



NVG NEWSLETTER 33.1

December 2023

Foreword

By Kat Bebbington

December is upon us again, and with it comes the closing of a year in which we saw the emergence of a new space-race to the moon, the shattering of several climate records and the ramping up of debate and discourse about the ever-growing influence of AI in our society.

Behavioural biologists might perhaps have paid particular attention to the latter two; as summer wildfires raged across southern Europe and we experienced one of the mildest autumns on record, the question of whether rapid behavioural adaptations to climate can allow animal populations to persist under climate change is becoming increasingly relevant; many of the friends and members of the NVG are actively involved in this kind of work. At the same time, the birth and subsequent meteoric rise of AI chatbot ChatGPT at the end of last year has within the space of just 12 months completely changed the landscape of both education and research in universities across the world. Aside from the huge unanswered questions about how AI technology will affect the way in which we perform science and teach it to those who follow in our footsteps, the tangible scent of change in the air is unmissable; if nothing else, the days of manually coding our observation videos in Boris are surely numbered.

Reflecting on the progress of our field was also of particular prominence for the NVG in 2023, after celebrating 30 years of the society's existence. At the request of the board to mark the occasion, founding members Prof. Carel ten Cate and Prof. Ton Groothuis have written a highly thought-provoking piece on the past, purpose and future of the NVG, which you can find at the end of this newsletter. If the contents of this article inspire any of our members to further action or discussion, please do get in touch – this is for example something that we can expand or work on further at our next annual meeting.

Elsewhere, of particular note on the 2023 behavioural biology calendar was the flagship conference, Behaviour, which was held in the German city of Bielefeld. Many Dutch and Belgian behavioural biologists were in attendance to take in and contribute to the more than 600 talks, 150 posters and various workshops on offer. Closer to home, we of course held our annual conference of the NVG in November, but in the interest of not revealing everything at once, I will refrain from elaborating here and trust the reader to keep scrolling a little further.

On behalf of the board I would like to thank all our friends and members for their continued support of the NVG. Thanks to funding from the Lucie Burgers Stichting, we were able to financially support some of our brightest MSc students to join the Society and present their research at this year's annual conference, and I'd like to extend a special welcome to them. Based on the quality of the work presented by these talented students and by all those that contributed to the conference programme, the future of our field looks very promising indeed!



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Report of the Annual NVG meeting 2023

By Kat Bebbington

The 2023 NVG meeting was held on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of November in Hotel Zuiderduin in Egmond-aan-Zee. Eighty-nine participants gathered at the venue for a scientific schedule that included evening plenaries, posters and a range of talk sessions on numerous different topics in the field of animal behaviour. Egmond has been the location of our conference for several years now and the charm of hitting the beach and letting the biting sea air refresh one's head after a morning of fascinating talks certainly hasn't faded.

An important supplement to scientific excellence, the bowling competition on Wednesday evening was a source of much enjoyment and a much-needed distraction from what turned out to be a set of very surprising exit polls from the national elections. There were reports of isolated pockets of intense rivalry, particularly between the team of the NVG board and that of the ex-board members, were received, but both teams were soundly beaten by Group 4. Congratulations!



Focused players competing in the bowling competition. Group 4 celebrate their win and receive the well-deserved prize of free drinks vouchers.

The NVG Board invites two plenary speakers that are conducting cutting edge work in the field of behavioural biology to give evening presentations in the Dobberke and Brill-Baerends lectures, respectively. This year we were very excited to have the conference programme



Profs. Eva Ringler (left) and Melanie Dammhahn (right) present their fascinating research lines in the two evening plenary lectures.

opened by Prof. Eva Ringler from the University of Bern, who gave a fascinating talk about her research into the evolution of parental care in amphibians. Conference attendees learnt about both evolutionary and mechanistic sides of parenting behaviour, a research topic that is largely overrepresented by studies on bird and mammal taxa, and many of us left with a new appreciation for the complex and wonderful behavioural traits that can be observed in frogs.



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On Thursday evening, Prof. Melanie Dammhahn from the University of Münster gave a brilliant conclusion to our plenary programme in her presentation of her research line on niche specialisation. Using a powerful combination of natural studies, experiments and interspecific interactions in various mammal species, she was able to neatly show how behaviour, life history and environmental factors all interact to produce population-level trends and patterns.

