
When leaving: about the past, the present and the future of *Lutra*

When I joined *Lutra*'s editorial team as editor-in-chief in 2002, the journal was in a state of transition. I was following in the footsteps of two outstanding predecessors. A. Scheygrond (1953-1976) and Chris Smeenk (1981-1998) had determined *Lutra*'s content for many years, and each was very successful in their own way, but it was not now clear which direction the journal should take. Scheygrond had worked hard to increase knowledge about the presence of indigenous mammals, and had also made a huge contribution to popularising mammal science in the Netherlands through *Lutra* and other channels. One of his many achievements was the publication in *Lutra* of the first Atlas of Dutch Mammals (*Lutra* 13-1/3; 1971). The special issues on badgers (*Lutra* 6-1/2; 1964) and otters (*Lutra* 12-1/2; 1970) were also important events. Until then, little was known about these species in the Netherlands, other than the fact that their numbers were so low that they were probably endangered. The first author of these three publications was Anne van Wijngaarden who, together with his co-authors, conducted pioneering research in the Netherlands during this period.

Smeenk had focussed on improving the scientific quality of the manuscripts submitted while also paying a great deal of attention to correct use of language and syntax. During his 'reign' in the 1980s, *Lutra* regularly published hefty single-theme issues, including an

Otter Special too (*Lutra* 27-1; 1984), the Predator Special (*Lutra* 29-1; 1986) and the Whale Special (*Lutra* 30-2; 1987).

Both editors also made their mark on *Lutra*'s appearance: during Scheygrond's period as editor-in-chief, issues were published as quires of varying thickness (to be collected and bound). Smeenk lobbied the board of the Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals ('de Vereniging voor Zoogdierkunde en Zoogdierbescherming'- VZZ, as the Dutch Mammal Society was called before 2010), which publishes *Lutra*, to have the issues published with a light blue cover. This better reflected the fact that *Lutra* was a journal, and made issues better able to withstand rough and inexperienced handling. The emblematic drawing of an otter, which had been the VZZ's logo for years, adorned the front cover.

When Smeenk retired from his post in the mid-1990s, there was no immediate *modus in place* for continuing the journal. Like Scheygrond, Smeenk had always done a tremendous amount of work for *Lutra*, but this had meant that other editors had been less involved and made it difficult to build a functional team that was not dependent on the input of one person. A somewhat precarious situation developed in the years that followed, resulting in a relatively high turnover of editorial staff; *Lutra* was in danger of extinction.

In around 2000, a number of young and enthusiastic researchers who not only wanted to take *Lutra* forward, but also wanted to give it a new lease of life, joined the editorial board. They asked me to become editor-in-chief and after giving the matter some consideration, I said 'Yes'.

I started just in time to work on a subject which, up to that point, had been a regular topic for *Lutra*: zoology in Zoo's. *Lutra* had planned a single-theme issue, the 'Zoo Special', for December 2001, but this proved to be an edition that was published only with great difficulty and a major delay in the planned publication date. These problems brought all normal editorial tasks more or less to a standstill. After this experience, the editorial team decided to set and maintain clearer boundaries with regard to the sub-disciplines we would cover. From now on, we would focus on *ecology, biogeography, behaviour and morphology of native (and wild) mammals in Europe*. Zoos did not fit within this plan. Another area that had previously received a great deal of attention in *Lutra*, but was scarcely dealt with by the 21st century editorial board, was the mammals of the former parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

A new look was introduced in 2001, when the blue cover was replaced by a predominantly yellow cover sporting a black and white photo (replaced by colour photos in 2007). Another change was that each issue now opened with an editorial. Up until 2010, each editorial was signed by the editorial board, after which it was signed by the member of the editorial team who had written it. To mark the celebration of '50 volumes of *Lutra*', the editorials of three consecutive issues (*Lutra* 53-1, 2007; *Lutra* 53-2, 2007; and *Lutra* 54-1, 2008) took a closer look at *Lutra*'s past and future.

