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UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

# Forest and Nature Conservation

Life after graduation: kick-start your career



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# Life after graduation: kick-start your career

**(Almost) graduated or just excited to start exploring your future career possibilities? The MSc Forest and Nature Conservation prepares you to be a multidisciplinary professional in approaches to natural resource management that can be applied at different political and social scales. In these complex processes, you can play a connecting role.**

The change from student-life to working-life can feel like a big leap. You may have had a very clear goal in mind throughout your studies, knowing which sector or position you would love to work in. Perhaps you may be in doubt about what is it exactly you want in a job, what energises you professionally or where to even start. Luckily there are many ways in which you can prepare for this switch and this career booklet is here to inspire and guide you through this phase of transition.

MFN is a broad study programme with many possibilities. Students come in with different pre-education and make different choices throughout their study that shape the direction of their career path. The choice of your study track<sup>1</sup>, internship and thesis are important decisions regarding your professional development and possible future job. In fact, there are not two MFN students that take the exact same programme. There is therefore not one clear career path of MFN graduates. The possibilities are endless.

Looking back, you can ask yourself: what are the recurring themes of interest in you studies? Are there particular topics, projects or issues that intrigued you most? Reflecting on this can help to carve out your own common thread within the field of Forest and Nature Conservation, supporting you in taking your first career steps. A way to do this is by following the courses of Modular Skills Training that focus on Career Exploration or Personal Motivation Assessment. Also, the Student Career Services is a great source of support and inspiration.

They offer a variety of career events every year. Another way is to reach out to your study advisor!

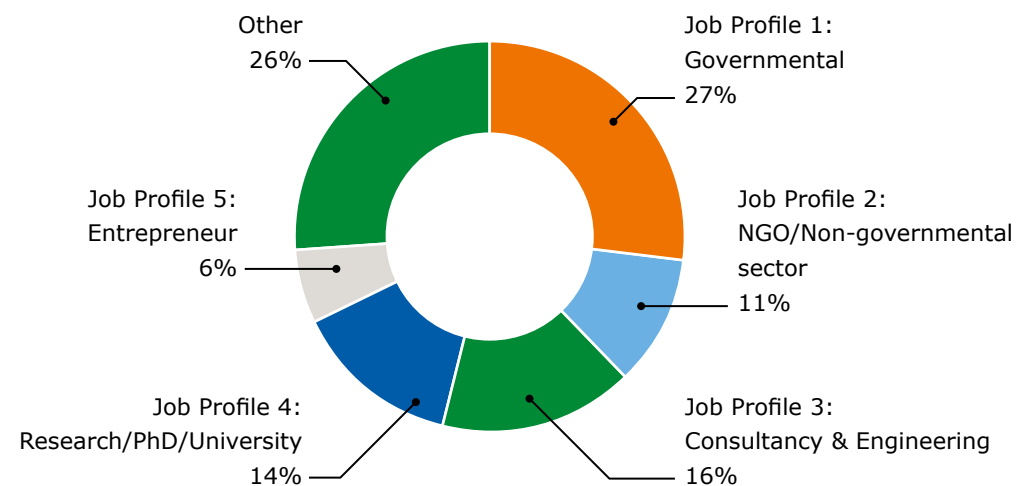
<sup>1</sup> The study tracks in MSc Forest and Nature Conservation are important learning trajectories. There are three tracks: Policy & Society, Management and Ecology

In this career booklet we invite you to explore five potential job profiles (see Figure 1). Each job profile provides general information about the job positions and sector, includes a personal career story from our MFN-alumni and lists 6 vacancy examples. These profiles can be used to test your interests for future jobs and hopefully inspire you about the multitude of possibilities upon graduation.

Importantly, this booklet does not cover all possible job profiles, roles, and sectors, but rather seeks to provide an inspirational source for the first steps in your career. You will most likely have different jobs in the future, which gives you the happy prospect of practicing your professional skills and developing yourself. Also, your vision of the ideal job will evolve over time. You will learn as you go.

When looking for your first job, flawless choosing may not always be possible, but strategic planning is. The MSc Forest and Nature Conservation provides you with unique academic competencies. In the final chapters of this career booklet, we offer insights in the competencies required by the labour market, tips on how to strategically strengthen them throughout your study, and how to navigate the job search.

## Dive in to get an impression of your future possibilities!



**Figure 1** Branches MSc Forest and Nature Conservation alumni



## Job profile 1: Governmental

**Nick Warmelink**

 **Policy Officer Species Conservation at Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality**



*Graduated 2017 – Policy & Society*

Nick works as a policy officer on national and international conservation issues. At the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV), he is dealing with both the protection and sustainable use of plant and animal species.