Elsewhere in the scientific programme, conference attendees could enjoy a hugely varied programme including 22 oral presentations and almost 20 poster presentations. Among the oral presentations were those given by invited keynote speakers: Prof. Anne Peters from Monash University in Australia who talked about her recent work on multi-level societies in group-living animals, Dr. Edwin van Leeuwen from the University of Utrecht who presented a suite of studies on cultural evolution in primates, and Dr. Marion Nicolaus from the University of Groningen who shared her insights on how individual personalities and dispersal strategies can influence population-level response to environmental change.



Keynote speaker Prof. Anne Peters gave a fascinating talk on the evolution of multilevel societies



NVG Board Member Prof. Wendt Müller explores the early life of gulls

Talks from the general membership on Thursday and Friday touched on many of the main subfields within behavioural biology including social behaviour, urban ecology, primate research, behavioural ecology and conservation. There were talks on fish, mammals, birds and amphibians; there were studies conducted in tropical jungles, savannas, windfarms and zoos; data were collected in aviaries and aquaria, laboratories and testing facilities. One of the clear strengths of our society is the breadth of taxa, model system and methodology that our members employ in their research and this variety was very much on show during both the oral presentations and posters.

The General Assembly of the NVG was held on Thursday evening; the current board presented the financial status of the society, asked for (and gained) approval for extending the term of current board members and welcomed a new one: Dr. Martijn Hammers from Aeres Hogeschool. Greater involvement with the ‘Hogescholen’ or applied universities in the Netherlands has long been on the agenda for the NVG and we’re very happy to have now established an official link via Martijn. For any members who wish to see the full minutes of the general assembly, please contact the NVG Secretary Kat Bebbington (kat.bebbington@wur.nl).



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The scientific programme ended on Friday with lunch and the closing of the conference by Chair Prof. Marc Naguib. Among Marc's tasks was to announce the winners of the presentation prizes, but before I get to that...

As always, the NVG conference this year showcased the very best of behavioural research in the Netherlands and Belgium. The quality of the talks and posters was exceptional, and it was fantastic to see such a diverse audience that ranged from MSc students to Emeritus professors. Thank you to all who attended and contributed to the event and we look forward to seeing you all again in 2024!

Winners of the NVG presentation prizes 2023

NVG poster prize 2023:

Danielle Crowley: Effect of light pollution on the migratory capacities of wild three-spined sticklebacks.

Danielle Crowley, Hans Slabbekoorn, Christian Tudorache, Elena Attias, Hossein Alami, Leiden University.

NVG oral presentation prize 2023:

Fien Demuynck: Can we deter herring with sound?

Jozefien Demuynck, Jeroen Hubert, Tom van Tilburg, Daniël Mirck, Lise Doksæter Sivle, Hans Slabbekoorn, Leiden University.

Berber Maarsingh: Do as your neighbours do? Breeding synchronisation in a colony living passerine.

Berber Maarsingh, Simon Verhulst, University of Groningen.



Congratulations to the three prize winners of 2023!



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Report of the 2023 PhD workshop

By *Heloyza Araujo-Silva, Leiden University*

Introduction

The NVG PhD 2023 Workshop was held on 22 November at the Zuiderduin Conference Hotel in Egmond aan Zee, The Netherlands. The workshop brought together behavioural biology doctoral students to discuss topics relevant to their research and academic careers.

1. Participants and Objectives: The workshop was attended by around twenty PhD students and two senior researchers, Dr Melanie Dammhahn and Dr Eva Ringler. The main objective was to facilitate contact between doctoral students in the field of behavioural biology and discuss relevant topics for young doctors who are starting their academic careers.

Topics Covered

(1) *“How to Stay Motivated in Science”*

This topic was guided by Dr Melanie Dammhahn and Dr Eva Ringler. We discussed various strategies to maintain motivation throughout the academic journey. We also talked about how to deal with challenges and moments of discouragement, and how to find inspiration. Additionally, we explored ways to stay informed about grant opportunities that young doctors may apply for after completing their doctorates. The discussion included relevant suggestions on how to find funding to continue their research.

