

WUR from within: straight, sharp, transparent

No 08

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The journalism platform for all at Wageningen University & Research

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worried about
hot-desking

More women
professors

Lightning hits
tropical trees

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FOREWORD

An activist year

The Sower blindfolded. *The Sower* covered in oil. Forum occupied on two occasions. At least six petitions and several demos. What about? Protesting against what? From WUR's collaboration with the fossil industry to the war in Gaza, and from less tarmac on campus to the influence of agribusiness. Staff and students have been making themselves heard this year and they want WUR to take more of a stand on issues. Also this year: WUR itself was more activist than ever at the opening of the academic year, with the president Sjoukje Heimovaara sounding a different note. (If you can't get enough of this review, test your WUR knowledge with our *Resource Quiz* on page 16). Meanwhile, research and education have continued as normal. Well, not quite as normal... A petition about hot-desking circulated in Lumen and was signed by huge numbers of ESG employees. That had an effect, as the directors have paused the roll-out. Not everybody is meekly accepting the order to give up their own desk (page 12). The Executive Board is not saying much so far (page 4). It looks as if engaged staff and students will continue to make themselves heard in 2024 too. And we will continue to report with pleasure on these developments in our usual independent, inquiring way. Just as we will on other WUR news and background stories about science, education and student life. But first let's process 2023. We wish you all happy holidays with family and friends, and a fresh start to the new year. We will be back on 18 January with a new issue of *Resource* on campus and online.

Willem Andrée
Editor-in-chief



Not happy about hot-desking

► Board: 'tailored solutions'

The introduction of the flexible workplace is not going smoothly. There is a lot of discontent in the parts of the organization where staff no longer have their own desks, as a *Resource* investigation shows (see page 12). At Environmental Sciences, the roll-out of the new system has now been put on hold, while in Helix (Agro-technology & Food Sciences Group), the Human Nutrition and Health chair group is looking at the possibility of reversing parts of the roll-out.

WUR's Executive Board is not saying much about the resistance to the plans. 'There will undoubtedly be some problems in the implementation of hot-desking and the pilots. We can learn from this. If issues occur, we need to explore ways of easing the situation with all the individuals concerned.' The board points out that hot-desking has become necessary because of WUR's rapid growth in recent

years. 'There is inevitably huge diversity in the workplace requirements in an organization of 7000 employees. The strategic

'There will undoubtedly be some problems in the implementation of hot-desking and the pilots'

accommodation plan seeks to provide a framework and at the same time offer sufficient scope for tailored solutions in the various buildings.' RK

► PhD candidates worried about hot-desking

Two out of three PhD candidates think the introduction of the flexible workplace will adversely affect their work. This finding is from a survey by the Wageningen PhD Council among over 300 PhD candidates. There are big differences between buildings: half the PhD candidates in Zodiac

don't want hot-desking, compared to 90 per cent in Lumen. PhD candidates are worried above all that they will have to work from home more. They also think hot desking will affect social contacts with co-workers. And they fear the flexible workplace 'will add uncertainty to daily routines'. By which they mean having to search for a free desk and for their supervisors. What is striking in the responses is the poor communication about the accommodation plan (with hot desking as its core component). Less than a third of PhD candidates think they have been properly informed about what the flexible workplace will mean for them. Chair holders don't involve PhD candidates enough in the plans. This is despite the fact that PhD candidates vastly outnumber permanent staff in many groups. RK

Read more about how WUR staff feel about the plans on page 12

Protesting WUR's agribusiness ties

WUR should cut its links with big agribusiness, as with the fossil industry. That was the message of a campaign on campus last week that drew attention to the victims of global agribusiness: both the human victims and the plant and animal species that have disappeared due to the adverse impact on biodiversity and the climate.

The protest follows a recent meeting in Impulse where various Wageningen groups explained to an audience of around 100 students and staff why they don't want WUR to continue collaborating with large corporate clients in the food and agriculture sector.

Scientific integrity

That is partly because of unethical practices in the sector, such as large-scale deforestation for the cultivation of soya, or land theft for palm-oil plantations. The investigative site *Follow The Money* recently exposed the indirect involvement of WUR partners such as Upfield and FrieslandCampina in these practices.

Scientific integrity is the second reason why the campaigners object to the links with agribusiness. 'Their mere presence



Photo Sven Menschei

influences how Wageningen frames its research and education,' says one lecturer. 'They set the norm for the issues we study, the research questions we formulate and the paradigms we use. WUR should and could do far more to challenge the status quo, but the links with big agribusiness are preventing this.' ME

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That's how many PhD students on grants are currently getting financial support from WUR. WUR is supplementing their grants up to the 'IND norm', the minimum income you need to get a visa. High inflation has eroded the value of their grants, which have not kept pace. WUR's supplement will help them cover their living expenses.

Funding organizations will have to pay the full norm for PhD students on grants starting after 1 January. ^{RK}

READ MORE ON resource-online.nl

Dijkgraaf stands up for press freedom

Outgoing Education minister Robbert Dijkgraaf believes it is important that universities' media outlets should be able to operate independently. He said this last week in response to parliamentary questions from the SP and GroenLinks parties about the conflict at Eindhoven University of Technology's university magazine *Cursor*.

In early October, the *Cursor* editors blacked out the website in protest at the forced dismissal of their editor-in-chief. The conflict was triggered by an article about an alleged conflict of interest of the university's new rector magnificus.

According to Dijkgraaf, university magazines should be able to publish articles that criticize their own organization. 'Freedom of speech, and therefore journalistic freedom, is a prerequisite for academic freedom.

Both scholars and journalists should be able to carry out their investigations in freedom and independently.' ^{HOP}

Wageningen sees biggest increase in female professors

Of all the Dutch universities, Wageningen saw the biggest increase last year in the share of female professors. While growth slowed or stalled at other universities, WU recorded an increase of 3.4 percentage points.

These results are from the latest monitor of the Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH). According to the monitor, at the end of 2022 women accounted for 25.2 per cent of Wageningen professors, compared with 21.9 per cent at the end of 2021. It should however be noted that the monitor is based on data from the Dutch universities association UNL. That means the Wageningen figures only refer to professors at Wageningen University, not professors at Wageningen Research.

The Wageningen Research professors are included in the overview of professors at wur.nl. That showed a WUR-wide proportion of 21.8 per cent female professors in January 2023, just after the reference date for the monitor.

Nationally, women accounted for 27.6 per cent of professors last year, an increase of just 0.9 per cent compared to the year before. LNVH is worried about this: 'We note this is the lowest increase in eight years. Assuming the growth rate of the past two years, it will take until 2045 to get equal numbers of male and female professors.'

Achievable?

At WU, half of the newly appointed professors last year were women. If that contin-

ues, its own target of 30 per cent women professors by 2025 should be easily achievable. In fact, at that rate WU should even manage 35 per cent by 2025. But it is far from clear whether WUR will indeed keep this up. The latest over-

view of professors (September 2023) has only five more women than the overview in January 2023, an increase of 2.25 per cent. However, Hannah van Zanten was recently appointed a professor, and more appointments of female professors may follow before the year end. ^{ME}

At this rate, the target of 30 per cent women professors by 2025 should be achievable

Plans for second Summervibes festival

The people who organized the Summervibes campus festival last summer are planning a repeat next year. The organizers want a second stage, WUR directors behind the bar and... better weather.

They got the idea for Summervibes when the usual Globus festival organized by students didn't go ahead last year. 'That was a great event that brought students, staff and other campus residents together,' says Sijf Moling, the AID project manager and one of the organizers. 'When that was cancelled, we decided we would just have to set up something ourselves.' There is still lots to do, but the organizers can reveal some of their plans for the second edition of the festival. They want a second stage and a more varied programme. 'Last year we had DJs and musicians; now we are thinking of adding street theatre, comedians or dance acts. We also think it would be fun to have the directors serving the beer.' (Go to resource-online.nl to find out why.) Like last year, the festival will be free and part of the proceeds will be donated to charity. LZ

Record number of PhDs

WUR's PhD engine went into overdrive this year. The calendar year 2023 will end with 359 PhDs, a record for the second year in a row; last year ended with 321 PhDs. Before the pandemic, the number of PhDs used to range between 280 and 300. The number peaked in 2015 with 305 PhDs, but that record was broken last year. The number of doctoral theses is now about a third higher than ten years ago. Internationals account for over two

thirds of PhDs (68 per cent). Women are just about in the majority, at 52 per cent. The number of PhDs is higher than expected, says Saskia de Boer of the PhD Office when asked to comment. That is partly due to the pandemic, which led to delays in PhD projects. The increase also reflects the increased intake of PhD candidates in recent years. Hauke Smidt, professor holding a personal chair in Microbiology, had the most PhDs - eight. RK

Ailing royal tree to be replaced

There is a dark hole in the grass near Atlas. Until last week, this was where the royal rubber tree stood. The *Eucommia ulmoides* was planted by Dutch king Willem-Alexander in WUR's anniversary year 2018. The tree is not dead, says park manager Elike Wijnheimer, but it is being moved elsewhere in the hope that it will fare better. 'The site next to Atlas was chosen for its visibility in accordance with

the wishes of the Executive Board, not because it offered good growing conditions. It also had lots of room for people to watch the tree being planted.' But what was good for PR was not so good for the rubber tree. In retrospect, the conditions are unsuitable for this tree. The *Eucommia* will get a second chance near the Amphitheatre and Zodiac, and a new tree will be planted in its place in January. RK

WUR but not WUR's

What do you do with a dead European shag wearing a ring with the letters 'WUR'? You send a photo of the bird to Wageningen, decided the Scot Stuart McLeod, who found the shag. The message was passed on to seabird expert Mardik Leopold. Leopold discovered the bird was tagged in 2015 on the island of Inchkeith near Edinburgh as part of a British study. That it got assigned the letters 'WUR' is pure chance. RK



Photo Stuart McLeod

Lightning strikes more tropical trees than thought

Until recently, researchers underestimated the role of lightning strikes in tropical forests. That is changing, partly thanks to research by PhD student Bianca Zoletto (Forest Ecology & Forest Management group).