Looking back, I can say that *Lutra* is still mainly perceived as a journal offering a wide range of more or less 'in-depth' articles. In

recent years, we have paid a good deal of attention to a very contemporary research area, namely the reappearance in the Netherlands and Flanders of wild mammal species such as the raccoon dog (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*), the wildcat (*Felis sylvestris*), the wolf (*Canis lupus*) and the golden jackal (*Canis aureus*). Connections (proven and unproven) are often drawn between these reappearances and large-scale environmental changes (such as climate change, maturing forests, and the increased tolerance of humans towards indigenous mammals). As always, we regularly published articles about marine mammals. Nowadays, *Lutra* now and then even explores the significance of molecular and genetic research into wild mammals, especially research to determine origin and kinship.

I do not want to discuss individual contributions here, but I would like to mention some of the specials that have appeared since 2002: 1) the Rodent Special (*Lutra* 45-2; 2002) with contributions presented at the symposium 'Rodents – threatened or a threat?' (7 and 8 September 2002 in Antwerp, Belgium, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the VZZ); and 2) the Beaver Special (*Lutra* 46-2; 2003) with contributions presented at the Third International Beaver Symposium (13-15 October 2003 in Arnhem).

I also want to make a separate and special mention of the comprehensive North Sea Cetacean Special (*Lutra* 61-1; 2018), which provided an up-to-date overview of the state of research on whales in the North Sea. This special themed issue, dedicated to Chris Smeenk (2016†), came about through the benevolent and persistent efforts of a guest editorial team consisting of specialist whale researchers Peter J.H. Evans (Wales), Carl Chr. Kinze (Denmark) and Graham Pierce (Scotland). For *Lutra*, and we hope also for our readers, this was a substantively valuable and memorable experience, which brought together a significant body of current knowledge about

the occurrence, (displacement) behaviour, ecology and taxonomy of cetaceans and dolphins in the North Sea.

In the meantime, the editors were trying to make publishing in *Lutra* a more attractive proposition for professional researchers by applying, in around 2010, for inclusion in the Web of Science, something which would also have conferred a Journal Impact Factor. The editorial board felt that *Lutra* met the criteria required for a successful application, however, the organisation (then Thomson Reuters) considered that not only were there already quite a few journals on mammals, but that the number of self-citations in *Lutra* was relatively high, and our application was rejected on those grounds.

The editors had terminated *Lutra*'s bilingual policy and switched entirely to English in the years leading up to the submission, partly in order to strengthen our case. Unfortunately this was to no avail, and so *Lutra* resumed publication of articles in Dutch in 2017. This decision was partly to encourage a particular segment of our target group – young, amateur researchers with little or no previous experience – to publish scientific articles.

Lutra faces other structural challenges, such as a tight budget, the equally tight supply of copy – even from non-professional researchers, and the limited availability of those members of the editorial board who have a full-time job. In addition to all this, technological developments in the field of publishing mean that we must now decide whether to publish a digital version of *Lutra* in addition to print, or to switch to this channel entirely. We are currently considering this matter and discussing how to deal with it in the future.

Other external factors are also exerting an influence on *Lutra*'s continued existence. New journals have been launched that are, to

some extent, fishing in the same pond, including *Zoogdier* (the popular scientific journal of the Dutch Mammalian Society), and *Cranium* (the journal of the Working Group on Pleistocene Mammals).

Given my rather limited understanding of 'the digital world', I felt that it was time for me to resign. It will of course also be necessary, if possible, to find a solution for the other points I have raised here.

I don't think that it is possible to predict what is going to happen to *Lutra* – I am certainly unable to do so – but I do think that the Dutch Mammal Society should have its own channel where it can publish research results in a scientifically sound manner. This means that its members will continue to have access to research and developments in this area – or at least they will if they have a subscription to *Lutra*! In my opinion, this is not only interesting, but also necessary for its objective functioning.

This does not mean, however, that subjectivity should be forbidden: on the contrary. In addition to curiosity, an emotional connection with mammals and other animals, and more broadly with nature and the environment, is a very important reason for people to engage with nature.

It only remains for me to thank all the co-editors, authors and numerous specialist reviewers for their collaboration over the years. It was thanks to them that we managed to produce many 'fine issues', as I referred to them in the corridors. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the board of the Dutch Mammal Society for the trust it placed in me. It has been an honour and a great pleasure to do this work, in the course of which I have been surprised time and time again by mammals and their weird and wonderful ways.

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