sometimes produces the best results above ground.’

‘Indirectly, we are committing collective suicide,’ said Secretary-General António Guterres at the UN biodiversity summit in December. ‘This conference is our chance to stop this orgy of destruction.’

‘He is absolutely right. The fact that in the Netherlands we are now thinking about forest fires, and the possibility that Texel will disappear – that’s terrible, isn’t it? And we are just letting it happen. I don’t understand why our own politicians keep on procrastinating like this.’

How do you stay hopeful?

‘I have two children at home at the table. If I give up, what are they supposed to do?’

Are we going to meet that 30 by 30 commitment from the UN summit?

‘It is the minimum we must achieve to avoid a catastrophe.’



The Paris climate agreement talks about a maximum of 1.5 degrees of warming. The Netherlands is already well over that.

‘Yet I feel obliged to stay optimistic. The UN summit was in December. For me, those targets are the North Star in the sky. We must set our course by

them. All we need now is three sages to guide us there.’

Who should those three sages be?

‘The European Commission has really good plans. Now it needs to stand firm and push the plans through the European Parliament. WUR can help by clarifying what we know and where more research is needed. For the third one, I would suggest a youth council – the new generation. We need to listen much better to their unorthodox solutions. To me, that’s where the hope lies.’

The period from 22 May to 1 July is all about biodiversity at WUR. Throughout the period, there are lectures and excursions organized by the Wageningen Biodiversity Initiative.

22 May was Biodiversity Day: on that day, WUR and 16 other universities launched a challenge to see which university can count the most species on campus in the period up to 1 July. At the time this edition of *Resource* went to press, the Wageningen counter stood at 1001 species. See resource-online.nl for up-to-date information.

On 1 July, all residents of the Wageningen area are welcome on campus to listen to a variety of lectures and to learn all about the flora and fauna of an urban environment and about how to use wildlife cameras. Mommer: ‘If you don’t know what lives there, you can’t love it.’

How will WUR make the switch to more sustainable agriculture?

‘There are brilliant projects underway. One example is CropMix, a consortium based in Wageningen. There are 30 farmers involved and they are in the lead. They ask the questions about the transition to sustainable agriculture, and we help find answers. Board President Sjoukje Heimovaara chose Planetary Boundaries as the theme of the academic year last year. There is a lively interest in the subject.’

When you said in the Dutch newspaper *Trouw* two years ago that Wageningen University was ready for a green revolution, the Executive Board wasn’t too happy about it.

‘That’s right. This kind of thing takes time and maybe I was going a bit faster than the rest. But we’re getting along fine now. The human race faces an immense challenge as a human race, but the green wind of change is in our favour at Wageningen and that will help.’ ■





GNSK IN WAGA

At last weekend's Great Dutch Universities Championship (GNSK), organized this year by Wageningen, 16 teams from 15 student cities competed in 14 events. Wageningen came third overall, behind Groningen in second position and Eindhoven, who came first. Nijmegen was fourth. The photo shows Christy Sieval (22) – masterstudent Nutrition and Health & Data Science from the Wageningen student gymnastics society WSTV Split in action on the beam. LZ

For more photos, see resource-online.nl

Photo María Joaquina Acosta

Two sides

Can we manage if pesticide use is halved?

All EU countries are expected to cut their use of plant protection products by 50 per cent by 2030. A concerned soil scientist and an experienced expert on chemical approval discuss the future of plant protection products in the Netherlands. Text Tanja Speek • Photos Guy Ackermans



Corné Kempenaar, a senior researcher in integrated crop protection and precision agriculture at Agrosystems Research and a board member of CTGB, the Dutch authorization authority for crop protection products.

Violette Geissen, professor of Soil Degradation and Land Management at Environmental Sciences, where she does research on the environmental health effects of pesticide residues.

Kempenaar: ‘The EU’s plan is to cut the use of plant protection products by reducing the total number of kilograms used. That is not a good strategy. It puts farmers off using low-risk pesticides because you need more of them by weight since they have less effect per kilogram. Besides, there is no clear definition of a low-risk agent, even though we want to give them priority. Europe hasn’t managed to sort that out.’

Geissen: ‘I am still very worried about plant protection products. I’m always seeing pesticides coming onto the market that turn out to be unsafe, and then yet another new pesticide comes along, which later turns out not to be safe enough either. In what world is that the precautionary principle that the EU claims to base its decisions on?’

Kempenaar: ‘I want to look beyond concerns about pesticides alone. Their use should always be weighed up against the effects of the alternatives. If you take the use of RoundUp against weeds, for example, there are also mechanical ways of getting rid of your weeds. But some of my research has shown that you kill more soil life with those than you do with the pesticide. I am in favour of any method that promotes sustainability overall. And not dogmatically believing that one choice is wrong by definition while another is fine.’