'My preliminary results show that a single strike affects an average of seven trees and kills two. However, the numbers can be up to 20 damaged trees and 16 dead trees per strike.'

Researchers recently estimated that lightning hits 832 million trees in the tropics every year. Almost a quarter of them don't survive the strike, and this makes it a major natural cause of death among tropical trees alongside drought, storms and disease. Zoletto looked for traces of lightning strikes in Uganda's Bwindi rainforest. It lies on the Albertine Rift, on the edge of the Congo Basin. This area is one of the world's lightning hotspots, with up to 200 strikes per square kilometre each year. By comparison, in Europe there are at most three strikes per square kilometre. 'There is much more water vapour and energy in the air in the tropics, so you get thunderstorms much more often.'

Lightning scars

However, a lightning strike is not easy to prove. In the rainforest, Zoletto and a team scanned the trees and canopies for lightning damage. One proven sign is 'flashover damage', where the strike has defoliated some of the branches in the treetops following a recognizable pattern. Scars on the trunk are another possible sign, but researchers in Panama concluded they are rare and therefore unreliable. However, Zoletto found that was not the case in Bwindi rainforest. In 2022, she discovered the trees had scars on the trunk in 20 out of 62 lightning strike sites. The scars complement the established method, says the PhD



Lightning damage to a tree in the Bwindi rainforest • Photo Bianca Zoletto

student. This is because not every affected tree has both flashover damage to the canopy and scars on the trunk. 'Moreover, that crown damage is not always a reliable sign,' Zoletto argues. 'A storm or insects can also defoliate part of the crown. And when the leaves grow back, the traces are gone, whereas a scar remains visible for years.'

Sensitivity

In other forests, the ecologist found few or no scars. 'It may depend on the tree species in the forest,' Zoletto suggests.

'Three species in Bwindi rainforest accounted for most of the scars. In the other forests, those species were less common.' According to Zoletto, how sensitive a tree is to strikes may have to do with the wood structure, but also with the electric current that each tree possesses. 'Every tree generates an electric current in its trunk due to the ions in the tree sap. We know very little about such currents.' She is developing specific tools to measure very weak voltages together with other departments and technicians within WUR. She is open to more collaborations. ss

A botched experiment, a rejected paper: such things are soon labelled as failures in academia. As for talking about them — not the done thing! But that is just what WUR scientists do in this column. Because failure has its uses. This time, we hear from Andriy Volkov, a PhD candidate at the Laboratory of Biochemistry.

Text Nicole van 't Wout Hofland • Illustration Stijn Schreven

'During my studies, I quickly learned that meticulous planning and organizing were not my forte. That may explain why I prioritized my experiments over all the other aspects of science during the last four years. I judged myself on the results I got, and that mindset meant that my academic achievements defined my identity. I set the bar high for myself. When I started my research, I set out to make great discoveries, with good data and publications in esteemed journals. But in practice, it is not that simple. I spent years trying to analyse

'My academic achievements defined my identity'

mutant plants and it just did not work. I started feeling inadequate, both in my professional work and my personal interests. It spiralled and I became depressed.

With the help of my girlfriend, self-help books and a psychotherapist, I overcame the mental health problems.

With hindsight, I recognize that my intense focus on laboratory experiments did not leave room for other important aspects of science. While my colleagues forged collaborations and authored papers with fellow scientists, my scientific network is virtually non-existent. The pandemic played a role in this, and as an introvert, I struggle to approach people I don't know. However, I should have paid more attention to this part of the scientific process.

My lack of a scientific network makes it harder to find new work now that I am finishing my thesis. I try to see things differently nowadays: I acknowledge that the results of experiments are beyond my control and simply putting in the effort is what counts most. Little by little, my mentality is changing.'



Matchmaking in the vegetable garden

Researchers in the CropMix programme are calling on vegetable gardeners to get experimenting during the coming growing season. Their results could help answer one of the key questions in strip cropping and other forms of mixed cropping: which crops go together well?

CropMix has been given 10 million euros from the National Science Agenda fund to study how crop diversity, for example through strip cropping, can speed up the transition to a more sustainable form of farming. The programme is looking at the agricultural, ecological, economic and social aspects: what are the implications of strip cropping for the farm, the supply chain and the retail sector?

One of the basic principles of strip cropping, and mixed cropping in general, is that with the right combination of crops you no longer need pesticides. But which combinations work best, and under what circumstances? The experiences of vegetable gardeners can help answer these questions, as vegetable gardens nearly always have several crops growing alongside one another.

Beans

So CropMix is starting a citizen science experiment. The researchers are asking vegetable gardeners to grow at least two combinations: broad beans with pumpkin, plus broad beans with a crop of their choosing. The harvest will be quantified by counting the number of pods and beans. Coordinator Yvonne Florissen: 'That is a less biased measure than the weight because not every gardener harvests their beans at the same point. People have differing tastes.'

Recruitment started at the end of November via a call in the magazine of AVVN, the vegetable gardeners' association. Any gardener with a plot of at least 4m² can take part, regardless of their level of experience. The soil type doesn't matter either. Florissen: 'One of the plus points of a citizen science project like this is that we will get results from all over the Netherlands, with varying growing conditions.'

WUR staff and students with a vegetable patch can take part too. To register, go to cropmix.nl/moestu-inmix. The deadline is 21 December. ME

You can **smell** **fattiness** in food

We love to eat high-energy foods containing carbohydrate and protein. This preference has developed in the course of human evolution. Consuming these foods brings rewards in the form of flavours and smells: the sweetness of sugars in carbohydrates, and the savoury umami experience in proteins. But what about fat, the third major nutrient that is energy-rich?

Can humans smell fat, directly or indirectly? And can we differentiate between different degrees of fattiness in food? Chinese researcher Shuo Mu was awarded a PhD last week for a study on the 'smellability' of fat in food. The headline of this article gives away the answer: Yes, we humans can smell fat. Not directly, but through volatile compounds such as fatty acids, which are found together with fat in foods.

It won't come as a surprise to many people that we can smell fat. After all, we can smell a doughnut stall a mile off. Fats are not volatile in themselves, but fatty acids are. Shuo demonstrated our ability to smell these by offering test subjects a series of three solutions. Two of these were dummies while the third contained fatty acids. Test subjects were consistently able to pick out the fatty acid solution..

Milk

What is more, test subjects link the presence of fatty acids with fat. But how does that work with actual foodstuffs? To find out, Shuo experimented with milk and meat. 'In the milk experiment, I investigated whether there was a smellable difference between three types of pasteurized and ultra-heat treated (UHT) milk from the supermarket. The milk varied in fat levels. The differences proved to be detectable by smell in the pasteurized milk, but not in the UHT milk.'

UHT milk is heated briefly to over 135°C to kill the bacteria. Does that get rid of odour substances that we associate with fat? No, says Shuo. 'They are still

'The differences in fat content could be smelled in pasteurized milk but not in UHT milk'

there, only they are masked or overshadowed by the strong odours of other substances that are created by the heat treatment. Two of these substances are acetoin and 2-heptanon.'

Meat

Something similar goes on with meat, as shown by Shuo's experiments with raw

and cooked pork and beef with varying degrees of fattiness. Frying releases lots of new odours and flavours through oxidation and the reaction of protein with sugar. Test subjects can still smell the difference between fatty and fat-free meat, but they have trouble estimating the exact degree of fattiness.

Fat is sometimes referred to as the sixth basic taste, along with sweet, sour, salty, bitter and umami. Shuo's findings tie in with that idea. Playing with fatty aromas could create interesting options, Shuo thinks. 'For example, you could make low-fat foods more appealing by adding a fatty aroma to them. You might even be able to influence eating behaviour with fatty aromas. But a lot more research is needed before that.' RK



Test subjects can still smell the difference between fatty and fat-free meat, but they have trouble estimating the exact degree of fattiness. ♦ Photo Harry Knight / Unsplash

PhD theses **in a nutshell**

Cold storage for infant formula

During the production and storage of milk powder for infant formula, glycation can cause the formation of breakdown products that affect the quality of the product. Glycation is the attachment of sugars to amino acids or proteins. Chinese researcher Yajing Xie studied this in infant formula powders made of cow, goat and soya milk. Glycation destroys a number of amino acids, depending on the kind of milk. Most are lost in storage, and the higher the temperature, the more nutrients are lost. So keep it in the fridge.