As a part of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, Nick is representing Dutch positions in international policy and implements European policy in the Netherlands in return. In his work, he deals with several multilateral environmental agreements like the Bern Convention, AEWE and CMS, and European legislation like the Birds Directive. “I work on developing and implementing these policies, together with societal, academic and governmental actors. In my work I must unite different perspectives and potential courses of action and advises towards management on how to proceed. Though big decisions are directly made by ministers or lower management, many small-scale everyday policy decisions are made by policy officers, allowing for a certain degree of initiative and responsibility in tackling environmental issues”.

*~Nick*

**“The meeting in Budapest reminded me of studying and working in Wageningen. It brought together more than 80 countries involved in the treaty working on waterbird conservation.”**

In his master program, the basics for understanding critical theories on policy development for biodiversity issues were faced, which Nick still uses in his current job. Furthermore, the knowledge of different perspectives and roles of actors and how they interact in policy making is a valuable tool. “Being able to communicate with ecologists and scientists and understanding the issues is essential to make good policy. Knowing practice helps to engage with nature managers and the practitioners.”

Both domestic and international travel are part of Nick's career. He shared his most memorable experience from abroad. "I went to Meeting of the Parties of the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, which was held in Budapest, Hungary. I learned a lot from this meeting to prepare for EU positions and taking part in negotiations. Aside from serious and challenging work, it was also enjoyable! It is great to meet people fascinated by nature and conservation" and he jokingly added; "and getting to do so whilst exploring Budapest together of course didn't hurt!"

Before he started this job, he worked in a consultancy firm. This helped to widen his scope in both the content of work and the processes he became a part of during the various projects. "Being a part of decision making at a variety of levels and organisations brought me valuable perspectives that I use in my work now."



## **Vacancy: Advisor Ecology for the Municipality of Zeist**

### **Job context:**

Are you passionate about helping restore, preserve, and enhance biodiversity? As urban infrastructure and housing developments increase in the Netherlands, preserving natural spaces for flora and fauna is more important than ever. In Zeist, we're committed to ensuring that biodiversity thrives alongside our spatial and infrastructural projects. By enhancing Zeist's green and cultural heritage, we aim to maintain high-quality natural areas for future generations.

### **Main Activities:**

As an Advisor Ecology, you will play a key role in supporting spatial planning projects, from small site developments to large-scale area projects. Working closely with our nature, green, and landscape advisors, you'll ensure ecological values are integrated into urban development. You'll also take a lead on implementing and monitoring our Species Management Plan (SMP), aligning goals, schedules, and budgets, and providing guidance on the plan's implementation across the municipality. This includes advising on policy, collaborating across teams, and balancing various stakeholders' interests. Additionally, you'll have the opportunity to innovate by developing new ecology-related services within our organization.

### **Your Profile:**

- Higher professional (HBO) or academic level, ideally in land and water management, forestry and nature conservation, or applied biology.
- Strong understanding of nature legislation and in-depth knowledge of Dutch flora and fauna.
- Skilled in drafting clear, impactful ecological recommendations.
- Excellent interpersonal skills, able to connect easily with colleagues and external stakeholders alike.
- Familiar with the socio-environmental challenges in Zeist and capable of considering them in your work.
- Ability to communicate effectively with professionals, volunteers, and local authorities.

## **Other employers**

Municipalities, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Commission



## Job profile 2: NGO/non-governmental

**Judith Slagt**

 **Ecologist at ARK Rewilding & PhD Candidate at Wageningen University and Research**



*Graduated 2012 – Policy and Society*

Judith has 2 jobs she works on: at ARK Rewilding as an ecologist and as a PhD Candidate at the Wageningen University and Research. The combination gives the possibility to both implement and investigate rewilding in the Netherlands.

ARK Rewilding is known for their projects on giving nature back to nature. A famous example is the Millingerwaard, where ARK Rewilding is already working more than 35 years. Otters, beavers, and spoonbills amongst others have returned in the area ever since. The projects Judith is working on within the company, range from reintroduction of bisons in the Netherlands to international projects on nature restoration.

A week consists of 3 days at ARK and 2 on the PhD, which also relates to rewilding. "I don't have any funding, but that also means I have a lot of control. What I like best about that, is that in the one job I'm implementing rewilding, while in the other I can research the science behind it: What works when and why?" "I see a lot of benefits to doing my PhD a decade after graduation, because that gave me the time to develop skills, gather experience and get to know my own limits".