Geissen: ‘It’s true that mechanical weed control has negative effects as well. But they only affect the field they’re used on, whereas in my research I find

‘I am in favour of any method that promotes sustainability overall’

Corné Kempenaar

‘We can easily feed eight billion people without chemical plant protection products’

Violette Geissen

the residues of pesticides everywhere. In house dust on farms and in their neighbours' homes. We don't have any norms for that kind of long-term exposure to these chemicals, and there's no agreement on how much is too much. Thirty per cent of the products found in our European research have been described as carcinogenic or potentially carcinogenic. You are inhaling these dust particles every day. The EFSA, the European body that draws up the review frameworks for market authorization, does not address this risk.'

Kempenaar: 'We don't authorize the use of carcinogenic substances in the Netherlands. But it is true that drugs are authorized without any mandatory evaluation of the danger of inhaling particles that spread far and wide. The toxicologists say this doesn't worry them at present, because they do measure the exposure of farmers who actually use the agents. If they don't detect a risk there, they don't expect to find one 10 kilometres down the road either.'

Geissen: 'I am also concerned about the effects of combining different agents. The review framework only considers the risks of individual agents, but at no point does it take into account how it works in practice. I'm now working on a project that aims to identify the effects of combinations of agents in the air and in house dust.'

Kempenaar: 'We do study the effects of combinations of agents in the case of things we eat. Toxicologists use models to identify any risks. They haven't found anything to flag up. And in this case too, they assume that ingesting agents with your food is riskier than inhaling a combination of agents at a long distance.'

Geissen: 'That is the assumption, indeed, but it hasn't been tested.'

Kempenaar: 'That's true, but the people who do this work aren't stupid.'

Geissen: 'The toxicologists in our project aren't stupid either.'

Kempenaar: 'I strongly reject any suggestion that we have a bad authorization system, but there is always room for improvement. It is good that you are now doing research on the effects of those combinations on soil life. I would like to add, though, that this problem has a broader scope than plant protection products alone. We are now aware of more than 250,000 chemicals in our environment, and this issue applies to all of them. Do we want to ban all these chemicals? And that brings us to another important point. WUR experts tell us that



we will not be able to feed eight billion people without using agrochemicals. We must do that with great care, of course.'

Geissen: 'Do you know how many calories we produce per day per person in Europe? The answer is 3400! And we throw out 30 per cent of it, with a lot of it going to livestock. We can easily feed eight billion people without chemical plant protection products. And it's okay to use modern techniques; it doesn't have to be all organic farming, but can be done using better rotation, strip farming, more agro-ecology, and robotization for weed control – which you are researching. When I'm abroad I see lots of good initiatives, and I see how it can be done.'

Kempenaar: 'I think you are really caricaturing the Dutch farmer now. Farmers certainly look at what's happening abroad and they are well educated. But their business model leaves them little choice, partly because of the high price of land. Addressing the problem of that business model would mean organizing our whole society differently.'

Geissen: 'That is what needs to happen.' ■

What do you think? Respond to this article at [Resource-online.nl](https://www.resource-online.nl)

Intimidation by fellow scientists

‘We didn’t let them silence us’

Stasja Koot, associate professor in the Sociology of Development and Change chair group, wrote a paper that was critical of the actions of other scientists in his field. These colleagues then verbally attacked Koot and demanded that the paper be withdrawn. Text Steven Snijders • Illustration Valerie Geelen

A 2021 survey by *ScienceGuide* found that 43 per cent of the respondents had been intimidated at some point after a public appearance, for example on Twitter. But intimidation can also

come from much closer quarters. ‘It came as a big surprise to me that my fellow scientists do this,’ Koot says. In the paper ‘Science for Success – A Conflict of Interest?’, Koot and his co-authors argue for more transparency about the position of researchers in the scientific debate on nature conservation, especially when they have a stake in the outcomes of the research. They cite the example of publications that are very positive about community-based conservation in Namibia, in which controversial trophy hunting plays a key role.

Koot: ‘Those publications were written by researchers with a keen interest in positive framing – either because they work for organizations that run community-based conservation projects or because they have financial ties to pro-hunting organizations.

And they don’t mention this. After our article came out, we received responses that were totally out of order. One pro-hunting group accused us of defama-

tion, threatened legal action and asked us to withdraw the article. Another letter of complaint came from employees of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) branches in the US and Namibia and contained strongly worded, unsubstantiated personal attacks. They cast doubt on our academic integrity. At first I was shocked and began to doubt myself, and I lost some sleep about it. But when I took a closer look at the criticism, I thought our arguments held water. And both letters of complaint contained factual inaccuracies. So then we responded to the letters in detail.’