Glycation Unveiled. Yajing Xie ◀ Supervisor Vincenzo Fogliano. ^{RK}

Big Brother spies on calves

Deaths and the use of antibiotics are big problems in the calf-breeding industry. Cameras, sensors and machine learning make early detection of disease theoretically possible. Chinese researcher Dengsheng Sun studied the potential for capturing the normal movement patterns of calves in models. The ultimate goal was to develop an instrument for fast detection of abnormal behaviour caused by disease. But that goal is not in sight yet. Interestingly, Sun openly questions whether more technology is in fact the solution to this problem. Calves fall ill because of the current production system. Early detection of disease doesn't prevent disease. *Decoding calf patterns.*

Dengsheng Sun ◀ Supervisor Peter Groot Koerkamp. ^{RK}

Smelling the enemy

Cabbage White butterflies are in a threesome with their host plant and their natural enemy, the parasitic wasp. This trio communicate with each other via volatile substances. The Cabbage White smells those substance via chemical receptors in its antennae. Chinese researcher Qi Wang identified and researched the role of a couple of genes for those 'odorant receptors'. One of the methods used was to use CRISPR-Cas9 to switch off those genes and then to see what effect that had on feeding, mating and egg-laying. Turns out a good sense of smell can be crucial for survival.

Odorant receptors in larvae and adults of a butterfly species. Qi Wang ◀ Supervisor Marcel Dicke. ^{RK}

THE PROPOSITION

PhD candidates explain the most thought-provoking proposition in their thesis. This time it's Lotte Yanore, who received her PhD on 31 October for her research on decision-making by Dutch dairy farmers under policy uncertainty.



'Equal opportunities cause inequality'

'Equal opportunities don't always lead to equal results. In a diverse classroom, giving the same lecture to all students may result in different grades. However, providing additional support, such as extra lectures or alternative learning methods, can help students with learning disabilities perform similarly to their peers. The point I want to make here is that sometimes the provision of differentiated support can help achieve greater social equality.

In the university environment, we have many international students who come from entirely different environments and education systems. Here everything is organized very differently from what they are used to. Providing them with extra support can be valuable in helping

them fit in and adapt to the new educational environment.

Outside the classroom, there are similar disparities among different types of PhD candidates. Depending on whether they are employed, get a scholarship or are in sandwich programmes, they get different pay despite doing equally valuable work. In my opinion, addressing these payment inequalities is crucial to creating a fair environment for all PhD candidates.

I know this topic sounds a bit abstract, but I believe it is important for each of us to think about how we can strive for equality in society and accommodate different people to help them achieve their desires.' ^{NF}

No such thing as a free lunch

The end of the year has been marked by ups and downs. The election result means we will be losing the person who I think has been our best ever Education minister. On the other hand, WUR has come out top again among Dutch universities for the 19th time.

Today, a *Resource* article caught my eye with an interesting perspective. 'Petition protesting expensive WUR canteen. Young Communists are objecting to the expensive food in the canteens on campus.' That's a surprise: you take 'healthy, sustainable and inclusive' as the priority themes of your Food & Beverage policy and it turns out the costs of said food and beverages rise as a result. Communists doling out advice on the food supply is interesting in its own right, but of course Wageningen doesn't teach history. Perhaps I shouldn't be sounding off about this; after all, my own crowdfunding effort

'The Wageningen bubble has its own political reality'

Communists' canteen petition. Perhaps not so surprising though, because if we go back to the election result, it shows the Wageningen bubble has its own political reality.

The lack of explicit support for cars on campus, the Communist lunch and the election result in Wageningen all give me the feeling that our amazingly inclusive campus is slightly less inclusive for campus residents on the right of the political spectrum. That is why

for a car park under Omnia got no support, so I'm doing way worse than the



Guido Camps

I would like to end this column by wishing you all the best for the new year and listing a few apolitical facts that might not have penetrated the Wageningen bubble but are worth noting for a more inclusive worldview:

- WU gets direct government funding for education and research to the tune of 269.8 million euros (WUR annual report);
- All of this government funding comes from taxes (obviously);
- Multinationals account for 40 per cent of the jobs in the Dutch private sector, and two-thirds of private-sector revenue (Statistics Netherlands);
- The top 10 per cent of Dutch earners earn 32 per cent of the total income and pay 36 per cent tax. The bottom 50 per cent earn 19 per cent of the total income and receive allowances equal to 129 per cent of their income (Statistics Netherlands).

I wish WUR a fine 2024, in which our biggest problems are the price of a bowl of soup and the cars (including those of multinationals) on campus. May we once again spend a year doing pioneering research at the Netherlands's best university!

Guido Camps (39) is a vet and a researcher at Human Nutrition and OnePlanet. He also enjoys baking, beekeeping and unusual animals.

STRESS ABOUT DESKS

Losing their own desks causes serious frustration among WUR employees. The resistance to hot-desking is so strong that here and there plans are being adjusted or even abandoned. Photos Guy Ackermans

It was busy in the corridors of Lumen and Gaia in August. Carpenters were sawing holes in doors to put windows in them. That makes it possible to see whether there is a space free in the room. Desks were swapped for sit-stand variants. From now on, everyone had to be able to work everywhere. These were the first tangible changes brought by the introduction of the flexible workplace. From now on – with the odd exception

– nobody has the right to a room of their own, with their own things around them and sharing with the same colleagues. It didn't take long for the backlash to start. At the beginning of October, a petition circulated among staff of the Environmental Sciences Group (ESG) in Lumen and was signed by the vast majority. The message was clear. The flexible workplace the way management is rolling it out wrecks the cohesion and collaboration within the group, condemns PhD researchers to social isolation, and undermines the quality of the work. One of the instigators of the petition was Louren Poorter (Lumen, personal



Text Roelof Kleis

'Investing in my quality'

Fred de Boer, former Teacher of the Year and associate professor of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation in Lumen: 'My job satisfaction, my efficiency and the quality of my work would go down massively if I couldn't see students in my own room anymore. I dread to think how it will be if that happens. I feel so at home here, and I can work so well here. Look, here's my diary. Every day is full of consultations with students and PhD researchers. Consultations at this table are my work. It's what I do. I get it that this is an expensive office in terms of square metres. But that's an investment in the quality I deliver. People knock at my door all day long. That availability is the quality we deliver in Wageningen. And if I'm not here, anyone else is welcome to sit and work here. Which does happen. To me, having my own room represents appreciation of my work. I see this office as a requirement for my job. I can't work at home. In the 30 years I've been doing this job, I've had experience of my own office, shared offices and hot-desking. By now I know exactly what works for me and what doesn't.'

professor of Functional Ecology). He considers a desk of his own essential to his wellbeing. 'We're constantly performing a juggling act, and if I've also got to go looking for a place to work every day... It just doesn't work. I have no wish to run around even more than I already do, looking for desks. Then why should I carry on coming in to work here?' In the ESG plans, the employees will lose 38 per cent of the space they currently have, according to the petition. 'Whereas staff numbers are actually increasing.' That enforced cutback comes primarily from the adopted starting point that from now on, there is to be one desk for every two fulltime workers. Also, much more space than before is to be allocated to students working on their theses, in accordance with guidelines issued by the Executive Board. Why, Poorter wonders. 'A lot of students can work perfectly well on their thesis in the library or at home. If I have to choose between my PhD candidate who needs to be immersed in



Fred de Boer, Wildlife Ecology & Conservation associate professor: 'Consultations at this table are my work. I get it that this is an expensive office in terms of square metres. But that's an investment in the quality I deliver.'

the research culture or a Master's student, I give priority to the PhD candidate. Let chair groups decide for themselves where their priorities lie: with their employees or their students.'

In tears

Resistance is not restricted to the ESG. Flexible working has been going on at the Agrotechnology & Food Sciences Group in Helix since last spring, and there too it met with a storm of criticism. A poll on the intranet in April showed that the vast majority (more than 80 per cent) of the staff don't want to hot-desk. 'What shocked me most,' says instigator of the poll Allan van Hulst (Human Nutrition and Health), 'was the number and the vehemence of the responses on the

intranet. Normally a message on the intranet doesn't get much response, but everyone fell upon that poll. It's a hot topic. There have been people bursting into tears here because they had to give up their own desk. This is something that really upsets people.'

The strength of people's feelings about this has to do with dignity, thinks Van Hulst. 'It's about being fully appreciated as an employee. Your own desk is part of the recognition that you count as an individual member of staff with your own contribution to the university. I was very shocked by the technocratic way management talked about the flexible workplace. In one discussion, Edith

'IF THERE'S ONE SUBJECT THAT HAS PROVOKED MASSIVE FRUSTRATION, IT'S OFFICE ACCOMMODATION'

Feskens (chair-holding professor of Global Nutrition) talked about staff taking up a desk. That's like telling your partner at home that he's taking up a chair at the dining table. It's not just about the flexible workplace, but also about communication and the way it is introduced.'

Not the same everywhere

The introduction of the flexible workplace was prompted by WUR's strong growth.





