



50 Volumes of *Lutra* (1)

The Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals (VZZ) was founded on February 15, 1952 and issued its first newsletter in the same year. Nineteen more newsletters (with consecutive page numbering) followed over the next seven years, the last two of these were called 'Lutra'. The last was not exactly what the editor, dr. Arie Scheygrond, had in mind for the launching of a new scientific journal. But a long lasting illness prevented his involvement in these developments. After this misunderstanding, it was decided to combine all these newsletters to form volume 1 of *Lutra*. This first volume contained all 20 issues published between 1952 and 1959. In 1960, the first 'real' *Lutra* was published as volume 2, issue 1.

This year *Lutra* is celebrating its 50th Volume, although it and its publisher, the Society for the Study and Conservation of Mammals, have existed for 55 years. Time for a retrospective. This editorial describes the history of the organisation and working process of *Lutra*. In the second issue of this volume, we will review developments in the papers contributed to *Lutra*.

From the very start, Scheygrond was the initiator to launching a VZZ publication dedicated to developments in mammal research and conservation. The first chairman of the VZZ was F.H. van den Brink, who would afterwards author the popular mammal guide 'Zoogdierengids' (first printed in 1955), which had a structure similar to R.T. Peterson's field guides. In his introduction to the first newsletter, he mentions the reasons

for founding the VZZ, but does not explain the aspirations of the newsletter itself. The two men jointly contributed much to both the content and organization of the first newsletter. But over the years, Scheygrond took more responsibility.

At first, the newsletter was a simple, stencilled society bulletin, on average 16 pages long. It contained short scientific contributions, news reports about mammals and the Society, literature overviews, and book reviews. Most Society messages were written by Scheygrond, as were the extensive overviews of mammal literature. Later, these growing lists were carefully maintained by dr. Eric Van der Straeten (1970-1997) and Bauke Hoekstra (1974-2003), who covered Belgium and the Netherlands respectively.

Initially, the newsletter was bilingual, with contributions in both Dutch and French (see also figure 1). The VZZ aimed to be the mammal society for the Benelux countries, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg. These aspirations, however, proved too ambitious since the newsletter attracted very little interest from the Walloon part of Belgium and from Luxemburg. There were attempts to include French contributions in the early newsletters, but this only happened occasionally and was not convincing. This led to a somewhat forced orientation towards the French mammal research community, during the first years, which was particularly encouraged by Van den Brink. VZZ members were also offered the opportunity to publish their scientific articles in a special section in *Mammalia*, the journal of the

VZZ's sister society, the 'Société Française pour l'Etude et la Protection des Mammifères'. Part of the arrangement was the exchange of reprints between the members, a service certainly used in the beginning but this became increasingly redundant after the release of *Lutra*. Nevertheless, it was only in the late 1980s that the agreement with Mammalia officially ended.

When the VZZ decided to publish its own scientific journal, it appointed an editorial board which defined the aspirations of the journal (in newsletter 18 - 1959): "As requested by several of our members, we will aim for a journal in which research about mammals in the Netherlands and, in broader sense, western Europe as well as in New Guinea and the West Indies is to be published. As circumstances allow it will also include announcements, reports, and short notes concerning our society. As a first step, the editorial board introduces a shorter journal name, to simplify reference to its articles. The name '*Lutra*' was chosen. [...] the board encourages authors to submit only type-written manuscripts, including an English summary to outline the contents of the paper." Despite this admonition, one regular contributor and editor too, Vincent van Laar has persevered to this day in submitting, at least partly, hand-written texts. Van Laar was editor of *Lutra* for over forty years (1959-2000) and was renowned for his slightly ironic but always positive comments, and for providing stimulating suggestions on content, based on his extensive experience and the comprehensive amount of field data that he had collected himself. These attributes greatly helped many authors to improve their manuscripts. In 1988, in a retrospective of the first 25 years of the VZZ (*Lutra* 31-2: 153-161) Scheygrond noted that early editions also carried "As far as space was available, book reviews and until 1974 reports of the society's meetings and excursions."