*~Judith*

**"I'm constantly trying to build bridges between practice, policy, society and science."**

Judith graduated in the time when there were not a lot of jobs in the nature sector. This is why she first started as a project assistant for a company that finances startups in the health sector. "I wrote tons of application letters. But the competition was killing, and I didn't have any experience, so I never got invited to job interviews, which was super frustrating" She therefore cut back on working days and started as volunteer at

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Natuurmonumenten and Landschapsbeheer Gelderland.

“I finally got a job as an ecologist at the Antea Group, a large engineering company. However, I missed working with likeminded people that were passionate about nature and switched to a smaller company. After a few years, I saw my dream job at ARK Rewilding: working with European Bison, in the Netherlands. Despite me writing the application letter on my phone, not having an updated CV – I was on a holiday – and me being one of a hundred applicants, I got the job.”

“My advice to you would be: Stick to your goal, even if it takes 50 application letters. Do not think the beaten track is the only one but find a path that suits you. Be patient, don't lose motivation and keep on making the world a wilder place.”

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## Joep Crombag



**Junior fauna ecologist at Natuurmonumenten**

*Graduated 2022 – Management*

As a part of his job, Joep helps shaping the fauna policies of Natuurmonumenten. He advises the local managers and foresters on fauna related topics and meets with other nature conservation organizations and ministries to discuss future policies. Sometimes he even appears in the media as spokesperson about topics like natural grazing of the wolf.

Natuurmonumenten is one of the biggest nature conservation organisations of the Netherlands. It buys, protects and manages nature reserves in the Netherlands and cultural heritage in nature. Their aim is to preserve nature for future generations. Joep said that “although I am a recent graduate, I am allowed and encouraged to work on ‘big’ topics and policies that have a real impact”. He works with actors like Staatsbosbeheer, LVVN (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature), ARK Rewilding, Free Nature and the VBNE.

One of the projects Joep worked on so far is the shaping of the avian influence strategy of Natuurmonumenten. Avian influenza kills a lot of wild birds in The



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Netherlands, and he helped to find a way to cope with that. Another ongoing project is the new meadowbird strategy of Natuurmonumenten, which Joep is part of. “Next to this, I helped designing our guidelines on the protection of livestock against wolves, which I am quite proud of”.

In his study career, Joep did the Bachelor program of Forest and Nature Conservation (BBN) with the specialization of Ecology and Management and the Master track in Management in the Master Forest and Nature Conservation (MFN). “MFN sometimes felt like a repetition form the stuff I learned during BBN, so I would recommend people to maybe choose another master if they did BBN or to expand the standard MFN curriculum with a minor. I created my own minor ‘Environmental Law and Policy’ which I really liked”. In his job, the ecological knowledge gathered during his program and internship were most important, alongside critical and analytical thinking.


For his internship, Joep was part of ARK Rewilding where he studied habitat selection by red deer, wild boar and roe deer in natural areas. During his study, he did quite some volunteering with Natuurmonumenten (as a voluntary forester), Staatsbosbeheer (as chairman of the Youth Council), the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (as a research assistant), and Rewilding Europe (as part of the young rewilders). “This volunteering helped me discovering what type of work I like and helped to build my network and contributed to give a head start in comparison to other recent graduates.” Another advice of him to increase your chances for a position is to translate your CV, which he found was greatly appreciated by Dutch employers.

“I did not know what I wanted to do, but I believe it is more important to know what kind of field and topics you like. My recommendation: volunteer to discover what you like and create a LinkedIn profile and follow people you think are interesting.”

~Joep

**“I want to contribute to making the world a better place and to counteract biodiversity loss.”**

## Lieke Verhoeven

 **Forest Ranger for Education and Communication at Staatsbosbeheer**

*Graduated 2015 – Policy & Society*



Lieke works in the National Park de Groote Peel as a forest ranger for education and communication. The job entails connecting nature conservation and society through education, communication and building a network with partners, tourists and residents.

Staatsbosbeheer is known for their large managed nature domain in the Netherlands. Within these areas, regulations like Natura 2000 are often applicable. The aim of the organisation is to provide everything created by nature; plants, animals, space, green energy building- and materials and other resources and lastly fresh air. Within the years Lieke works in this function, she helped in aiming this goal by raising awareness about nature and the environment.