Without expanding, there isn't enough space to give everyone a desk of their own. And due to home-working, the average desk is collecting dust for more than half the working week. In the eyes of the Executive Board, the flexible workplace addresses both problems. The application of the principle was left in the hands of the science groups, which led to a wide range of approaches and differences in pace. While AFSG and the Plant Sciences Group (PSG) have already got it sorted, the Environmental Sciences Group (ESG) and the Animal Sciences Group (ASG) have only just taken the first steps

towards implementation, and at the Social Sciences Group (SSG), the ink on the first sketches hasn't dried yet. Leo Marcelis (Radix, chair-holding professor of Horticulture and Product Physiology) heaves a deep sigh when asked about the flexible workplace. 'If there's one subject that provokes great frustration, it's office accommodation. I've had endless discussions about it this year! All of them in a negative atmosphere.' His chair group opted to have five or six people sharing an office. 'A maximum of four of them can be there at the same time. They have to coordinate that themselves. There are a lot of people who like working at home, but there are also some who don't. And then people who don't like hot-desking

start working at home for that reason. This generates a lot of negative vibes. The dissatisfaction is enormous.' But there is a glimmer of hope. The petition submitted by Poorter and his allies has prompted the ESG directors to press the pause button. The space allocated to students is being drastically reduced, says Poorter, and the needs and grievances of staff are being considered afresh. All this should lead to an adapted plan. Poorter is cautiously positive. 'The question is whether the end result will be a structural improvement. Flexible working still seems a bad idea to me. The real question should be, not what kind of office is the most efficient economically, but what do we need in order to deliver top quality.'

'PEOPLE HAVE BURST INTO TEARS HERE BECAUSE THEY HAD TO GIVE UP THEIR OWN DESK'



Deprived

The AFSG (or part of it) is making a quiet U-turn now too. 'We can't deny that it's not going well,' says Renger Witkamp, who is leading a small team tasked with documenting the grievances for Human Nutrition and Health. 'Our staff have not been consulted enough throughout the process. There's a strong feeling that the flexible workplace was imposed from above, and that staff have been deprived of something. You are not allowed to personalize your room anymore; decorations are organized centrally and there is a plant policy. That is not popular and we must address that fact. We've got to halt the machine that has steamrolled over us. We want to take a bottom-up approach to finding

‘THERE’S A STRONG FEELING THAT THE FLEXIBLE WORKPLACE WAS IMPOSED FROM ABOVE’

‘WE’RE GOING TO REVERSE SOME DECISIONS AND ORGANIZE THINGS DIFFERENTLY’

solutions this time.’ For Witkamp, one of the options would be to make employees responsible for a few offices. ‘So you might allocate two offices with eight desks to 10 people. That way you have your own office and maybe even your own desk, if that’s what you agree on among yourselves. I really understand the dissatisfaction when people can’t find each other, or you can only find a spot in a room you don’t want to sit in, or among people you don’t want to be with. Some people didn’t fully realize how losing their own work station can affect someone. I was shocked by what an impact it has on some people. That’s why we’re going to reverse some decisions and organize things really differently.’

‘What strikes me,’ says Poorter, ‘is the top-down way in which WUR went about this, with only vertical lines and no communication about chair groups, departments and the various different jobs people do. No one really listened to the official participatory organs, and no one dares to stand up, speak out and intervene. Pretty shocking, really.’ ■

Read the Executive Board’s response on page 4



Personalizing your desk is still possible, but that will end with the introduction of hot-desking.

‘Hot-desking doesn’t work in the academic world’

Marc Naguib, chair-holding professor of Behavioural Ecology in Zodiac: ‘I don’t know of any university in the world where a full professor or a tenure tracker doesn’t have their own office. Hot-desking doesn’t work in the academic world. I share this office with a colleague, but we don’t work here at the same time. That’s impossible. Half the time I try and work in the office of someone who’s working at home. I have a lot of consultations and students need to be able to pop in on me, so they need to know where I am. A fixed spot is essential. Hot-desking is so ineffective. Without your own office, effectiveness and quality quickly go downhill. Work satisfaction drops off and that makes people start working at home more. That ruins the whole academic atmosphere in which you easily bump into each other and feel welcome. And a lot of younger staff with small children can’t work at home anyway. So they share an office here and wander around with their laptops. Every day the same question: where can I sit? It will generate an awful lot of stress.’

1 The white baby swans on the campus have lower chances of survival than the brown ones. According to ecologist Jente Ottenburghs, that's because:

- A** The white cygnets are more easily picked off by predators
- B** Daddy and Mummy Swan see the white cygnets are competitors
- C** Pike prefer white swans
- D** White swans are actually albinos



2 The new photosynthesis institute on campus is named after Jan Ingen Housz. Who is/was he?

- A** He is the institute's biggest sponsor
- B** He was the first professor of Plant Sciences in Wageningen
- C** He didn't exist, it's a made-up name that sounds nice
- D** He's the man who discovered photosynthesis

3 Atlas was evacuated on Tuesday 9 May because of a suspect parcel in the bike cellar. What was in it?

- A** Nothing, it was a badly timed April Fool's joke
- B** A wasp
- C** An Extinction Rebellion pamphlet
- D** A dead sparrow

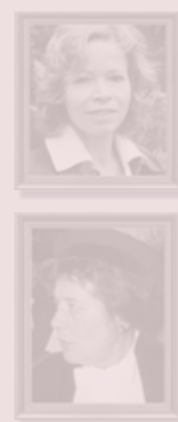
4 The soup in the campus canteens is expensive because:

- A** It's of superior quality
- B** Everything has gone up in price
- C** The caterer thinks we're crazy
- D** Yeah, why, actually?

2023

END-OF-YEAR QUIZ

Was 2023 an unforgettable year? Maybe. There were an unusually large number of demonstrations on campus, let alone elsewhere. The traditional *Resource* End-of-year Quiz freshens our memories of a few noteworthy WUR events. The answers can be found elsewhere in this issue. Text Roelof Kleis • Photos Shutterstock



5 'Stay with the trouble and look in the mirror more often.' Who?

- A** Scientists4Future on the ban on spontaneous demonstrations on campus
- B** Extinction Rebellion on the blockade of the A12 motorway
- C** DARE (anti-discrimination) on the hidden racism on campus
- D** Student Service Centre on the dwindling waiting list for the student psychologists

6 The new Code of Conduct for undesirable behaviour is based on:

- A** The principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth
- B** The perpetrator's intention
- C** The principle that it's your own silly fault
- D** How the victim feels

7 The mystery professor in the much-talked-about portrait gallery in Omnia turned out to be:

- A** Johannes Hendrikus Becking, a former rector magnificus
- B** Clara Wilhelmina Visser, the first woman professor in Wageningen
- C** A lost purported self-portrait of Aalt Dijkhuizen
- D** A borrowed work from the art library, Kunsttuileen Wageningen

8 Scientists4Future held a reading marathon in Atlas. What did they read aloud?

- A** The complete works of Jules Verne
- B** The Bible
- C** The full sixth IPCC report
- D** All seven Harry Potter books

9 'I feel it's my duty to remain optimistic.' Who?

- A** Professor Liesje Mommer on the planet's ever-dwindling biodiversity
- B** WUR President Sjoukje Heimovaara on the recent election results
- C** Rector magnificus Arthur Mol on his successor
- D** Director of Facilities and Services Harold Swartjes on the lack of a cycle path past the Dassenbos

10 Climate programme head Tim van Hattum wrote a book entitled:

- A** Only the Lonely
- B** Lonely Planet
- C** Planet Only
- D** Only Planet



11 WUR's Executive Board is going to provide PhD researchers on grants with financial support because:

- A** Resource wrote such a heart-rending account of their plight
- B** Life sucks for PhD researchers on grants
- C** PhD researchers on grants earn less than they should
- D** You should look after your cash cows

12 Anti-Shell activists smeared The Sower with oil. What kind of oil?

- A** Fuel oil
- B** Massage oil
- C** Olive oil
- D** Deep-frying fat



13 The art work *Deer Dichotomy* by Iris le Rütte was stolen. What does the artist hope?

- A** That the statue and the thief get on well
- B** That the statue won't be melted down
- C** That the thief burns in hell for all eternity
- D** That the statue will be found in two pieces

14 The use of ChatGPT in exams is officially banned, unless ...

- A** It's explicitly allowed
- B** You do it secretly
- C** You are up-front about it
- D** You don't take it too far

15 The Student Council elections were called off. Why?

- A** There weren't enough candidates to choose from
- B** The election campaign fell in the middle of the exam period
- C** The parties couldn't agree on the order of their candidates list
- D** The sitting members decided to stay on another year

16 The new coffee machines on campus use oat milk. Why?

- A** Oat milk is healthy
- B** Oat milk is trendy
- C** Oat milk is yummy
- D** Oat milk is plant-based

17 For the first time in history, WUR revoked a PhD degree. Why?

- A** The PhD holder's supervisor had done most of the work
- B** The PhD holder had fiddled the data
- C** The PhD holder got ChatGPT to write the thesis
- D** The PhD holder's twin brother did all the work

18 For the Master's in Metropolitan Analysis Design and Engineering, students made a bench out of...



- A** Elephant droppings
- B** Elephant grass
- C** Pig's manure
- D** Pig's grass

19 Wageningen research shows that it's perfectly possible to measure wind from a...

- A** Plane
- B** Yacht
- C** Wind turbine
- D** Hot air balloon

20 The student house at Heerenstraat 6 is celebrating its centenary with a book. What's the title of the book?

- A** H6
- B** Watch out, falling pianos!
- C** Ever seen a hunk like that before?
- D** Among den mates

Bluetongue and genetic diversity

Saving what you can

The bluetongue outbreak in the Netherlands has not only caused many deaths among sheep, it is also casting a shadow over the mating season. This can be problematic for the smaller breeds – meaning numbers, not size: will they become endangered? *Resource* discussed the question with Annemieke Rattink and Noelle Hoorneman of the Netherlands Centre for Genetic Resources (CGN).