Discursive violence

‘On our initiative, the two parties agreed to openly air the criticism and our responses in the journal,’ Koot continues. ‘Just a substantive debate, without personal attacks.’ But that’s not how it went. In the paper ‘Science Versus Ideology in Community-Based Conservation: A Reply to Koot et al.’, by WWF staff, there was a renewed personal attack on Koot and his colleagues. The authors declared that Koot did not adhere to basic scientific principles and based his claims entirely on emotion and ideology. In a new article, ‘Conservation Science and Discursive Violence’, Koot and colleagues authors defended themselves against the charges and argued that the attack by their critics actually illustrates their initial point.

‘The response with personal attacks just confirmed our point’

‘The response with personal attacks and legal threats confirmed our central point, in our view,’ says Koot. ‘They have a potential conflict of interest, and that carries a risk of making you less open to critical voices. And then they try to silence the critics with this kind of intimidation, which is known as discursive violence.’

Dirty game

A few months later, the magazine’s publisher, Taylor & Francis, took the mediation process into their own hands, and away from the magazine’s editors. Koot: ‘From then on, we were no longer dealing with editorial board members who are at home in scientific discourse, but with employees of the publishing house.’

Koot continues, ‘The day after our second paper was published, we discovered to our astonishment that both our papers had been taken offline, without informing us, whereas the objections of our critics were still online. We heard from an employee of the publisher that this had been done on the advice of the publisher’s lawyer. But the publisher said it was a production error. We suspect a dirty game was being played in which the publisher succumbed to legal pressure from the complainants. It took five months before our two articles were back online.’

‘I think their unprofessional behaviour was outrageous, and I am really angry about that. I think they hoped we would crawl back into our shells. And that is just not on: there must always be room for criticism. I felt frustrated and powerless at times during all this. But because they failed to silence us, we achieved something in defence of critical science. If this were to happen again, I’d be able to deal with it more skilfully. I notice that I even enjoy talking about it now!’

Different experiences

In response to his experience, Koot organized a session on the harassment of scientists at a conference for ecologists and sociologists. There he heard more stories from fellow scientists both inside and outside WUR. There are no figures on the incidence of harassment, but it clearly is an issue. WUR recently organized a meeting for and about scientists who come under pressure from third parties. Jan Willem Bol, WUR press officer: ‘There were discussions about

The paper

Stasja Koot wrote a methodological paper with Paul Hebinck and Sian Sullivan: ‘Science for Success - A Conflict of Interest?’ The authors noticed that researchers linked with certain organizations wrote very positively about those organizations’ programmes without reflecting on any potential conflict of interest. One example was the case of researchers from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) US and Namibia who wrote about community-based nature conservation in Namibia. WWF Namibia co-finances conservation projects in which controversial trophy hunting plays a major role. The series of papers highlights ways in which community-based nature conservation and trophy hunting are good for both nature conservation and local communities, which benefit economically. In their paper, Koot, Hebinck and Sullivan call for more transparency about and reflection on the researchers’ own position. Their paper expands on the theory of constructivism, which assumes that knowledge and facts are not objectively observable but are constructed by the scientist, who is not entirely neutral, thanks to conscious and unconscious beliefs and interests. The authors argue that this necessitates openness and reflection, all the more so when the researcher clearly has a stake in the study.

colleagues who get pressurized by the Ministry of Agriculture, the business community, and even by NGOs. Employees who are faced with this kind of thing can get legal advice and support from WUR. And we also have confidential counsellors who you can talk to about psychological pressure. And for serious cases, if you have doubts about your physical safety, there is the social safety contact point.’ ■



Renovation of student residences may put paid to bars

Saying goodbye to Annie's

The renovation of the Asserpark residence in 2024 spells the end of the legendary 'Annie's Kroeg'. And with it, the loss of an important meeting place for small student clubs. The Hoevestein and Dijkgraaf residences are due for renovation in the next few years too. Student associations are worried. Is the end of student residence bars in sight? And if so, where can they go?



Text Luuk Zegers

There were once five of the star-shaped blocks of student flats, each with a bar run by residents. Now there are three left: Annie's Kroeg at Asserpark, Woeste Hoeve at Hoevestein and the Bunker at Dijkgraaf. And next year there will only be two. Small student societies and study associations make grateful use of these bars. The Indian Student Association (ISA), for example, throws a party in Annie's every month, and Biologica study association runs game nights and silent discos, and holds its AGM there. 'We don't have our own clubhouse, so we usually run our activities in Annie's,' says Marit van Hooren (22), who is on the board of the Brabant Student Guild (BSG). Together with other regional associations 't Noaberschap (for students from the eastern Netherlands) and WSSFs (for Frisians), the BSG looked into the feasibility of sharing a clubhouse. It proved unviable financially, says fellow board member Kim Wassenberg (21). 'The university

buildings close early in the evening, so that's not an option. It's too expensive to rent a room for our association at a pub in town. You can sit in the pub like everyone else, but then you are never on your own as an association.' That's what makes the bars in the student residences so handy for the small associations, says Kim. 'We can book Annie's for our association for a few hours free of charge. It's run by students, for students. You only pay for what you drink, and a beer costs 1.40 euros.'