Lieke started working at Staatsbosbeheer half a year after graduation from MFN. In this gap, she worked as a volunteer at the Institute for Sustainability and Nature Education (IVN). "By working at IVN and creating a network, I was approached for the job at my current employer".

The bachelor program Lieke followed was Applied Biology at the HAS. There, the main focus was on ecology and research. In her master, she followed the track in Policy and Society. "The MFN program taught me to use the knowledge from my bachelor about ecology and apply it in education, experiencing nature and communication". Lieke would like to encourage everyone to try courses at other chair groups or studies than the usual program. Through this, she personally discovered that she was not the ecologist that she thought she would be after graduating.

In her working life, the biggest lesson learned is the complexity. "There is not one magical solution. Societal

~Lieke

**"In 2022 I had the honour of giving the king and queen an excursion and tell them about the nature restoration in the raised bogs of the Peel."**

issues and nature restoration often have conflicting interests". An example she addresses is the idea that people grow respect for nature by experiencing. However, many visitors might cause negative effects. "Tailor made solutions are needed to keep a healthy balance".

"I like the idea of contributing every day to raising awareness about nature and the environment", she says. This is sometimes directly through excursions, or indirectly by writing about restoration projects. "If by raising this awareness people change their behaviour and take care of nature in their own surroundings- big or small, I did a great job".



## **Vacancy: Internship Modernization of Forest Coffee Farm Internship The Fairchain Foundation in Ethiopia**

### **Job context:**

The Fairchain Foundation is an agricultural company committed to sustainable and ethical supply chains in East Africa and around the globe. FairChain is actively engaged with the development of a 240ha plot of forest coffee in the Guraferda woreda of Southwest Ethiopia. We are seeking 2 highly skilled and dedicated interns to assist in farm modernization efforts. The ideal candidates should have a strong background in agriculture, a passion for sustainable farming, and the ability to work effectively across cultural contexts. This is a challenging yet rewarding opportunity to make a significant impact on local communities and contribute to the development of fair and responsible farming practices. Depending on the background and interests of the intern, specific goals can be agreed upon.

### **Main activities:**

1. Farm Digitalization:
  - Oversee coffee tree digitalization
  - Collect shade tree inventory
  - Facilitate training sessions on digitalization tools
2. ESG Compliance:
  - Facilitate and attend training sessions for deforestation compliance and RFA certification
  - Clearly understand what requirements the farm must meet to gain certification and entry into the EU market
  - Communicate with relevant stakeholders how standards can be met
3. Post Harvest Processing:
  - Collaborate with farm management and other stakeholders to assess and communicate the quality, capacity, and overall success of new drying beds
  - During harvest season, help assess the quality of drying coffee and report any issues.
  - Develop improvements for next generation drying beds.
4. Farm Diversification:
  - Monitor success of newly added species and agroforestry plots
  - Assist in the development of tree/plant nursery.
  - Continuously assess and improve farming practices, exploring innovative techniques and technologies to enhance productivity and sustainability.
5. Community Building and Reporting:
  - Collaborate with local communities, government agencies, and relevant





stakeholders to foster positive relationships, promote knowledge sharing, and address community needs.

- Represent Fairchain in meetings, workshops, and industry events, advocating for fair and ethical farming practices.
- Build professional relationships with farm team and local community member
- Report regularly to the FairChain NL team.

**Your profile:**

- Currently enrolled in an MSc program in Agricultural Sciences, Forestry, or related field.
- In-depth knowledge of sustainable farming practices, crop management, and ecology.
- Works well in a highly adaptive, intercultural environment.
- Excellent problem-solving and decision-making abilities, with a keen eye for detail.
- Proficiency in using farm management software, data analysis tools, and basic computer applications.
- Familiarity with fair-trade, organic, and Rainforest Alliance certification processes is desirable.
- Strong communication and interpersonal skills, with the ability to engage and collaborate with stakeholders at various levels.
- Fluent in English, both written and verbal. Knowledge of local languages is an advantage.

**Vacancy: Graduate Trainee Programme Proforest**

**Job context:**

Proforest is a mission-driven organisation that works throughout supply chains supporting the production and sourcing of multiple commodities like sugar, soy, palm oil, coconut, cocoa, beef and fibre in ways that deliver positive environmental and social outcomes for people and the environment. If you are motivated by being part of a solution to support this transition to responsible production and sourcing and are passionate about taking on challenges at a global scale, we would like to hear from you.