(2) *“An Introduction to Open Science”*:

This topic was addressed by Bawan Amin, who introduced the principles of open science, as well as issues like data sharing, transparency, and research collaboration. The positive points of open science were addressed, highlighting the transparency and reproducibility that promote accessibility to raw data, methods and results for other researchers. Collaboration and data sharing between researchers were discussed as incentives to accelerate scientific progress, providing free access to knowledge, especially beneficial for countries with limited resources. However, the negatives associated with open science were also explored, such as privacy and intellectual property issues arising from data sharing. Furthermore, the financial cost associated with publishing in open-access journals was highlighted, with high fees that can be a burden, especially for researchers without adequate funding. Inequality of access was also mentioned, highlighting that although open access is a laudable initiative, high fees can create disparities, making it difficult for researchers in countries with limited resources to bear such costs. This, in turn, could result in a gap between researchers from different regions of the world, raising questions about the validity of current metrics for assessing a scientist's competence in their field.

Activities and Discussion

At the end of Bawan Amin's talk, the balloon debate took place in two groups. In this exercise, participants had the task of arguing and defending randomly selected positions, which could be for or against Open Science. This activity stood out as the most beneficial moment of the workshop, as it provided discussions among young scientists about the pros and cons of open



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science. Furthermore, it allowed a closer relationship with researchers Eva and Melanie, who were each guiding one of the groups.

Feedback and Reflections

In summary, both talks gave us helpful tips for dealing with challenges in our academic journey, how to handle the basics and details of this new way of doing open research science, finding inspiration, and staying updated on grants after getting our doctorates. The balloon debate at the end was a standout moment. It lets us talk about both sides of open science. It was the best part of the workshop, bringing young scientists together to discuss important ideas. In the end, this workshop not only widened our view of how science works but also made us think about how we measure success in research.

Board members and functions 2024

Below are the current board members and their roles.

Name	Role
Marc Naguib, Wageningen University	Chair
Wouter Halfwerk, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	Treasurer
Kat Bebbington, Wageningen University	Secretary
Wendt Müller, University of Antwerp	Belgian representative, conference programme coordinator
Michelle Spierings, University of Leiden	Conference venue organiser, conference coordinator
Christian Tudorache, University of Leiden	Education officer, PhD workshop coordinator
Martijn Hammers, Aeres Hogeschool	Communications and PR, Hogeschool representative
Hannah de Waele, Wageningen University	PhD representative
Robin van Iersel, University of Antwerp	PhD representative

Key dates for 2024

The next annual meeting of the NVG is confirmed! We will once again be at Hotel Zuiderduin in Egmond aan Zee, from 27th until 29th of November 2024.

The next newsletter is planned for Spring 2024. Follow us on twitter (@NVG_tweets) and linkedin, or visit the website for regular updates and announcements.



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30 years NVG – its origins, development and potential future

By Carel ten Cate & Ton Groothuis

Why and how it all started

Being awarded the honorary membership of the NVG, and being involved with the NVG since its conception, made us look back and reflect on the NVG's history. Before its origins disappear in the clouds of history, it might be worthwhile to chronicle how and why it all started. This not only for the sake of history itself, to know where we as society come from, but it may also be relevant to define and reflect on the current and future role of the NVG.

Before the founding of the NVG, researchers on animal behaviour were organized within a multilevel structure created by NWO: the 'Werkgemeenschap (WGM) Ethologie' (Research community for Ethology), which, together with other WGM's working on animals (e.g. Physiology, Morphology) was part of the 'Sectie Dierfysiologie' (Section of Animal Physiology). That section was one of several, which together were supported by BION, the NWO- foundation that at the time was funding biological research in the Netherlands. The WGM's were expected to organize and represent their research fields and, importantly, they could themselves evaluate research proposals for PhD/Postdoc projects in their domain, resulting in funding for 1 to 2 animal behaviour projects a year. The WGM also served as a platform for scientific exchanges, with as most significant event the organization of a yearly scientific meeting for its members, subsidized by NWO.

The WGM functioned well, but membership was limited to researchers of animal behaviour working at the biological institutes of universities. However, interest in animal behaviour was also present outside this community: from animal physiologist and ecologists, to other disciplines such as psychology or psychiatry, as well as among teachers in biology at secondary schools and the general public. During 1991, when both of us were working at Groningen University, discussions with other Dutch behavioural biologists and in particular with the renowned behavioural biologist professor Gerard Baerends, gave rise to the feeling that forming an association for behavioural biology might be a way to accommodate these interests. It might stimulate interdisciplinary interaction among researchers, but also fulfil a role in spreading knowledge about, as well as promoting, the study of animal behaviour to a wider audience. This idea was met with enthusiasm at a meeting, organized by GPB, TG and CtC, at the Zoological Laboratory of Groningen University, to which representatives of various research groups were invited. The outcome was that on the 12th of December 1991 the NVG was formally established at the WGM autumn meeting, with professor Jan van Hooff from Utrecht university as its first president. Its aim was (and still is) to promote research and teaching on animal behaviour as well as spreading knowledge to broader audiences. The label Ethology was deliberately replaced by Behavioural Biology, as the study of behaviour became increasingly diverse, encompassing the molecular to the whole organism level, from insects to humans, but remained based on the scientific methods and approaches used in biology. As by then the study of mechanisms and function of behaviour had diverged, the explicit intention was to reunite both approaches again. The NVG was deliberately kept separate from the WGM,