From AGM to pub quiz

So BSG runs activities every Wednesday in Annie's or another of the student residence bars. Van Hooren: 'From an AGM to a potluck to a pub quiz.' Wassenberg: 'Annie's is perfect for that: it's got a nice atmosphere, drinks, music and light. We sometimes do things in other spaces, like the living room at Nieuwe Kanaal. But it's not the same.'

The BSG students are concerned about the small clubs that use the residence bars as their home base. 'The closure of

Annie's is a threat to our survival. There are fewer and fewer good meeting places. These clubs may be small, but a lot of people depend on them for their social life.' The bars play an importance role in student nightlife too. 'After their club activities, a lot of people go on to Woeste Hoeve or the Bunker to dance.'

So the plans to renovate Hoevestein (2026) and possibly to demolish and rebuild Dijkgraaf (2027/2028) are worrying the small Wageningen associations: are Woeste Hoeve and the Bunker going to disappear? No decision has been made on that yet, says Idealis director Bart van As. 'We have noticed that the bars have not been very popular with our tenants for a few years now. We conduct a survey on resident satisfaction every year.'

Nuisance

'Over the past four years, the residents seem to have been using the bars less and finding them more and more of a nuisance. Annie's was intended for

Asserpark residents but it is mainly used by people who don't live there. For us, that was reason to use the space for a meeting place that meets the needs of Asserpark residents better.'

That does not suggest a rosy future for the Bunker and Woeste Hoeve. Van As: 'We are not taking a decision on that at this stage. As the renovation of those residences comes closer, we'll look at the issue case by case. What are the problems, and what do the residents think of the bars? We do have a clear policy of creating meeting places for our residents. If the residents were all to start going to the bars and enjoying

them, then it's fine to keep them open. But the surveys of recent years suggest otherwise.'

Van As agrees that it is important for Wageningen to offer places for smaller clubs to meet. 'But at the same time, we don't think that's Idealis's job. Our mission is to provide student housing, not facilities for study associations.' After the renovation, residents will still be able to rent the meeting room for their association meetings, Van As explains.

Annie's alternative

Meanwhile, the associations put their heads together. The Student Council got involved too. Councillor Wessel Weterings: 'Associations with no premises of their own need to know where they stand in good time.' He understands that Idealis prioritizes the interests of its tenants. 'At the same time, there are other groups for whom the bars are important. The end of Annie's means the loss of a place where student groups of all kinds can meet, where you can organize

an event and where you can party for a good student price. If Idealis decides to close the other residence bars, we must keep Wageningen's student culture alive. Perhaps the International Club could be an option? Or a new student bar on campus? Or make it easier to rent space at big societies?'

But it hasn't come to that yet, says Weterings. 'We want to sit down soon with all those involved, from Idealis to the associations, and from the university to the municipality. In the end, everyone benefits if Wageningen's club life flourishes. We don't know what's going to happen to the Bunker and Woeste Hoeve yet. But it is good to start discussing the options in plenty of time.' ■

'The closure of Annie's is a threat to our survival'



Annie's pub • Photo Brabants Studenten Gilde

NEW PERSPECTIVE THANKS TO SLAVERY TOURISM

You can set your clock by it: in the run-up to *Keti Koti*, the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Suriname, heated discussions invariably erupt about the history of slavery and its commemoration. Wageningen-based cultural geographer Emmanuel Akwasi Adu-Ampong is in a position to shed new light on these sensitive issues.

Around this time last year, the Mayor of Amsterdam Femke Halsema was in Suriname, where she followed the Boni Trail on the former Frederiksdorp coffee and cocoa plantation.

This is a walking tour on the theme of the history of slavery and Maroon freedom fighter Boni. The trail enables tourists to walk in the footsteps of enslaved people. They are even shackled for a while, for example. Halsema felt extremely uncomfortable with it all, and the word *Disneyfication* was used by someone in her delegation. 'I am bothered by the way it's turned into an experience. I feel this history is too appalling for that,' she said in the newspaper *Het Parool*.