Scheygrond (1907-1996) successfully defended a PhD thesis on a plant sociological subject, and worked as a biology teacher in Gouda, his birthplace. He was a passionate nature conservation-

ist with a special interest in mammals. The otter was one of his favourite species. The cover of his book '*Zoogdieren van Nederland*' (first printed in 1943; co-authored with dr. M.A. IJsseling) had an elegant illustration of an otter, provided by P.L. Scholten, the Gouda graphic artist who illustrated the book throughout. The drawing shows a front view of an otter, drawn from above, a perspective which emphasises the animals' liveness and muscularity. The VZZ adopted this design as its logo at its inception and it can always be found (in differing forms) on the cover of the journal. Scheygrond took on many responsibilities – he was already the editor of the '*Mededelingenblad*' before he became editor of *Lutra* and was also the secretary and treasurer of the VZZ. He was a friendly, charismatic man, who knew what he wanted, had a very clear viewpoint and unequivocal standpoints. He decided what was published in *Lutra*, and how it was published. However, the choice was never difficult, as only a limited number of papers were submitted in the 1970s. Overall his involvement with *Lutra* spans 40 years. Ten years as sole editor (1952-1959), managing editor for a further fourteen (1960-1974) and from 1975 to 1991 as editor.

Scheygrond was completely responsible for publishing the first ten volumes of *Lutra*. Although the aim was to publish three issues each year in the 1970s, two or more issues were often combined, due to a lack of manuscripts. The opening article of the first copy of *Lutra* was curious but characteristic of an era: an obituary of Henri J.V. Sody, a zoologist who had worked at the Zoological Museum of 's Lands Plantentuin in Buitenzorg at Java, Indonesia. This shows the range of other types of articles that were published in *Lutra*. Aside from research articles they included minutes from meetings, excursion reports and literature and book reviews. In the 1960s and 1970s, *Lutra* became *the* medium for research papers on indigenous mammals and the possibility of extinction faced by some of them. Yet it is still questionable how much this research influenced government policy. It was twenty years until policy makers paid significant attention to



LUTRA

ORGAAN VAN DE VERENIGING
VOOR ZOOGDIERKUNDE EN
ZOOGDIERBESCHERMING
BULLETIN DE LA SOCIÉTÉ POUR
L'ÉTUDE ET LA PROTECTION
DES MAMMIFÈRES

Adres der redactie: Van Itersonlaan 7, Gouda
Tel. 01820-4021

Uitgever: E. J. BRILL — Leiden

VOLUME 2

MEI 1960

No. 1

IN MEMORIAM H. J. V. SODY

door

A. C. V. VAN BEMMEL

Op 16 januari 1959 overleed te Amsterdam HENRI JACOB VICTOR SODY. Daarmede is een uitstekend en toegewijd zoogdierspecialist van ons heengegaan.

SODY werd op 31 augustus 1892 te 's-Gravenhage geboren. In 1917 studeerde hij af aan de Rijks Hogere Landbouwschool te Wageningen en vertrok in 1918 naar het toenmalige Nederlands-Indië. Aanvankelijk werkte hij daar als employé op de thee-onderneming Tjikadjang bij Garoet (Java). In 1920 werd hij aangesteld als leraar bij de Middelbare Landbouwschool te Buitenzorg. Deze functie heeft hij tot 1941 vervuld, enkele malen onderbroken door Europees verlof in 1926 en 1933 en door enkele jaren non-actief in Nederland (1934-1937).

In 1941 werd SODY gedetacheerd bij het Zoölogisch Museum van 's Lands Plantentuin te Buitenzorg met de opdracht het rattenmateriaal van het Klapperproefstation te Menado (Celebes) te bewerken. Na het gereedkomen van deze opdracht werd de detachering verlengd en ook gedurende de Japanse bezetting bleef SODY, geïnterneerd in een speciaal kamp, zijn werk in het museum voortzetten. Daarop vertrok hij met verlof naar Nederland. In 1949 werd hij definitief voor de dienst in de tropen afgekeurd en gepensioneerd.