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which remained functioning in judging research proposals for funding, organizing the scientific autumn meeting and representing the field within NWO-BION.

The early years

The first years of the NVG were characterized by organizing various events to bring together scientists working on animal behaviour in the broadest sense of the word in meetings that were also open to interested outsiders. This started off with a symposium in March 1992 representing the area in its full breadth with presentations ranging from traditional ethological subjects to neurophysiology, child behaviour, chronobiology, functional morphology and animal welfare. In the same year, another symposium, on modelling of behaviour, was jointly organized with the Netherlands association for theoretical biology. Also the first Newsletter was published, reporting about the events and meetings. The incorporation of animal behaviour in the biology curriculum and examination at the secondary school levels HAVO and VWO gave rise to organizing a meeting especially directed at teachers in 1993. In 1994 a symposium on Human Ethology got a lot of media coverage and attracted many visitors from various backgrounds. In these early years, the NVG (chaired by TG at the time) organized one such an event for a larger audience every year, as well as a smaller scientific meeting bringing together researchers on related topics – also those not part of WGM Ethology. The yearly general assembly for the NVG membership, which had grown to around 200 members, was also held during this meeting. The Newsletter continued to be published with two issues a year, covering the scientific meetings but also giving attention to doctorate theses and acting as a forum for more scientific discussions. It also reported on the general assembly, revealing ambiguity in the relation with the WGM Ethology.

NVG and WGM

While the NVG flourished, the WGM had to face radical changes within the NWO organization. Over the years, the hierarchical structure with WGMs and Sections under the umbrella of BION as one of a range of NWO foundations became to be seen as constraining scientific developments, such as the emergence of new fields and interdisciplinary collaborations, rather than promoting them. For this reason BION merged with other NWO foundations into the Stichting Levenswetenschappen (SLW), the foundation for the life sciences. The assessment of grant applications was no longer done at the level of WGMs, but by independent panels covering larger domains. All this happened around 1993. It meant that WGMs as well as the Sections would cease to exist as formal platforms. At the same time the new SLW stimulated the fields to reorganize themselves in such a way that existing scientific networks would remain and become formal organizations that could be consulted by SLW to define areas of scientific interest and research priorities. The WGM Ethology thus had to reconsider its position in this changing scientific landscape. One option was to merge with the NVG. This option seemed a logic choice, given that many researchers working in the area of animal behaviour were already participating in both. However, there were also initiatives to turn the former Section Animal Physiology into a large and prominent organization uniting all the former WGMs in its area. SLW preferred such a development. Also, as the smaller NVG also consisted of a mixed membership of biological researchers and researchers of other disciplines, as well as interested outsiders, it was not guaranteed that NWO would continue to fund the yearly autumn conference. For this reason the majority of WGM group leaders opted



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for the initiative of an animal physiology organization, with the idea that animal behaviour would in this way be most visible as important topic within the animal sciences. The downside of this decision was that those working in the area of behavioural ecology did not really feel at home in such an organization. At the same time, awaiting whether the initiative of an animal physiology organization would take off, both the WGM and the NVG represented the field inside and outside NWO and kept organizing meetings and inviting (foreign and Dutch) guest speakers that covered the full breadth of the field.