**Main activities:**

Our Graduate Trainee Programme develops leaders to ensure our continued success as well as the success of our partners and clients. It gives you a thorough overview

over essential topics in the fields of responsible sourcing and production and lays the foundations you need to analyze systemic issues, shape strategy, develop innovative solutions, drive the transition to responsible supply chains and deliver positive outcomes at scale. What makes our Graduate Trainee Programme so special is that you will be taking on substantial responsibilities under supervision of sector experts in an international setting, enabling you to contribute to our mission right from the beginning of your career in Proforest.

This is an exciting opportunity to join our consultancy practice and work with global brands. We offer various traineeships across our practice areas.

**Responsibilities**

In this role you will carry-out assigned project tasks and support the delivery of projects. You will develop an understanding of our project management systems and support the effective project management and control, incl. supporting proposal development, project planning, subcontracting, monitoring of time and budget, invoicing, etc. You will develop an in-depth knowledge of relevant topics and keep up-to-date with developments within the area of responsible production/sourcing of agricultural commodities.

**Your profile:**

- Self-motivated.
- Have passion for what we do and are excited about helping deliver our mission
- To succeed within Proforest you need the confidence and drive to achieve real change in a challenging environment.
- You are an excellent communicator, able to build and deepen collaborative relationships with stakeholders.
- You have strong analytical, organizational and project management skills.
- You will preferably have a relevant Masters' level qualification, some relevant professional experience in a similar role.

**Other employers**

Stichting Probos, Mileudedefensie, Vogelbescherming, WNF



## Job profile 3: Consultancy & Engineering

**Simone Loohuizen**

 **Team Leader & Project Leader at Arcadis**

*Graduated 2015 – Policy & Society*



At Arcadis, Simone works in the department of Spatial & Environmental Planning & Permitting. In her function, she works on different projects and provides advice on decision-making strategies and governance and the required procedures. As a team leader, she manages a team of approximately 15 people within the same field of expertise.

Since finishing her study, Simone works at Arcadis. Projects she has worked on so far include nature development projects, dike reinforcements, and the construction of wind farms. Arcadis is operating both nationally and internationally and delivers sustainable design, engineering, and consultancy services for natural and built assets. Traveling the country for meetings with ministries or to be present at construction sites are some examples, next to internal meetings with her team. “No two workdays are the same for me”.

There is never one project to work on, but various at a time. She is assisting Dunea with conducting a study on different options for achieving future drink water demand. With the new Environmental Act (Omgevingswet), she also offers training sessions to government entities. Another client that she works for frequently is Rijkswaterstaat (part of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management), where she also did her internship.

*~Simone*

**“I did know that I wanted to do something that would have a positive impact on the world around us.”**

The beginning of her career was as an ecologist, but she quickly found out that bridging the gap between different technical disciplines and topics was more interesting to her. “I never thought that I would enjoy a management role, but I do. I always wanted a job that offered variety and opportunities for learning new things and I found it in what I do now.”

A lesson Simone learned while working in developing new nature areas, is that it is not always about acquiring more technical or ecological knowledge. It is rather in convincing the right people. The interaction with different stakeholders gives the opportunity to have a tangible positive impact.

“Do not worry too much about choosing the ‘right’ job from the start. The chances of doing the same work for your entire life are not very high”. She emphasizes that you need to find out whether you enjoy working with many or few people, working outdoors or indoors, being more hands-on or working on a more abstract level.

“Just start with something that seems interesting to you, and from there, you will naturally discover what suits you best.”

### **Vacancy: Forestry – carbon project developers Form International**

#### **Job context:**

Form International is a management, investment, and consulting firm specializing in sustainable (agro)forestry, nature-based solutions, and landscape management and restoration in tropical Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Our mission is to create and deliver innovative and sustainable solutions for our clients, including investors, supply chain actors, governments, NGOs and local communities, to generate multiple returns on investment for people, planet, profit, and purpose.

