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Family planning under social competition

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Acknowledgements / Dankwoord

FIELD WORK TEAMS



2011



2012



2013



2014



2015

While I am writing this the breeding season has just started, the people of my working group are excitedly running around, busy sorting out the final details for the experiments and studies they have planned. What a privilege to be outside and to be able to monitor the lives of breeding birds, I cannot wait to leave my computer and be out in the field again!

I am very glad that I had the opportunity to do my PhD in the group of Joost Tinbergen working as the final PhD student in the Lauwersmeer study population (in Dutch : 'de hekkensluiter'). It was great to gain experience with complex experimental designs in a population devoted to studying the fitness consequences of reproductive decisions of individuals within a social context.

My work in the Lauwersmeer was first of all made possible by the NWO (the Netherlands Organization of Scientific Research), who saw the value of our fundamental research and gave me the opportunity to work for four years in the Lauwersmeer population. The other main foundation of our work was the permission to work in the area under the support of Jaap Kloosterhuis, Hans Gartner and their co-workers of the State Forestry Service 'Staatsbosbeheer' and of Gerrit Altena, Gea Stiekema and Gijs Kroon and their co-workers of the Royal Dutch Army 'Koninklijke landmacht'. The fact that we could stay at the 'Willem Lodewijk van Nassaukazerne' with our field team and dine in 'de kantine' was a luxury during the busy fieldwork. Furthermore, the 'huismeesters' (Trijnie, Henk and Bas) were very kind and helpful during our stay. Bedankt dat we al die jaren op de kazerne hebben kunnen verblijven, voor het lekkere eten en de goede zorgen!

Large scale experiments as presented in my thesis are impossible without the help of a large team. The core of our team consisted of me, Joost Tinbergen and Richard Ubels. Next to the core team, one to two master students, one to two field assistants and four bachelor students of the Animal Ecology research course joined us every year. Over the five field seasons in which I worked in the Lauwersmeer area for my PhD thesis (the first year as a field assistant), there were quite a lot of people with whom I got the chance to work with. Martijn, Margje, Egbert, Harm, April, Anne, Youk, Sanne, Jildou, Kaylee, Niek, Maico, Sabrina, Annelies, Redmar, Puck, Mirjam, Redmar H., Ties, Iris, Livia, Bouwe, Gosse, Mardy, Myrthe and Wim thanks to all of you for your great help! Annelies, Margje and Egbert joined us during the different years as field assistants, it was very nice to have such experienced field workers around during the sometimes hectic fieldwork days.

I was able to profit from the excellent study population in the Lauwersmeer which was started by Joost in 1993. It was a great pleasure to learn from you, Joost, how to design proper experiments to understand variation in individual reproductive behaviour. Working with you was the experience every PhD should wish for, because you are a great teacher. Besides me, many, many students profited from your teaching and your office was always open for any student with questions (no signs with 'do not disturb' on your door). The many hours we spent discussing every detail of our experimental designs in your office, also often together with Richard, helped me very much and it was highly motivating. Later on, it was very productive to not only receive the comments of you on my manuscripts digitally, but also discuss them in detail together. From these discussions we both learned a lot about the often complex subjects and the subtle details of how to write an article.

Richard, you were the motor of our fieldwork. In the beginning you taught me how to set up and run the field station in the Lauwersmeer and manage the database. I was able to pick up some of your skills and I could also run it by myself, though you were always on the database help line. In the field, the competition with you to do the work in the quickest most efficient manner was a nice challenge. I still remember the day when I, as a master student, observed one more bird than you in the observations of colour ringed birds in the winter. I was not allowed to go home until we had re-counted the observations and it turned out that we had seen a similar number of birds. At the university it was always very nice to visit you and Marco at your office to hear the latest news and see some rare birds from your office window!

The visits to Agnes' and Joost's place were always very nice and relaxing. Having a great dinner and sitting inside watching the birds roosting or breeding in the nest boxes live via the webcam or enjoying the wildlife in the garden together. It was great to see the great tit and pied flycatcher pair competing over one nestbox in the garden from up close together and also to see the squirrel trying to steal the peanuts from the mesh bag (but falling down in the bushes every time it tried). Richard and Marion, I first visited you in Garnwerd at the old farm, where Leo was born, and later we helped move you to the little white house under the 'scheve toren' of Bedum, where Arthur was born. It was very nice to visit you there and very funny to go with you to greet Sinterklaas as he entered Bedum. With Richard and Jeroen Onrust I am also part of the Dollard bird counting group. Richard, thank you very much for inviting me to be part of that group, it is a very nice way to get to know all the birds, the counting methods and seeing the Dollard and its bird communities change over the year!

Christiaan, it was great to have you as my second promoter! Your sharp mind and helpful comments greatly benefitted the design of the experiments and the writing of the manuscripts! It was very nice that we had the opportunity to work together in the field, during the annual night checks, but also in doing observations of colour ringed individuals prior to our experiment in which we induced competition for breeding boxes. Besides my own work, it was very nice to gain more insight into the pied flycatcher study population in Drenthe and the interesting work you do there. I always found the tit-flycatcher meetings we regularly organized very stimulating and a great moment to critically examine research plans and presentations for conferences.

During the last years of my PhD, Marion had re-established in Groningen and started her postdoc with Christiaan. Marion's work forms the foundation of my thesis and having you around Marion to discuss research plans, analyses, presentations and manuscripts was very stimulating in the final phase of my PhD. Your energy and enthusiasm for this line of work is very encouraging for a PhD at the brink of the competitive postdoc life.