The WGM and the NVG thus coexisted for a while, each with its own membership meetings. However, to coordinate their activities the chairs of both organizations (TG for the NVG, CtC for the WGM) became part of each other's board from 1995 onwards. During 1996 it became clear that the initiative for a large animal physiology organization did not really take off. So, the issue of a merger of NVG and WGM was back on the table and in a letter in September 1996, directed at the SLW director, the WGM expressed that it was considering to merge with the NVG to be able to represent the field better. SLW supported the idea and in November 1996 the WGM board proposed to the members to become incorporated within the NVG. At the autumn conference this was formally decided by the joined membership meetings of the WGM and the NVG. At the same time the NVG established a 'research platform' and a 'scientific council' for scientific researchers. This platform was a request from SLW to provide them with a partner for discussions about science policies. Professor Serge Daan from Groningen University became president of the redefined NVG and the scientific platform. The NVG now became a formal representative for the field to SLW and animal behaviour became more visible and involved in larger NWO research initiatives such as the 'Cognition Program' and 'Evolution and Behaviour'. The 'scientific council' met a couple of times, but only existed for a few years, also because of further changes to the NWO structure.

The autumn conferences

Quite soon after establishing the NVG, it was decided that the WGM autumn conference would also be open to NVG members. The program was getting more extensive over the years, with one or more (foreign) guest speakers and occasional themes to give more attention to particular topics – something becoming more prominent once the two organizations were merged. While initially in Dutch, the language became English over the years, as a consequence of increasing numbers of non-Dutch speaking PhD students and postdocs. Also Flemish research groups were invited to the meetings, with Marcel Eens (Antwerpen University) becoming the first Flemish board member. From 2007 onwards the PhD-workshop was added to the program. The conference became truly international with prominent international speakers for newly established the Gerard Baerends Lecture (in honour of this internationally famous ethologist) and the Brill lecture (sponsored by the Dutch publisher of the journal *Behaviour*, established by Niko Tinbergen as one of the first journals on animal behaviour) and a lot of attention for newly appointed researchers.

International perspective

The NVG was not the first society for the study of animal behaviour in Europe. Two prominent ones were (and still are) the Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB) and the Ethologische Gesellschaft (EG). Both were aimed at a larger international research community



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beyond their countries of origin, with ASAB (with the UK as its basis) attracting members from many European countries and the German speaking EG attracting members from central Europe. Being geographically in between these two, many Dutch researchers were also member of one or the other or both organizations, also because they provided some funding options for researchers. It also resulted in hosting the summer meetings for these organizations, e.g. an ASAB summer meeting at Leiden (1995) and one of the EG in Groningen (1996). Right from the start the NVG also realized that close contacts with these other organizations in Europe might be useful. The Netherlands, with its rich history in the study of animal behaviour, was also well positioned to act as a bridge between these two societies, which each had their own and different culture. After a meeting at Leiden with representatives of the boards of ASAB, EG and NVG, exploring the way in which collaboration at a European level might be promoted, it was not only decided to create an informal European platform to which all European societies were invited, but also to initiate a European conference on animal behaviour (the ECBB) that might be held every other year alternating with the years in which the large International Ethological Conference (IEC) was held. The first meeting was organized in Münster (Germany, 2002), the second one in Groningen. The NVG was also represented with two members in the international committee organizing the IEC.

From past to present and future

Over the years, something was lost and something gained. To start with the latter, the quality of the yearly NVG meetings has increased a lot. It provides a beautiful overview of animal behaviour research in the Netherlands, fulfils a valuable role for PhD students and serves as the yearly meeting place for everyone interested in the topic. The NVG also still is participant in the European platform. However, the role of the NVG in promoting the visibility and emphasizing the importance of the study of animal behaviour to various relevant scientific platforms such as the Dutch Federation for Neurosciences and the Netherlands Ecological Research Network as well as to the outside world seems to have become less prominent. As also outreach has become so important these days, the NVG might consider profiling itself stronger as some sort of expertise centre for the study of behaviour for scientists, journalists and the general public. One lesson learned from the past is that our field runs the risk of being caught in between topics and considered marginal to larger fields and that it requires active lobbying and a pro-active attitude, combined with flexibility and pragmatism, to keep the study of animal behaviour visible and relevant. Fortunately, the interdisciplinarity of our field, crossing boundaries both within the biological sciences as well as between biological and other sciences provides excellent opportunities for research and collaboration. Animal behaviour research may contribute its insights to important topics such as climate change and adaptability of organisms and ecosystems, the steep increase in behavioural pathologies, issues concerning animal welfare and others. At the same time, the study of animal behaviour is nowadays more strongly embedded within different universities than it has been at times and has remained an attractive topic among undergraduate students as well as for a broader audience. A strong and outward-looking NVG will be the best way to keep the subject healthy and to get involved in all sorts of larger research and funding programs initiated by NWO or others. We certainly see its relevance and potential!