Slavery triangle

It is exactly this kind of issue that cultural geographer Emmanuel Akwasi Adu-Ampong studies. The university lecturer has a Veni grant to investigate how tourism in the triangle of Ghana, Suriname and the Netherlands colours people's perception of slavery in the past. 'These are countries with a shared history of slavery,

'TOURISM SHOWS THAT
THERE ARE PLENTY OF
VISIBLE TRACES OF SLAVERY'



Text Marieke Enter

and they all deal with it in their own way,' he explains. His research – which is not finished yet, he is about halfway through – focuses on tourism at six key historical sites. These are Fort Elmina and Fort Amsterdam in Ghana, where enslaved people were brought before they were transported by ship; Fort Zeelandia and Frederiksdorp Plantation in Suriname, where they were disembarked and lived and worked under often horrendous conditions; and in the Netherlands, the National Slavery Monument and the Black Heritage Tour, which showcases the superficially 'hidden' slavery history of Amsterdam, the economic epicentre of slavery.

At these locations, Adu-Ampong observed and filmed the dynamics between guides and visitors, conducted in-depth interviews, documented the stories the guides told (and how they varied according to the 'type of tourist'), and studied reviews on travel sites and such. His research is a blend of cultural geography with tourism studies and heritage studies.

Coincidence and taboo

For Adu-Ampong, there is no doubt that at least on an individual level, tourism influences our view of the slavery of the past in a way that reminds one of famous words by the Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy: 'The

trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it.' He says: 'Tourism shows that there are plenty of visible traces of slavery, often far more than people previously realized. And that highlights what I call the embodied absence of the past: the past that was always there, but which you only see when it is pointed out to you as a tourist. And then you also suddenly realize that it was no coincidence that you hadn't noticed it any earlier. Because the history of slavery is surrounded by a host of taboos.' Tourism is often promoted for economic reasons. But its impact goes much further, stresses the researcher. 'Tourist heritage sites influence which stories are told about the history of a place, and therefore how people think about it,' says Adu-Ampong. In the context of slavery, the question of exactly which stories are told, and in what way, can generate tensions, he acknowledges: how far do you go in popularizing painful episodes from history? 'Of course you have to watch out for Disneyfication, and the tourism sector should tell people facts and stories that are historically accurate. But at the same time, tourism requires a degree of entertainment value, otherwise a site will not attract visitors. And if nobody comes, you won't see the change that tourism is capable of bringing about either,' he explains.

Transformative power

The popularization of stories about slavery is less of a thorny issue in Ghana and Suriname than in the Netherlands, in Adu-Ampong's experience. 'In Suriname, for instance, there is hardly any discussion about the Boni Trail. People there generally feel it's a good thing. Everyone knew the story of Boni, but until recently nobody really did anything with it. Thanks to the trail, all kinds of new conversations have started: who was Boni exactly, what did he mean to the Maroons, to what extent does his period still leave its mark on contemporary Suriname?' According to the researcher, the (perhaps excessive) sensitivity to aspects of the trail expressed by Mayor Halsema is above all illustrative of



Ornamental plaques on Amsterdam mansions of the 17th and 18th centuries often refer to slavery, as here with the naval commander Cornelis Tromp and his Black attendant (Oudezijds Voorburgwal 136). • Photo tovsla / Shutterstock



Ornamental plaques of 'man with tobacco leaf' (Lindengracht 211) and 'the Moor' (Eerste Leliedwarsstraat 15).

Commemorative year

On 1 July, Ketikoti (literally: the chain is broken), the Kingdom of the Netherlands will launch Slavery History Commemoration Year, exactly 150 years after the end of slavery. Legally, slavery had already been abolished in 1863, but many of the enslaved people had to continue working on the plantations for another 10 years - a Dutch government decree to 'limit the damage' for the plantation owners.

the way the Netherlands relates to sensitive periods in history. 'That relationship is strained,' he notes. Tourism helps to gradually normalize that relationship, suggests Adu-Ampong - even if tourism can sometimes initially put a strain on the relations. 'But that's all in the deal, it's part of the transformative power of tourism: it provides a platform for productive tension. The great strength of tourism is that it appealingly invites people to recalibrate the way they look at things - whether a building, a painting, or the overall history. And looking at things with new eyes often plants the seeds of change. That's why I find tourism so interesting: it provides a kind of lens for seeing social issues more sharply.'

So Halsema's discomfort on the Boni Trail wasn't so terrible? 'As I often tell my students, there's nothing wrong with a bit of tension. It's perfectly reasonable for stories about the slavery of the past to create tension. And that is certainly better than hushing it all up.' ■

Adu-Ampong published an article on this research in Annals of Tourism Research at the beginning of June. A short 'edumentary' (an educational documentary) can be found on YouTube.