Hoewel geschoold op natuurwetenschappelijk gebied, was SODY toch geen zoöloog van professie. Hij pleegde zichzelf daarom dan ook een amateur te noemen. Maar in de vele jaren waarin hij zich met de studie van de vogels en zoogdieren bezig hield, had hij een ervaring en een feitenkennis verworven, die aan het ongelooflijke grensden. Zelf heb ik SODY pas in 1937, dus kort na zijn terugkeer op zijn post in Buitenzorg, leren kennen. Daarom heb ik ook niet kunnen nagaan of hij in zijn studietijd zich reeds met het onderzoek van vogels en zoogdieren bezig hield. Wel was hij lid van de redactie van „Ceres” en van het „Algemeen

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the plights of the otter and badger when their status as endangered species was beyond dispute. However, the 'old papers' in *Lutra* then still serve their purpose as source of reference for the past distribution.

Curiously for years *Lutra* did not contain any information about the publishing procedures and this information cannot be found in VZZ's archives. Not until 1975, in issue 19(1), was there a colophon explicitly stating the members of the editorial board, which at that time consisted of three members: Scheygrond, Van Laar and dr. A.C. van Bruggen, the latter of whom was editor-in-chief. Occasionally the minutes of the business meetings of the society of this time contain details about *Lutra*, such as those of the meeting of 12 February 1969: "The chair [...] gave words of thanks to the editorial board of *Lutra*, for the good care of said publication". We may, however, never know the exact meaning and background and the outcomes of the following item (meeting of 12-13 May 1972): "At the end of the meeting Mr. van Bree brought up the policy conducted by the editorial board. It was decided to examine this more closely in consultation with the board".

Between the Scheygrond era and that of dr. Chris Smeenk (see below), the tasks of editor were done by dr A.M. Husson SCJ (Conservator of Mammals at the State Museum of Natural History (RMNH) in Leiden; editor from 1960-1977) and later by Van Bruggen (also affiliated to this State Museum; editor from 1972-1998 and editor-in-chief from 1975-1980). Prior to becoming editor of *Lutra* Husson interested dr. W. Backhuys, then director of the international scientific publisher Brill, in *Lutra* and this resulted the company publishing *Lutra* from 1959 until 1985. After 1985, *Lutra* was published by the Society herself, whilst Brill printed the journal for years. Since 1996, *Lutra* has been printed by Ponsen & Looijen BV in Wageningen.

The 1970s were relatively calm: the Society was small with about 300 to 400 members, who often met at gatherings. In 1980, a new period started

for *Lutra*, when Smeenk succeeded Husson, at the Museum. The cover became light blue, with the logo of the VZZ, giving *Lutra* more the feel of a 'real' journal. 'Guidelines for authors' (in Dutch) were included on the inside of the back cover, albeit in very condensed format. These instructions, now expanded are today available in both English and Dutch on the VZZ website (www.vzz.nl).

In the following years, the editorial procedures became much more explicit, but were mostly still carried out by one person, Smeenk. He considered himself the managing editor, but in practice, he did almost all the work of the editorial board: acquiring papers, editor-in-chief, editor, reviewer and managing editor. He and his wife even did most of the shipments of the journal to its readers! The other members of the editorial board did often receive a copy of all newly received manuscripts, together with a request to comment on them. Often, Smeenk had already added his own comments to these manuscripts, which he had sometimes already returned to the authors.

The curators of the mammal collections of the two major Natural History museums in the Netherlands, Smeenk of the RMNH and dr. PETER J.H. van Bree of the Zoological Museum in Amsterdam (ZMA), generated numerous papers in *Lutra* throughout the 1970s and 1980s. These publications were often produced by students whom they were supervising. Today many students still publish their work in *Lutra*, but many other papers are written by the applied scientific community, by conservationists and even by amateur naturalists with a completely different background and education.