Text Marieke Enter

Temperatures are falling at last, and wiping out – for now at least – the midges that spread the bluetongue virus. Noelle Hoorneman, a sheep farmer as well as a researcher at CGN, knows from experience how catastrophic an outbreak can be: her flock was infected this autumn and she lost four of her 37 sheep. And that is a relatively low death rate. On average, about 25 to 30 per cent of affected flocks die of the disease.

The effects of the bluetongue outbreak are being felt in the Netherlands. Since the virus broke out here in September, more than 50,000 sheep have died of it – over five per cent of the national sheep population. The outbreak impacts future generations as well, as many infected animals fall so ill that it affects their fertility. And this happened right in the middle of the mating season. Among the larger farmed breeds such as Texel or Swifter sheep, that is primarily a financial headache. But in the case of the smaller breeds, there is more at stake.

According to Annemieke Rattink, head of CGN's farm animal cluster, this bluetongue variant affects all breeds of sheep. Some breeds do seem to be more vulnerable

to it than others, although nothing conclusive can be said about that yet. 'From the literature it is known that breeds that originally came from Africa are more resistant to several bluetongue variants,' she says. 'And there is also a theory that woollier breeds don't get bitten by midges as easily.' But geography may play a role too, she adds: 'Some sheep breeds are mainly found in particular areas of the Netherlands and the severity of the bluetongue outbreak varies regionally. Moorland sheep, for example, tend to be kept on drier sandy terrain, where there may be fewer midges and therefore a lower risk of infection.'

Massive blow

Could the bluetongue virus endanger the numerically small Dutch breeds of sheep? Rattink: 'Some breeds such as the Mergelland sheep have a population of only a few hundred. So if 30 per cent of them die, that's a massive blow.'

Moreover, the Netherlands has not seen the back of the virus yet, she points out. If we don't have a vaccine yet when the disease flares up again next spring, the death rate could soar again. Because there hardly seem to be any subclinical cases – sheep that get infected without observable symptoms. 'That implies that animals only

About the CGN

The CGN works on the maintenance of genetic diversity in Dutch (indigenous) trees, crops, farm animals and aquaculture species (fish, shellfish and seaweed). This is one of WUR's statutory tasks.

‘Some breeds have populations of only a few hundred animals’

build up antibodies if they are symptomatic. A sick animal runs a 70 per cent risk of death, says the sheep farmers’ association NFSO.’ A scenario that could be very problematic for the smaller breeds.

Help

Breed associations and farmers who are seeing their breeding strategy hindered by bluetongue can get help from the CGN. Hoorneman: ‘We analyse populations, for instance. Then we can determine the genetic diversity within a population and which animals are the closest and the least closely related to each other. That gives us a basis for proposing options to breeders, if necessary making use of the genetics of related breeds.’ This support is offered free, being one of the CGN’s statutory research tasks (see inset).

The CGN also offers help in the form of a gene bank, as a backup in emergencies. This gene bank has been built up over 20 years. In spite of the devastation currently being wreaked by bluetongue, the CGN is not frantically collecting genetic material. Rattink: ‘Your instinct is to save what you can, especially when you know that

certain animals are going to be slaughtered. But you have to collect genetic material before a crisis, not in the middle of it – that is too risky. We can’t run the risk of bluetongue getting into our gene bank. That could endanger our collections of all those rare old breeds. Nor do we want to run the risk of unintentionally helping the virus to spread.’

Those are not the only complications. Hoorneman: ‘At present, the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) observes a strict protocol for the transportation of semen. Anyway, semen collection in sheep is not straightforward. If it is done at all, it’s a question of extracting epididymal semen (from the testicles of a slaughtered animal, ed.). But that is no longer an option now the NVWA requires a donor animal to be retested for bluetongue a few days later – in this case, the animal is already dead. And the electroejaculation method used on cows and horses won’t work: rams are not used to that at all. All things considered, collecting semen is not a viable option now.’ But to end on a positive note: the bluetongue virus outbreak has made it crystal clear how important the gene bank is and how valuable the collaboration of individual sheep farmers. Rattink: ‘Fortunately, we’ve been able to store the semen of a lot of sheep breeds. The safety net might not be as big as we would have liked, but at least there is a safety net.’ ■



The Fries melkschaap, one of the small sheep breeds that are in danger of dying out due to the bluetongue virus • Photo Dierenbeeldbank/Jan Smit

Feedback on peer feedback

Loads of potential if used properly

Omid Noroozi, associate professor of Technology-Enhanced Transformative Learning at WUR, has been doing research on peer feedback – students commenting on each other's work – for over a decade. Both his findings and a quick survey among students by *Resource* suggest that the instrument must be used in the right way to benefit from its potential. Text Luuk Zegers

'Giving and receiving quality feedback can enhance student's learning, critical thinking, engagement, motivation, satisfaction and more,' says Noroozi. 'Peer feedback can also significantly reduce teachers' workloads, especially in big classes. But to benefit from its full potential, merely asking students to give each other feedback is not enough.' A survey of *Resource* student editors confirms this. Feedback from peers is often perceived as less reliable compared to feedback from teachers.

Students' 'peer feedback literacy' varies too, says Noroozi. 'And then there are cultural differences too, which can play a role.'

As a result, the final version of students' work (after perhaps two rounds of feedback) is sometimes hardly any different to the first version. Noroozi: 'In that case we might well wonder what the point of peer feedback is. Luckily,

some small adjustments in how we use peer feedback can lead to significant improvements in learning outcomes.'

'Could be better'

To ensure that students give each other useful feedback, teachers should start by giving them clear instructions on what is expected of them. General guidelines on peer feedback principles can be helpful for maximizing the benefits, thinks Noroozi. He proposes a short, compulsory training course on feedback – which does not exist at present. 'Students need to learn

Students on how it works. Three *Resource* student editors reflect on peer feedback in Wageningen education.

Ilja Bouwknegt (Master's student of Forest and Nature Conservation): 'I've noticed that peer feedback is taken more seriously in my Master's than it was in my Bachelor's. Recently I suddenly found out that my feedback – four comments on a classmate's work – counted towards my grade. I lost one point. So the next time I went over the top and gave 14 comments. I only considered a couple of them really important – the rest were just for show, so I would get a better grade. That worked: I gained a point. But I doubt whether the recipient got more out of my feedback than the first time.'

Linde Klop (Bachelor's student of Environmental Sciences): 'Good feedback takes time. Since hardly anyone has time, people usually do it half-heartedly, but that's no good to

anyone. If the feedback counts towards your grade, people put more effort into it. An advantage of peer feedback is that you get an idea of your classmates' level. That can be helpful but it can also be stressful, if their work is of very high quality, for example.'

Femke van den Dries (Master's student of Geo Information Science): 'I was taught how to give feedback in my first Bachelor's course. For instance, to identify strong points as well as points for improvement, and to give specific tips. Peer feedback is used in nearly every course I take. You see what someone else is doing and you can learn from that. Giving feedback is a useful skill. But it's a pity when you put a lot of effort into your feedback and then you only get a tiny bit of feedback from a fellow student.'



'You have to learn not to take criticism personally' • Illustration Valerie Geelen

'If the feedback counts towards a grade, students put more effort into it'

how to identify what is wrong with a peer's work and how to provide a clear critique; how to offer constructive suggestions – also known as "feedforward", because it helps someone progress; how to identify the strong and weak points of the work, and so on. Sometimes students just write "could be better" or "this is good", but that's not much use. Say what is good about it.'

Another key topic in a training course should be justifying feedback. 'Well-argued feedback is more likely to be implemented by recipients,' Noroozi says. 'Justified feedback also enhances the learning experience for the feedback provider. Research shows that feedback providers may actually learn more from the process

than feedback recipients.' A training course on feedback should also cover how to receive feedback, says Noroozi. 'Students on the receiving end should be reminded not to take critical feedback personally, but rather to analyse, reflect and act upon it.'

Constructive criticism

Noroozi offers fellow teachers two tips from his own practice. 'I show my students a video on peer feedback principles. That improves the quality of the peer feedback a lot.' He also gives

his students clear feedback guidelines. 'I suggest using the sandwich format: starting with something positive, then providing critical feedback, and ending with something positive again. Praise reassures the recipient that their peer recognizes both strengths and weaknesses,' says Noroozi. 'In short, feedback should be "critical yet constructive" instead of "critical and destructive".'