LOOKING AT ART FOR CREDITS

Art appreciation is not the main thing on your mind when you start out on a Wageningen degree programme. But looking at art is central to the Philosophical Skills course, which is part of the Philosophy minor. The course teaches students how to deal with the preconceptions and ethical dilemmas that can crop up when you're doing research. **Text and Photo Maurice Schoo**

‘What do you see here?’ lecturer Josette Jacobs asks a group of students. It is a chilly, changeable spring day and we are standing in front of a blue-green bronze sculpture in the Dreijen Arboretum. ‘I see a male and a female body. They are both naked and they are standing inside a circle,’ says one of the students. Someone else continues: ‘Maybe it’s referring to heads and tails? Because it looks a bit like a coin.’ Jacobs asks: ‘What makes you see that in it?’ ‘Well, it’s a circle, it’s flat and made of metal. And it has two different sides.’ Other interpretations follow: ‘The male body is much less naked than the female body, which I think is related to how our society views the difference between men and women. We see naked female bodies far more often.’

Not hamsters

The lecture at the Arboretum is what is known as a Visual Thinking Strategies session (VTS session). This method was

developed by museums to get visitors to look at art better. The idea is that during a session, participants share their interpretations freely in response to short open questions. ‘On my course, we use this method so that you become aware of your own assumptions,’ says Jacobs. ‘The idea that the sculpture stands for a coin is an assumption you make as a viewer, because the sculpture doesn’t talk to you.’ For Evie Armendariz, a student of Nutrition and Health, the course is an eye-opener: ‘You discover that if you don’t ask questions, you make quite a lot of assumptions. In my degree programme, I get a lot of information, but you don’t know what that knowledge is based on.’ The awareness-raising process that students go through on the course is not easy, says lecturer Jacobs: ‘I don’t turn them into hamsters, with fat cheeks stuffed with knowledge. No, I give them a chunk of knowledge that they’ve got to chew on. And you do that chewing during a VTS session. You could call it

a philosophical skill.’ Jacobs uses other things besides works of art to teach this skill: ‘I also use a text by Nietzsche on this course. With such a text you can also question what is happening in it. That makes it easier to process a text.’ This is the second time this course has been taught. And once again this year, the students have to make a documentary about an ethical dilemma. ‘Making a documentary helps them to understand and apply Aristotle’s ethics - which we cover on the course. The ethics are about finding the golden mean, which requires phronesis: a process of weighing things up,’ Jacobs explains. For example, one group is making a documentary about genetically modifying humans: should we perfect humans with genetic technology or is it better not to mess with our genes? The documentary should present various pros and cons in order to arrive at a balanced ethical viewpoint. ‘Like that, my students learn to deal with that difficult



Lecturer Josette Jacobs with a group of students near a bronze sculpture in De Dreijen Arboretum.

‘I DON’T TURN THEM INTO HAMSTERS WITH FAT CHEEKS STUFFED WITH KNOWLEDGE’

ethical question. The answer also requires you to collaborate well, because the final decision must have the support of the whole team.’

Knowledge hurts

The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer comes up a lot on the course too. ‘His book *Truth and Method* is about what method you use to find out the truth. He gives a good description of the process of understanding,’ Jacobs says. According to Gadamer, understanding goes together with shedding your preconceptions: ‘Understanding arises when you brush away your own traditions or preconceptions and embrace new ideas.

He talks about the fusion of horizons, meaning a merging of your own horizon of understanding with someone else’s. To understand someone else, you have to set your own traditions aside. And that hurts. That’s why I say: knowledge hurts.’ With all the pain it entails, this might not sound like the most attractive course on offer at WUR. Jacobs: ‘But that pain is present in every course. You’ve got to learn to live with it. So don’t run away from it to go drinking with the crowd

every Friday night, as I see a lot of students doing.’

The work of humans

What can the scientists of the future, as Jacobs calls the Wageningen students, learn from looking at art? ‘Without preconceptions, we have no knowledge – that’s the most important message. That’s what a Visual Thinking Strategies session shows: you bring your existing knowledge to bear on the artwork and use it to try to decipher it.’ This message calls for a change of attitude by the researcher: ‘What we’ve got to get rid of is the really arrogant I’m-always-right attitude. We must respect the fact that science is the work of humans.’ Gadamer’s philosophy can help with that, says Jacobs: ‘The most important lesson I learned from Gadamer is that the other person might be right. That should be your starting point.’ ■

SEVEN TIPS FOR DEFENDING YOUR THESIS

Every Wageningen student who wants to graduate has to go through it: a thesis defence. It was student editor Steven Snijders' turn at the end of May, and in the run-up to the day, he felt like a lamb to the slaughter. But all went well. Very well in fact. So he is sharing seven tips for getting through your defence in one piece. Text Steven Snijders

My day of reckoning fell on a sunny Thursday at the end of May. I am referring to that academic purgatory: the thesis defence. For just under an hour, a so-called second examiner asks critical questions about your thesis. 'I'm here for the nasty questions,' mine said jokingly. (At least, I hoped it was a joke.) Historian Maarten van Rossum recently called a PhD defence a 'fun day'. 'You are apprehensive, but once it's over, you want to do it all over again,' he said. But things often look rosy in retrospect. On my way to the defence, I felt like a lamb to the slaughter. Having obtained a nine for my defence, I can offer a few tips:

1 It's possible to prepare for your defence. Think about how to respond to critical questions. Revisit the discussions you had with your supervisor in which your work was subjected to criticism. You may want to plan a meeting with your supervisor before the defence to discuss your defence strategy and identify points for improvement.