VZZ membership more than doubled in the 1980s (from 374 members in 1981 to 815 in 1991) and then stabilised in the next decade (to 821 in 2001). The larger membership in the 1980s led to more activities, such as the formation of working groups, a new phenomenon for the VZZ. Thematic symposia were organised

more frequently and these new activities have contributed to an ever increasing number of submissions to our journal. Interesting and sometimes bulky special issues were produced from some of these symposia and, in contrast to his predecessor, Smeenk often 'suffered' from an abundant supply of material. Editing all these papers was a time-consuming activity, so much that his ordinary work had to wait at times. At the time it was normal to produce just two issues per volume, the production of special issues generated a considerable extra work load and often led to the publication of three issues in a year when two had been planned. Raising funds to produce special issues was easier then than it is today. Today, *Lutra* is nearly completely financed by membership revenues.

The editorials of the special issues show that scientifically soundness was not the editor's only concern but that he was also passionate about the conservation of mammals. Some editorials contain pleas for a better conservation and protection of, for example, the otter and the harbour porpoise. Interesting he was not afraid to name and shame the relevant authorities.

Smeenk's legendary linguistic skills, his knowledge of editorial rules and conventions (and, even more disconcerting of the reasoning behind these) continues to inspire the present editorial board to publish a high quality journal in every respect. Often Smeenk and Scheygrond would spend time discussing and arguing over tiniest details. For example they would greatly enjoy discussing the whys and wherefores over whether 'Zeeuws-Vlaamse' or 'Zeeuwsvlaamse' was proper written Dutch. There were many similarities between the two men, both were highly skilled, determined and involved editors. But there were also some differences. Smeenk could be furious with a submission of substandard quality, but was always keen to get the best out of it and would spend hours in improving poor texts. The editors Van Laar and dr. Sim Broekhuizen remembered that period in a previous edition (*Lutra* 41-1: 1-3, 1999): "Smeenk

was a managing editor for so long, for 18 years [1981-1998], and as a result, the VZZ members came to take the regular, timely production of *Lutra* for granted, nobody felt responsible. *Lutra* was as regular as clockwork. In addition, authors found it no more than natural that any textual shortcomings were repaired by the editors. He could be so irritated by poor quality that we feared for his life at times. For one as determined as Smeenk being an editor was a dangerous business. But once he had vented his anger he would resume working energetically, making sure that everything was fine and that the paper could go to print."

In 1981 a very active (and at the time young) board member, G.H. Glas, initiated a new VZZ publication, 'Lutra-informatie'. This was a simple and highly informative, photocopied newsletter containing VZZ news and announcements of activities. This newsletter became the glossier and popular journal 'Zoogdier' in 1991 and from that year on contained short and popular articles about indigenous mammals as well as VZZ news, reports of sightings, and preliminary results of ongoing studies.

Between 1981 and 1991, Van Bruggen, Van Laar, Scheygrond, Smeenk and Van der Straeten formed a solid editorial team. This was great in terms of ensuring the continuity of production but it also scared away other potential editors, who were possibly afraid that their skills were not considered well enough for *Lutra*. In short *Lutra* had been in the hands of too few people for too long, and it seemed that nobody was prepared to come forward to pick up the ball.

In the 1990s it became increasingly difficult to produce two issues per annum. The excessive commitments of the editorial board may have been one explanation for this, but it may not just have been the shortage of skilled editors prepared to work on *Lutra*. The fact was that fewer and fewer professionals were engaged in fundamental scientific research on mammals in the Netherlands. In addition the pressure on those scientists

to publish in high level journals (“to publish or perish”) meant that papers of potential interest to *Lutra* were now being submitted to higher ranking journals.