Lastly, Noroozi prompts students in his classes to engage in meaningful reflection on peer feedback by encouraging them to consider what they've learned, identify the strengths highlighted, and draw up action plans for improving their work. 'And finally, to maximize peer feedback benefits: get the givers and recipients of feedback to engage in a dialogue. This gives you a chance to clarify things and might even reveal new insights that benefit both parties.' ■

Mature Master's students in Wageningen

'Twenty all over again'

Not everyone goes straight from their Bachelor's degree to a Master's. Some graduates get a job and work for a few years first. Like *Resource* student editor Kevin Aditya Prathana. So now he's a thirty-something among the twenty-somethings. What's that like? And how do other older Master's students find it? He asked three of them. Text Kevin Aditya Prathama

Kevin (32)

'I feel I am getting a second chance at being a twenty-something'

'Last year, I decided to leave the development consulting job I'd been doing for the previous five years to start a Master's in Development and Rural Innovation at WUR. Coming from Indonesia with my wife — who was going to study at Delft Technical University — I suddenly found myself among people of diverse nationalities and backgrounds. But what struck me most was that most of them were in their early or mid-twenties, while I started a month after I turned 31. I learned that, especially in the Netherlands, most people go straight on to a Master's degree after graduating from their Bachelor's programme, so people around my age at the campus are typically either PhD students or WUR employees. While I was initially worried about not being able to fit in, I eventually made friends with students on my programme and beyond, and learned a lot about their



lives, hopes and worries, from the current political climate to future job prospects. A year in, I get along with many people just fine and I feel like I am getting a second chance at being a twenty-something — even if I never really figured out how to use Snapchat! Throughout my studies I also encountered a few other older Master's students who started in their thirties or later, each with their own circumstances and challenges, but also excitement and eagerness to go back to the classroom. I talked with a few of them to find out what life at WUR's been like for them so far, and whether age is really just a number.'

Philline (40+)

‘Age-wise, a lot of my fellow students could be my kids!’

‘I’m Philline from the Philippines, and I’m currently doing a Master’s in Governance and Sustainable Transformations. I have worked in the sustainability sector for the last 15 years. In the Philippines I run an energy transition campaign and a decentralized solar technology startup. I’m still running that remotely from the Netherlands, where I’ve lived with my husband for the last four years. I enrolled in this programme because I wanted to be in a space where I can pass on my knowledge and lived experience in Asia Pacific on the fight for climate justice to young people. In my programme, I am very inspired by the people from my cohort who are very politically aware on climate justice issues, and listening to them speak gives me energy to go to classes. But I am also aware that I have more experience, and so I restrain myself from speaking too much because the learning process is different for me than it is for someone of 22 or 23. In terms of age, a



lot of them could be my kids! I see the multiple ways I could feel awkward among these young people, but I just choose not to, because what for? I enjoy learning new things and I find myself offering advice to them on internship opportunities or experiences in working in international organizations. I feel like what I know can be put to some use. I am thinking of going on a pathway to be a lecturer by first becoming a teaching assistant, and perhaps eventually pursuing a PhD.’

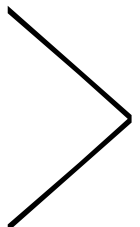
Nati (34)

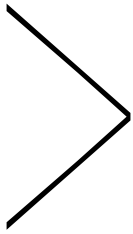
‘I miss my family but because I’m a bit older I can cope with that better, I think’

‘I’m Nati, an environmental engineer from Colombia. Previously I worked for a big airline in Latin America on their climate change strategies. It was difficult to create change because there’s not much in place yet for airlines. So I decided to do a Master’s in Environmental Sciences at WUR to be able to make a meaningful contribution to addressing climate change. Once I arrived here, I found out that most people do



their Master’s in their twenties, and when we talk about age, people are surprised to hear that I’m 34 and think I don’t look like I’m in my thirties – which gets me thinking, do I look immature? In the first months I had to get used to the idea that I am older than others, but then I started to just have fun, and it feels like going back a decade in your social life. In Latin America, older people are not that open to new things, but I like it that Wageningen is so international that I can open my mind to experiencing other cultures. Off-campus, I also meet people in their thirties that are not students in Wageningen, so I have a balance between hanging out with younger people and people my age. I’m happy with my Master’s because I have a good professional perspective and I know this programme is where I need to be. I miss my friends and family a lot, but at the same time I think I’m more resistant to





being depressed about that, perhaps because I'm more mature and can manage my feelings and understand that I'm only here temporarily. I'm thinking of doing a PhD at WUR after I graduate, because I want to continue researching and contributing to climate change issues, but I'm also keeping the option open

of getting a job, preferably in addressing climate change for the aviation industry. For now I look forward to doing my internship to get used to the work environment in the Netherlands. From what I see, there is a better work-life balance here compared to when I worked in Colombia.'

Mala (30) & Ikhsan (30)

'I can't talk to my coursemates about parenting and children'

'We are from Indonesia and we are here at WUR for our Master's degrees, together with our four-year-old, Cia! We both turned 30 this year.

I'm Mala and I'm pursuing a Master's in Environmental Sciences at WUR. Currently I am still employed as a researcher at the Government of Indonesia's National Research and Innovation Agency. Most of the employees there have a Master's or doctoral degree, so I decided to pursue one at WUR, partly because my father was also a WUR graduate. Coming here, the challenging part was finding housing for a family that was within our budget. Luckily we were able to talk to other Indonesians who have also brought their families here. It's crucial to get family housing so that we can register Cia for the daycare, because it would be too much for both of us to be doing a Master's degree while having Cia at home all day. It's great that Cia enjoys daycare and even speaks better

Dutch than us now! It was difficult last winter with our workloads and caring for Cia and I was homesick, so my parents visited us here. However, my friends here are all very understanding about the fact that I have to be really strict about how I manage my time because I have a child. I also love that my circle of friends will start a house party earlier at 7 so we can go home by 10. But I can't talk to my coursemates about parenting and children – I do that with people like other parents at the daycare centre, where I chat about what food our kids eat or which playground to go to.

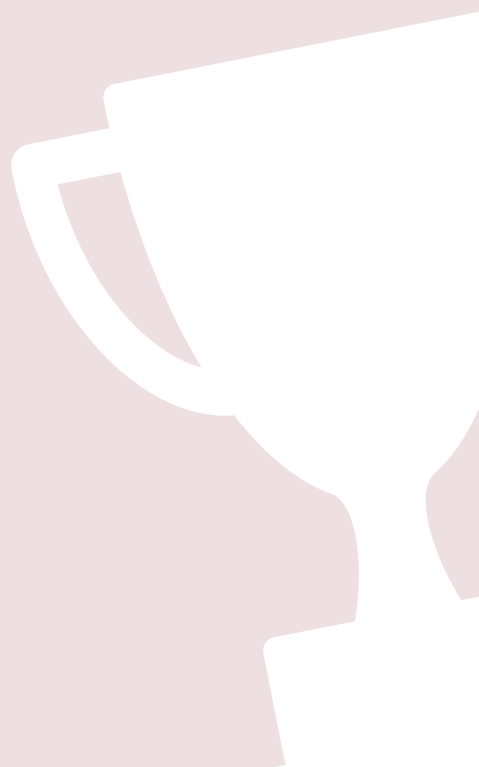
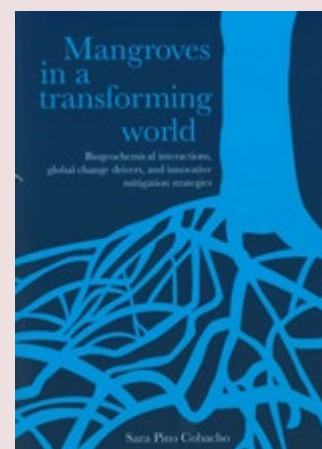
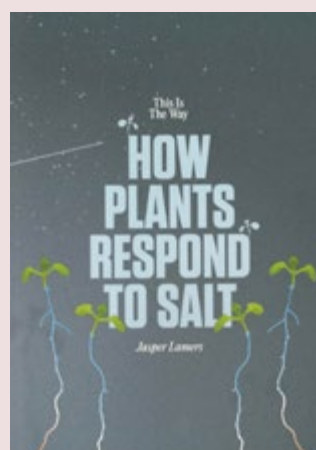
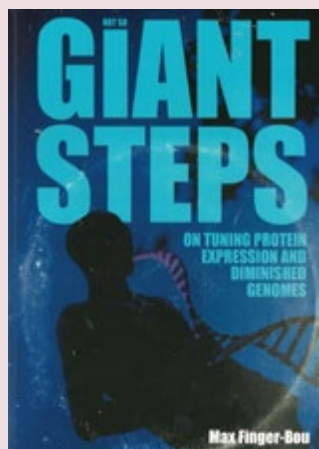
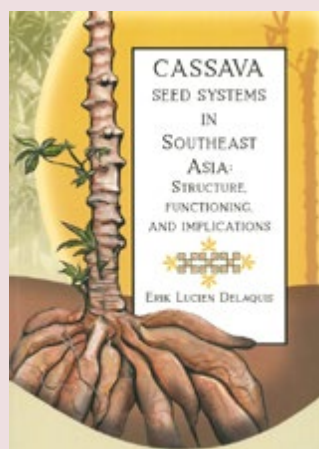
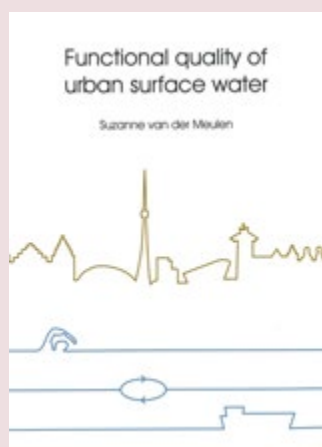
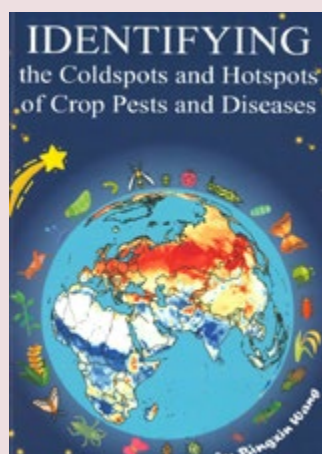
I'm Ikhsan and I am doing a Master's in Supply Chain Analysis. Before coming here I worked at an e-grocery startup in Indonesia, I feel we are very fortunate to be able to pursue our Master's at the same time. Studying here, I don't notice much difference being an older student academically, except that I have more experience than others. It's also good to have work experience because I already have experience of applying what I learn in class in real business cases. But socially it's more challenging because I set a high standard for myself and my family, so after classes I choose to go home, feed and teach Cia, and basically dedicate my time to my family. I do have FOMO (fear of missing out) sometimes when I see people joining associations and organizing activities, but I do have a family now. I also feel that students here are not overly ambitious, so when it's time to go home, we all go home instead of working overtime on assignments. Which is good for me.' ■