2 Keep on referring to facts. The second reader will always have more limited knowledge of the facts than you, and repetition is permitted. They may even have skipped parts of the thesis when reading it. Cite figures and quotes and make sure you have them at your fingertips.

3 Admit to any limitations your research may have. Nothing in this world is perfect, and that is not an issue as long as you are aware of the fact. End with conclusions that are supported by your research or facts that back your choices.

4 Cat got your tongue? Reply with 'good question', and repeat the question. An age-old teacher's trick to stall. And it's okay to keep quiet for a moment to think. Don't panic. Trust in your ability to improvise. You are an expert in this field by now.

5 Nervous? That's okay! But rapid breathing and sweaty palms are not helpful. Try to relax. Nothing terrible can happen, can it? To the best of my knowledge, examiners don't generally brandish weapons (disclaimer: N=1).

6 Test the audio the day before to get used to talking into a microphone. That will help you feel more at ease and confident.

7 Do not hide behind your supervisor's advice. The choices are ultimately yours. Good luck!



There are some great-looking individuals wearing the coolest outfits on Wageningen campus. In this regular column, we put one of them in the spotlight. This time, we speak to Levi van Altenburg, a second-year student of Landscape Architecture and Spatial Planning.



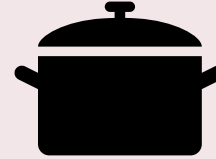
'I bought this jacket in a second-hand shop in England. I hardly wore it for three years, but I happened to be wearing it at a rave once, when someone came up to me with waterproof markers and asked if he could draw on my shoes. That seemed like a fun idea, and that's how I came up with the idea of doing the same with this jacket.

So I bought myself a set of markers and asked numerous people to draw something on it, on special occasions or at parties. I think by now about 100 people have drawn on it; I started doing it a little over a year ago. I always carry the markers around in my jacket pocket.

The biggest drawing is this lovely skull on the back, and the best is the spider – it's the most detailed, at least. Every drawing brings back memories. Some of them have a meaning but most of them are just amusing, like this one of the beer brand Faxe. The drawings are also visible in blacklight so during parties they stand out even more, although the oldest ones are starting to fade a bit, and I should really redo them.

I get the occasional comment about the jacket, as it does stand out of course. When people say they like it, I ask them if they'd like to draw something on it too.' CJ

You encounter all the flavours of the world in the WUR community. Julian Gomez (29) and Isabella Castro (28), MSc students of Climate Studies and Urban Environmental Management from Colombia, share a recipe for Ajiaco.



Flavours of WUR

Ajiaco

Julian: 'This is the soup of my region, Bogota, but it is also one of the most famous soups in Colombia. It reminds me of my childhood and my family. My mother used to make it for our birthdays.' Isabella: 'This is a soup you share with your family once a week. We always had this soup on Sundays.'

- 1 Peel and slice all the potatoes. Then finely chop the chives, onion and garlic.
- 2 Boil the chicken for 20 minutes in water. When it is done, take it out of the pot and keep the water.
- 3 Fry the onion, garlic and chives in sunflower oil. Then add the potatoes and the water from the chicken, adding enough water to cover the vegetables. Let it all simmer for one hour. Stir frequently.
- 4 Shred the cooked chicken finely with a fork.
- 5 Cut the maize into big chunks and add it to the soup. Then chop and add the parsley and coriander and add it too.
- 6 Once the potatoes are soft, season the soup with guascas and salt.
- 7 Ajiaco is best served with as much avocado, capers, crème fraiche and rice as you like.