The journal nearly collapsed in the late 1990s. Fewer manuscripts were received. It was unclear if the VZZ members were sufficiently interested in *Lutra*, and given the huge workload of the editors, it was hard to form a new editorial board. Nevertheless, a new start was made in 2001, with a new team of editors, and new enthusiasm. The team presented itself in the editorial of Volume 44 (2001), with a *real* editorial, and since that volume, each issue is introduced by an editorial. These are meant to explain any changes that may have occurred, future plans and provide a thematic introduction to the issue. A new look was introduced and an attempt made to explain it “... Once in a while we discover that the way we did things for years, works no longer. The lay out of *Lutra* is one of these things [...] Apart from this new look two other changes are worth mentioning. From now on *Lutra* publish only in English and Dutch, and English is preferred over Dutch. [...] Another change is that *Lutra* now distinguish between full articles and short notes. While full articles describe the methods, results and conclusions of comprehensive mammal research, short notes may consist of remarkable observations, simple surveys, methodological aspects or other brief communications. ...” To mark this new start *Lutra*’s cover changed from pale blue with the otter logo on the front, to one that was bright yellow with a black and white photograph. And the colophon of the journal clearly states: “... *Lutra* publishes peer-reviewed scientific papers on mammals across all disciplines, but tends to focus on ecology, biogeography, behaviour and morphology. Although exceptions are made in some cases, *Lutra* generally publishes articles on mammal species native in Europe, including marine mammals. ...” This new editorial introduction in fact represented a continuation of an editorial course developed since the early days of the journal. What is new is that this editorial plan is put to paper, so one can refer to the editorial

conventions. In practise *Lutra* aims at publishing the results of studies that can be conducted with relatively simple means.

The other explicit choice, to publish either in English or in Dutch, was also a continuation of an existing trend, rather than a new policy. English has been the leading language in the scientific community since the Second World War, but it was not until the 1990s that most papers published in *Lutra* were written in English (figure 1). There have been complaints that the new editorial team has changed *Lutra* into a journal entirely written in English, but this has been a long established trend. In 1994 (still in the ‘blue’ period) the majority of papers published was in English rather than in Dutch (figure 2).

The board of the VZZ has never sought to influence the composition of the editorial board, or to interfere with editorial conventions and policies. This still holds true today, but there are certainly discussions with VZZ board members, and the board of VZZ is consulted over the more important decisions that have to be made. Editors have full editorial freedom and nobody but them is involved in the acquisition, review, and acceptance of manuscripts, in setting the editorial policies, or in designing the lay out of the journal. It is our opinion that this freedom is essential: the editors of a scientific journal should operate independent of the publisher.

The new editorial team has been operating for a number of years now and has made a start in building a new phase of *Lutra*’s existence. The current editorial board is a skilled and determined team aiming to produce an attractive and interesting journal into the foreseeable future. Recently, a new section (Comments) was introduced which provides readers with a platform to respond to articles. Moreover, from now on we are also offering readers the possibility to start debates about new topics in the Forum section. For the benefit of our readers we also plan, at around the turn of the year, to publish all 50 volumes in a DVD/CD format. This will enable all our readers to track

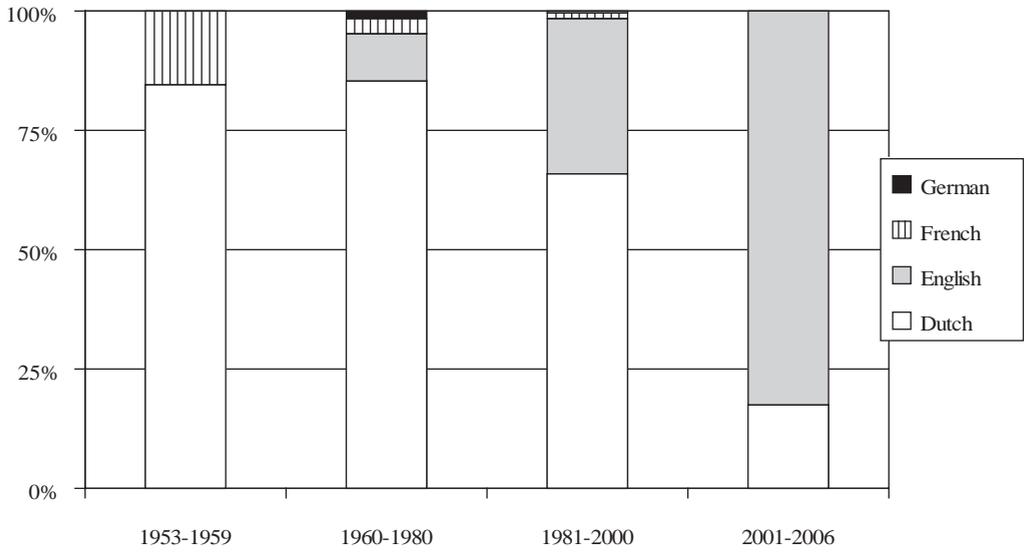


Figure 1. Language used in full papers and short notes published in Lutra since 1953.