Full names known to the editors

COVER PRIZE 2023

The ten covers on this page have been nominated for the 2023 Cover Prize. Which PhD thesis of the past year had the most attractive, most unusual and most appropriate cover? Over the next few weeks, our readers (that's you) can help our jury choose. Go to resource-online.nl to vote online: polls close Monday 8 January at 12 midday Dutch time. Text Roelof Kleis



Christmas for internationals

From an early night to expensive plane tickets

‘Going home for Christmas.’ Isn’t that what the festive season is all about? Being with family, decorating the tree, eating together, unwrapping presents. Wageningen’s international students also want to go home for the December holidays, whether or not they celebrate Christmas. But not everyone can. *Resource*’s student editors asked internationals about their plans.

Text Ilja Bouwknecht, Femke van den Dries, Felix Landsman, Kevin Aditya Prathama and Sarah Scheid • Illustration Shutterstock



Alexis Thomas Stamatopoulos
Environmental Sciences
Master’s student from Germany
and Greece

‘I plan to travel home to my family in Munich for two weeks. On the 24th, I wake up at some point, wrap my presents and put them under the Christmas tree. My mother starts cooking early and makes *Rinderrolladen* with noodles; we eat this every year. I make the salad with my brother, and my sister makes some cookies. When it gets dark we go to the church, and when we come back we eat. Then we usually open our gifts, chat, eat the cookies and play some board games. It’s pretty relaxed. I am really looking forward to seeing my family again and catching up with my friends!’ ^{FL}



William Koven
Environmental Sciences
Master’s student from China
and Indonesia

‘I don’t have a plan for Christmas yet. I’m going to travel to various cities here in the Netherlands to visit the Christmas markets. I might go to the church in Wageningen to listen to the Christmas concert there. So far I haven’t planned any Christmas dinners. I will go to bed early on Christmas night so I don’t see people celebrating Christmas, ha-ha. I expect Wageningen to be very empty then, so I might just cook some food with my Indonesian friends.’ ^{FL}



Nida Adzilah Auliani
Nutrition and Health Master’s
student from Indonesia

‘Who wants to spend Christmas on an airplane? I do! As a Muslim, I don’t celebrate Christmas. However, I can say spending December in the Netherlands and European countries is more festive than in my home country, Indonesia. Last year, my corridor mate baked us cookies with our names written on them. My friend and I also visited Christmas markets in Vienna, Budapest and Prague. This year I decided to go to my hometown in Bekasi, Indonesia, and my flight is on Christmas day! My brother’s and father’s birthdays are in December. Our family’s ritual is to celebrate them all night with cake, card games and a reflection on our goals for the coming year. Afterwards, I will travel with my mother before I start my thesis in Yogyakarta in the second week of January. I can’t wait to see them all and start my thesis!’ ^{KP}



Szonja Lippert

Bioinformatics Master's student from Australia and Hungary

'I am going to stay with my grandparents and aunt in Hungary to visit my family. We usually celebrate by having a big Christmas dinner and going to the Christmas market. In Budapest, the Christmas markets are very popular, with lots of food and handmade items. I am really looking forward to visiting them. My aunt is an interior decorator and her house is always beautifully decorated. I look forward to decorating the Christmas tree and playing with her six cats.' ^{SS}



Ryan Haddad

Environmental Sciences Master's student from Lebanon and France

'I am planning to celebrate Christmas in Germany with the ISOW association, mainly to experience the Christmas markets in person. We will be visiting Christmas markets in Duisburg, Cologne and Düsseldorf. I can't wait since it would be my first time in Germany, and Christmas eve is one of the best times to go there. I will be spending the rest of Christmas week here in the Netherlands, where I expect a cosy atmosphere, and a fun mood, with some nice decorations in the big cities. I am really looking forward to the vibe of Christmas!' ^{FL}



Hannah Ikkai Graham

Geo-Information Science Master's student from America

'In the Christmas holidays, I'll visit my parents in Washington DC. They have moved since my last visit so it will be my first Christmas in their new house. My mother is Japanese and my father American. Christmas isn't a big thing in Japan; they celebrate New Year much more. So we celebrate Christmas the American way, and New Year in the Japanese style. Japanese New Year mainly means counting down early because of the different time zone, and lots of great food. We traditionally eat soba noodles on New Year's Eve. On New Year's Day we make Osechi Ryori, a collection of symbolic dishes that you are supposed to serve up as exquisitely as possible.' ^{FD}



Lewis Hitchings

Exchange student in Ecology and Conservation from the UK

'I'll be going home to the UK for Christmas. My parents are divorced, so on Christmas morning all the presents are at my mum's house. Then I have a big Christmas dinner with my dad, which is a roast turkey. During Christmas, we watch Christmas movies and we decorate cookies and the Christmas tree. We always have too much food, which we're still eating for days after Christmas.' ^{SS}



Gabriela Copello Duque

Master's student of Resilient Farming and Food Systems, from Colombia

'I'll be going home — to Colombia — for Christmas. It's one of the two opportunities I have per year to see my family. We do the usual Christmas stuff: eating together, giving presents, playing games. In the past, I was made to go to church but I've now rebelled against that, ha-ha! My plane ticket was really expensive this year, the most I've ever had to pay. My parents help me out with that as they want me to come home. If they hadn't paid part of it, I'd have stayed here. Perhaps I would have spent Christmas with friends in that case.' ^{IB}



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You see the mostfabulous-looking people and the coolest
outfits on campus. In this feature, we shine the spotlight on
them. This time, Maxime Brandt (24, on the left) and Judith Su
(26), Master's students of Resilient Farming & Food Systems.



Photo: Ilja Bouwknegt

Maxime: 'My favourite colours to wear are red, purple and blue,
and Judith's are green and orange. I've been knitting quite a lot
over the past couple of years. I made these gloves and this scarf,
and under my coat I'm wearing a knitted bolero.'

Judith: 'Max can make literally everything herself. I haven't
been knitting very long, but I've made the same gloves
and scarf. I come from Amsterdam, where people are very
preoccupied with what they look like. I'm not all that interested
in that, but through the knitting it's happening a bit – you
always get a unique item of clothing. And you see how yarn is
transformed into something you can wear.'

Maxime: 'When I was very young, I once said: "When I grow up
I want to be a Dutch knitter in New York". Now I'm a half-Dutch
knitter in Wageningen, so that's nice. It takes a long time to knit
something, and it makes you realize how much effort goes into
every garment. An advantage is that if you get a hole in it, you
can just darn it.'

Judith: 'We both place a lot of importance on durability,
functionality and style. And I think it's lovely to put so much
effort into something. And then to give it away, too.'

Maxime: 'To some extent our friendship developed as we
knitted together. It's a real conversation starter.' IB

Starter Chestnut soup

Peter Weidenfeld, a Bachelor's student of Food Technology from Germany, shares a recipe for chestnut soup: 'At primary school, we used to collect chestnuts for the Haribo sweet company to get gummy bears. Haribo distributed the chestnuts to various wildlife reserves in Germany and Austria. We always kept a few of them for the soup, and it became a family tradition to have chestnut soup at Christmas.'

- 1 Caramelize the icing sugar in a frying pan over a medium heat until golden brown. Pour in the port wine and reduce it by one third.
- 2 Bring the stock and chestnuts to the boil in a saucepan. Add the crème fraîche and blend. Add the reduced port to the soup. Add the vanilla pod and leave to infuse for



1-2 minutes, then remove. Add the orange zest and blend in the cold butter. Season the chestnut soup with salt and chilli powder.