For my work outside the breeding season, I was dependent on the help of many colleagues to conduct roost checks in winter. The checks were always a great group outing in which we would first eat together at the restaurant 'Schierzicht' in Lauwersoog and then would dive into the dark forests to check the nest boxes for roosting birds. It was great to see how many colleagues were enthusiastic to join, we never had any problems with finding help. Christiaan, Claudia, Marco, Peter, Wim, Tom, Anne, Maaïke, Margje,

Elske, Pieter, Sjouke, Frank, Reinaldo, Arne, Anneleen, Janne, Jeroen, Annelies, Popko, Jelle, Emma and Ineke thanks very much for your help!

At the office, work would not have been possible without the administrative or technical support of Joyce, Ingeborg, Corine, Jan and Paul. Thank you for always being kind and helpful whenever I had questions! I also would like to thank Nanno Herder and Ger Veldman who helped me out when light triggers needed to be made for a project with Christiaan and Jelmer on the diet of great tits and pied flycatchers. A special thank you as well to Prof. dr. Ido Pen whom I could ask for statistical advice. I think it is very great that your office is always open for other researchers in need of statistical advice!

The lunch meetings that are held by the former Animal ecology group and the new Conservation ecology group were a great place to get feedback on my research and gain insight in the various research that is taking place in the group. In my opinion it is very important to have such meetings to learn more about and discuss (critically) each other's research plans. The annually organized Gaast meetings at Theunis' and Petra's place were also a great venue to hear about the research done at the NIOZ and meet the PhD students and staff from Texel.

The journal clubs that were often organized in our research group were very stimulating. This was also especially so when members of staff showed up besides the PhD students. Here, I really learned to critically dissect journal articles and that publishing in Nature or Science is certainly no guarantee for sound high quality science. Thank you Jelmer and Pieter for organizing this in the last years! I hope some of the new PhD will take over the task. Also, the movie nights organized by Jelmer and Annelies were a welcome distraction of the work, I vividly remember watching the movie about the 'killer Sinterklaas' while enjoying my pizza with 'pepernoten' (hidden under a piece of salami by one of you ☺). Great that you Jelmer and Sajad are now continuing the movie nights!

Very important for my work, but also in general for the cohesion of the group were the coffee breaks! Coffee, I learned, was as central to our group as the heart is to the body. Beware the one who forgets to make coffee! ;) The coffee table was and still is the place to be. I think it is also very important that this tradition is still continued. It is the moment to hear the latest stories, what everyone has been up to and to get to know your colleagues. Thanks very much to all of my colleagues for the 'gezelligheid'!

Thanks as well to my colleagues: Maaïke, Maurine, Irene T., Irene L., Joost, Christiaan, Richard, Emma, and Jelle with whom with I organized and taught the course 'Ecologische interacties'! I took over from Maaïke Versteegh in organizing and lecturing for the practical 'Heat balance', but luckily I still had you as a co-organizer Maaïke, in all years. It was great to gain experience in teaching this way! Also the predation practical or the 'bonenpracticum' as we called it in Dutch was nice to organize with Richard and Jelmer. It was always very funny to watch the students fiercely compete with one another (but no kleptoparasitism!). Thanks to Maurine Dietz as well with whom I faced the difficult challenge of coming up with a suitable exam question and correcting it. And thanks to Joost, Elena, Irene T. and Irene L. of course for the company when surveying at the exams!

Also a special thank you to all the people with whom I shared an office over the years. Office 04.33 or the 'jungle' as it may also be known to some was a great place to work in.

When I started there I was the only other animal ecologist together with Arne Hegemann. Over time the office composition changed a lot and Jeroen, Jeltje, Elena, Marion, Jelle, Mo, Jesse, Yvonne, Mathilde, Fons, Mathias, Qingqing, Xuelai, Koosje and Drew joined. You were all great colleagues! We had a stimulating working environment here and it was nice to be able to ask advice to one another. Jeroen Onrust sat at the desk opposite to me and we became good friends, our Kubb tournaments, joined counts in the Dollard and game evenings were a welcome distraction from the busy working days, trying to finish the thesis.

During my PhD I visited several conferences, two of them held outside of the Netherlands. With Seyed Mehdi and Peter Korsten I went to the Zoology meeting in Liège, which Seyed Mehdi and I were able to reach despite the strikes of the Belgian train personnel. It was very nice to stay with you guys there, go to the conference and also explore the city. In the summer of 2016 I visited Exeter for the ISBE conference. Marion, Jelmer, Allert, Roos, Jelle, Juan Diego, Reinaldo, Jorge, Blanca and Peter it was great to spend time with you there! Besides the conference, the trip with Jelmer and Marion following the small roads through Dartmoor with the rented car to a very nice pub in the countryside was great!

Friends and family were very important in the writing of this thesis because they showed me the world outside of science and kept me from becoming a hermit living only behind his computer. Thank you for putting up with me, when I would cancel plans together because I was too busy. Now you can see, what I have been up to all this time ☺. Thanks in this final stage of my thesis as well to Dick Visser for helping me out with the lay-out of the thesis!

And last, but certainly not least, my thanks goes to Margje. We got to know each other in the Lauwersmeer area and now, 5 years later, we are still together ☺. You supported me during the first, sometimes stressful, years as a PhD when all the plans needed to be made and experiments needed to be done. It was great that you were part of our team in the Lauwersmeer in all but the last year. I could always count on you. Now, in the last hectic year(s) of my PhD you have supported me in writing down the thesis, checking countless things of which I was not sure and needed a second opinion. Sometimes it may be a bit much when two PhDs are discussing their research all hours of the day, but I would not want any other way. It is great that we have the same interest in research and that you understand why I am so crazy to work on the thesis all day even in the weekends, not going outside and not being paid for it as well anymore. It is the mad, mad world of science that we both at sometimes dislike, but above anything, especially when we are out in the field, very much enjoy. I hope you will join me for many years to come on our (scientific) adventure!