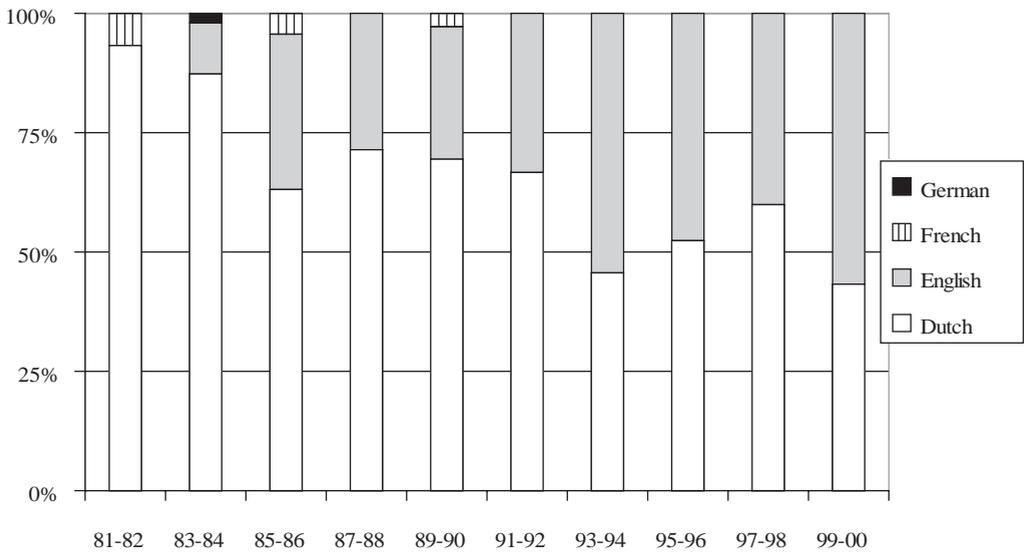


Figure 2. Language used in full papers and short notes in the 'blue period' (1981-2000).

back to past issues and articles. This endeavour is made possible thanks to a grant from the 'Stichting Publicatiefonds Lutra', a fund formed in 1993 to manage a legacy, one which Lutra has made use of several times in the recent past. The editors are very thankful for this grant.

With the production of this disk, we are definitively seeing the end of a phase when Lutra was only available in print. While subscribers continue to receive hard copies of Lutra through the post, PDF versions of articles have been freely available on the VZZ website (www.vzz.nl) from volume 48 (2006) onwards. For Lutra, as for so many other journals, the internet has made a huge difference. In addition to improved access to papers, the exchange of information and manuscripts between editors, authors and referees is now much quicker and easier.

Meanwhile, two new editors have been recruited to the team, Koen Van Den Berge and Kees Camphuysen. Koen is particularly well known

from his work on indigenous carnivores and can be considered the leading specialist in Belgium. Kees is probably best known for his work on seabirds, but also for his studies and data collection of cetaceans in and around the North Sea and his interpretations of distribution patterns and trends. Several recent papers on marine mammals in Lutra were from him and his colleagues. We hope that we will be able to utilise the knowledge and skills of Koen and Kees in the years to come. Unfortunately, two editors had to resign. Kamiel Spoelstra has accepted a job in the United States of America and cannot combine that work with Lutra. We would like to take the opportunity to thank him for all his efforts, also as an author for Lutra, and to wish him the best of luck and success. Goedele Verbeylen has indicated that she needs to give priority to her many other activities in studying and conserving mammals and has to give up her editorial responsibilities. We would like to thank Goedele for her input over recent years, for her speedy replies and valuable input and accuracy as an editor.