3. Quarter the chestnuts and blanch the Brussels sprouts in boiling water for about 2 minutes, drain in a colander and rinse with cold water.
- 4 Heat the herb butter in a frying pan. Add the quartered chestnuts and Brussels sprouts, reheat and season with chilli salt.
- 5 To serve, place the chestnuts and Brussels sprouts in the centre of preheated soup dishes. Bring the soup back to the boil and serve it sprinkled with croutons.



Flavours of WUR German Christmas Dinner

Ingredients

For the soup (for 4 people)

- 1 tablespoon icing sugar
- 50 ml red port wine
- 800 ml chicken stock
- 350g cooked chestnuts (vacuum-packed)
- 200g crème fraîche
- 1/4 vanilla pod
- 1 tbsp grated orange zest
- 30g cold butter
- Pinch of salt and pinch of mild chilli powder

Garnish

- 80g cooked chestnuts (vacuum-packed)
- 8 Brussels sprouts
- salt
- 1 tbsp herb butter
- Mild chilli salt
- Croutons



Main course Potato Salad

Sarah-Maria Scheid, a Master's student of Climate Studies from Germany, shares a recipe for potato salad: 'Potato salad is one of the most popular choices for Christmas Eve in Germany. That goes back to the time

when there was a period of fasting from mid-November until Christmas Day. Cheap, filling potatoes were ideal during the fasting time, which included 24 December. It is usually eaten with sausages and a baguette.'

1. Boil the potatoes for 25 to 30 minutes in lightly salted water.
2. Peel and slice the boiled potatoes.
3. Cook the eggs for 8 minutes and cut them into small pieces.
4. Finely chop the onions, gherkins and parsley.
5. Mix the mayonnaise and gherkin liquid and season to taste with salt, pepper and sugar.
6. Mix everything together and let it marinate in the fridge.

Ingredients

Potato salad (for 4 people)

- 1 kg waxy potatoes
- 2 onions
- 4 eggs
- 6 gherkins
- 6 tbsp of liquid from the gherkin jar
- 300g mayonnaise
- 1/2 bunch fresh parsley
- salt, pepper, sugar

Dessert Speculoos-Mascarpone-Crème

Sarah-Maria Scheid: 'My mother sometimes makes this dessert for Christmas dinner. It's delicious and looks very pretty and festive.'

1. Crush the speculoos biscuits.
2. Mix the yoghurt with the mascarpone and add half of the speculoos.
3. Whip the cream and add the icing sugar and cream stiffener.
4. Carefully fold the cream into the speculoos mixture.
5. In glasses, layer the speculoos cream alternately with speculoos crumbs and tinned mandarins. Adapt quantities to the size of the glasses.
6. Garnish with cinnamon, chunks of chocolate, mandarins or other fruits.



Ingredients

Speculoos-Mascarpone-Crème (for 4 people)

- 8 speculoos biscuits
- 350g natural yoghurt
- 200g mascarpone
- 1 cup cream
- 1 packet cream stiffener
- 20g icing sugar
- Tinned mandarins (optional)
- ground cinnamon and chocolate for decoration



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, like Kristina Smieskova (23), a Slovakian Environmental Sciences Master's student. She is helping to draw up a framework to guide future collaborations between WUR and fossil-fuel companies.

Text Steven Snijders

'You might remember the recent protests and discussions about WUR's ties with the fossil fuel industry. The Executive Board has established an Advisory Group to come up with a framework with which to weigh up the potential pros and cons of an individual research project against the company's commitment to the

'If you're on the frontline, you come in for a lot of criticism'

climate. I'm the only student among the 10 members of the group. I was invited to become a member partly because I could represent concerned students. I was outspoken in the discussions during the Let's Explore sessions, and I'm involved with the Green Office and the Green Active Network. In the past few months, the work consisted of a few meetings a week and the preparations for them. In order to articulate a framework, we talk to various boards, bodies and relevant people. During these meetings, I raise a lot of questions and I make suggestions of my own. We discuss things within the Advisory Group and we try to reach an agreement. We have drafted a proposal, which we are sharpening

with the feedback we got from the WUR community. We hope to send our final recommendations to the Executive Board before Christmas.'

'I love community building, building partnerships. Standing for something gives me energy, but if you're on the frontline of a community, you also come in for a lot of criticism. Within my Master's programme, I'm specializing in diplomacy. I'm challenged to put my knowledge into practice in this side job. Understanding each other's perspectives is very important. I also learned that other members of the board can feel less inclined to speak their minds than me. As a student, I'm not inhibited to express myself freely. But for WUR employees in certain positions, it can be more complicated. After realizing this, I learned that some people were more on the same page as me than it seemed at first sight. This realization made collaboration with others members of the group easier.'

Kristina advises

Who: Kristina Smieskova

What: member of the Advisory Group on collaborations with WUR

Why? I love building communities and advocating for a more sustainable and just future

Hourly wage: no pay, but an allowance per meeting



Kristina Smieskova (left) speaking to the president of Slovakia, Zuzana Čaputová, at COP28 in Dubai • Photo Presidential Office of Slovakia

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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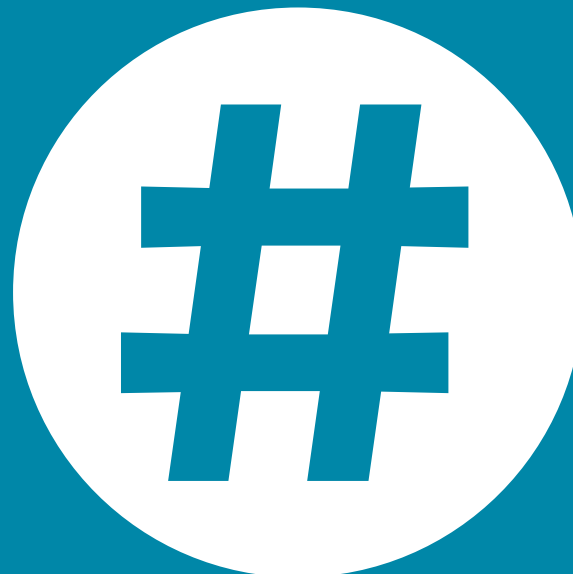
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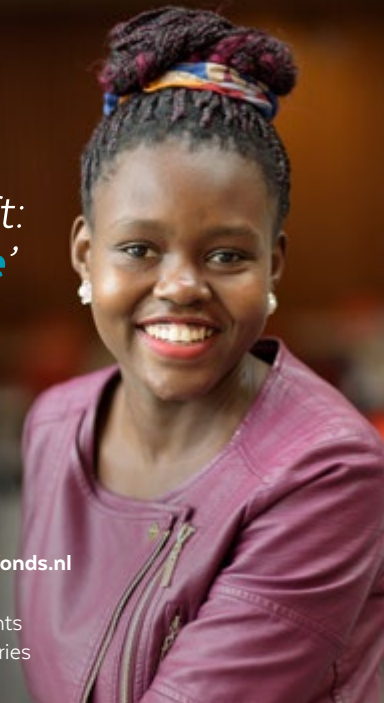
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Answers to 2023 End-of-year Quiz

1b, 2d, 3b, 4d, 5a, 6d, 7a, 8c, 9a, 10d, 11c, 12d, 13a, 14a, 15a, 16d, 17b, 18a, 19d, 20c





The reindeer like to go on boozy weekend breaks. They might have picked up the virus during one of those trips ♦ Photo Norman Tsui / Unsplash



NO SANTA AS REINDEER AFFECTED BY BLUETONGUE

Santa won't be visiting the Netherlands this year as at least three of his reindeer have bluetongue. That is bad news for all children and grown-ups who behaved perfectly all year long.

In addition to the three sick deer, two more of Santa's eight reindeer are showing signs of the disease; tests will be performed to see whether they really have it or are just trying to get off work.

It is not yet clear how Rudolf, Dancer and Vixen could have caught the disease as bluetongue is relatively rare in Finland. The virus is spread by midges and they don't like freezing temperatures. Santa is not ruling out the possibility of the three catching the disease during one of their weekend trips to more southern climes. 'They have a habit of taking off on a Friday or Saturday and returning intoxicated in the wee small hours,' says Santa. 'Alcohol is cheaper than here pretty much everywhere else and I don't always know where they hang out.'

The remaining healthy reindeer are still able to pull the sleigh, but the full Christmas schedule would be too exhausting for them. 'I've looked at the list of destinations and I will need to cancel about a third of them.

Unfortunately that includes the Netherlands,' explains Santa. 'The choice was based on distance and the ratio of naughty to nice people.'

Naughty

The Netherlands doesn't perform great in that respect, according to Santa. 'I hate to say it, but you have a lousy ratio. All that whinging about asylum seekers, and then that election result... As for the students: skipping lectures, "forgetting" to do the washing up — nearly everyone was on the "naughty" list. That's before I get on to what has been happening in the Bunker.'

Santa agrees this is a real shame for all the children on his 'nice' list. 'I'm in contact with your tax authority and they will be working on a tax-deductible Christmas Present Allowance in early January, so those children will see some compensation. Just don't assume it will be allocated fairly.'