Ingredients (for 4 persons) :

- 400g floury potatoes
- 400g sweet potatoes
- 400g waxy potatoes
- 50g chives
- 300g chicken
- 1 medium-sized onion
- 1 clove of garlic
- 1 maize cob
- 2g guascas* (a herb found in Colombia)
- 10g fresh parsley
- 20g fresh coriander leaves
- A pinch of salt
- water
- sunflower oil

Garnishes and side dishes

- avocado
- cream
- rice
- capers



Isabella Castro (28) and Julian Gomez (29)
Master's students in Climate Studies and Urban Environmental Management from Colombia. Photo Sarah Scheid

*Guascas is sometimes known as 'gallant soldier' in English

Which dish reminds you of home?
Share it with *Resource* so we can all enjoy it! resource@wur.nl



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 in unusual ways. Like Vincent Latjes (29), a Master's student of Development and Rural Innovation. He helped organize the Teacher of the Year (TOTY) election. The award ceremony is on Tuesday 20 June. Text Steven Snijders

'The winner has been picked, but I am not allowed to say who it is yet. Everyone is invited to come to the award ceremony, which is at Impulse next Tuesday 20 June at 16:00. We shall announce the winner then. Students could vote in March. The 10 teachers with the most votes in proportion to

'With every interview, I felt like we were talking to the winner'

the number of students they teach were nominated. The winner is chosen by a seven-member student jury that is very diverse in terms of education, gender and nationality. The jury interviewed all the nominees. As a student assistant, I helped with the paperwork and practical matters. I recorded the interviews using transcription software. I thought the interviews were really nice and inspiring! These teachers communicate their knowledge with so much passion that you are really eager to learn from them. One of the nominees wears clothes printed with funny things his students have said. Like 'No (d)rain no g(r)ain', which came from a PhD student. Another lecturer helps her students plan their



Photo Guy Ackermans

Vincent helps organize the TOTY election

Who: Vincent Latjes
What: student assistant for the Teacher of the Year (TOTY) election
Why? Very inspiring because of the exceptional lecturers
Hourly wage: 12.25 euros net

activism. She has advised Extinction Rebellion, for example. Meanwhile, another lecturer was working on improving the work culture at WUR. She organizes workshops and meetings to break the taboo on menstruation and the menopause. In every interview, I felt we were talking to the winner. But there can only be one winner.' 'The teachers' passion for their job has made me wonder whether I should become a teacher too. I've been thinking about what I want to do for quite some time. I ended up where I am now via a Bachelor's in Events and Communication, a teacher training course for teaching Dutch and a Bachelor's in Environmental Studies. I think it's better to explore various things than to plough on with something you have no passion for. Discovering your passion is possibly the best thing in life and the nominated teachers show that.'

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

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IN MEMORIAM

PAUL VAN BEEK

Paul van Beek, emeritus professor who led the Operations Research and Logistics chair group, passed away on Sunday 14 May 2023 at the age of 79. Paul was appointed in May 1976 as lecturer and researcher in Operations Research at the then Agricultural College. The group flourished, offering lectures in Operations Research as a component of numerous degree programmes at the university. In 1987, Paul helped launch the degree programme in Agrosystems Science, which became part of the Management and Economics programme in 2000. As well as sitting on the boards of various research associations inside and outside our university, Paul was acting chair of the Management Studies chair group, which is now

called Business, Management & Organisation.

Paul gave his valedictory speech on 21 March 2002. But he continued going into Leeuwenborch every week for many years, now focussing exclusively on research. How much he enjoyed that is clear from the fact that an article co-authored by him was submitted just a few weeks ago.

We offer our condolences to Paul's wife Marijke and his children and grandchildren, and wish them strength to bear their loss.

ORL chair group and SSG management

Colophon

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Steps have already been taken to close the first car park. ♦ Photo Resource



MAKE WUR GREEN AGAIN!

That was a shock: the Netherlands's greenest university is no longer the most sustainable uni. Not by a long way, in fact. After winning the SustainaBul prize year after year, now WUR has plummeted to sixth. A result that has led to much weeping and gnashing of teeth in the offices of Board President Houkje Sjeimovaara.

But she is not giving up. Now a far-reaching recovery plan has been set up under the slogan Make WUR Green Again. According to Sjeimovaara, it is badly needed. 'It's no longer enough to have a couple of solar panels, a Green Man or a Bioblitz. A genuine transition is called for.' The Executive Board is therefore targeting the most unsustainable element on campus: the car.

After all, cars' emissions harm nature. So the idea is to reduce the vehicle population by closing car parks. The focus is on the big culprits close to nature areas. The BioBlitz, which is still in progress, can be useful here, as it shows where the biodiversity hotspots are on campus.

A buyout scheme is being worked out for carparks near the hotspots. Sjeimovaara: 'I can confidently say it's a very attractive scheme.' In theory, the buyouts will be

on a voluntary basis. However, the Board President eventually admitted she would not be ruling out some form of compulsion if the car park operators aren't sufficiently enthusiastic.

The rationalization of the car parks will be accompanied by supporting policies. For example, working from home will be encouraged. A first step in this direction was already taken last winter by turning down

the heating. The same will now happen with the air conditioning: as of next Monday, it too will be turned down a notch.

The idea is to reduce the vehicle population by closing car parks

by turning down