#### **Main activities:**

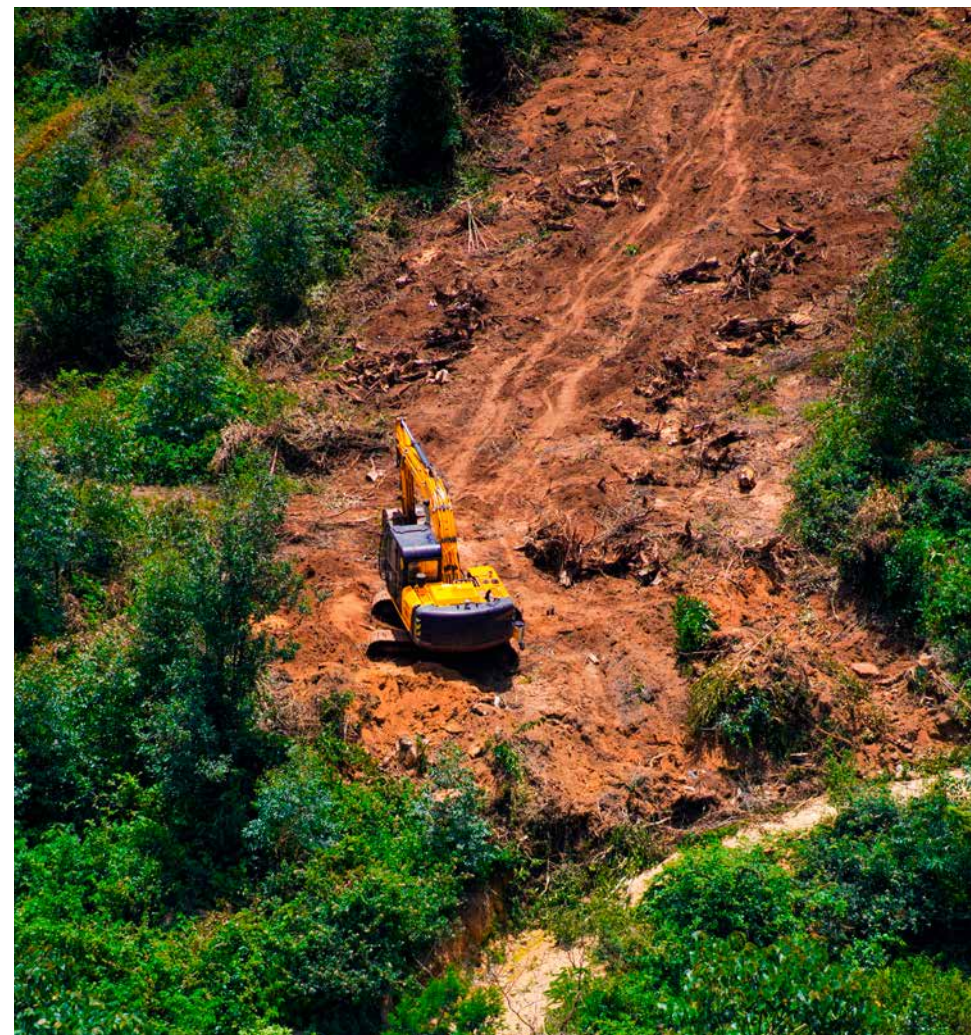
We design, develop and implement forestry – carbon projects. Our office is based in Hattem, the Netherlands, with the flexibility for some remote work. But of course, you will be traveling to the project locations in the southern hemisphere. The Forestry-Carbon Project Developer will be contributing to, or be responsible for, developing and managing multiple projects that deliver carbon revenues from community-based forestry and agroforestry.

#### **Your profile:**

- A Bachelor’s degree or higher in environmental science, forestry, natural resource management, or closely related fields
- 2+ years of experience in developing and implementing community-based forestry and agroforestry projects that generate carbon revenue
- Knowledge and experience in forestry carbon certification standards, including the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) and Climate, Community, and Biodiversity (CCB) Standards
- Experience in conducting feasibility assessments, carbon accounting, and

cost-benefit accounting is an advantage

- Some demonstrated expertise in project and stakeholder management
- Good communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to work independently and as part of a dynamic team
- Fluent in English, and preferably French. Fluency in another language (e.g. Spanish) is a plus



## **Vacancy: Medior tree technical advisor idverde**

### **Job context:**

At idverde Bomendienst we are looking for a mediocre tree technical advisor who understands trees. You will work in this challenging role with a young and committed team of advisors from the branch and from home. idverde Bomendienst is the specialist in the field of trees. We offer national advice, care and disease control of trees and deliver to a high standard. Trees are of great value because they have a beneficial effect on our health and social interaction. Well-founded tree policy and management provides clarity and limits the number of unexpected complaints and problems. We work intensively with the operating companies idverde Advies and idverde Realisatie and can therefore provide a complete package for the development, construction and maintenance of outdoor spaces.

### **Main activities:**

Trees largely determine the green character of the environment. They help ensure that people enjoy being outside and therefore live healthier lives. Many of the effects are achieved or enhanced when there are large, mature trees with a considerable crown volume. Trees depend on natural processes to reach maturity. In a built environment, the space and time for natural processes are limited. That's why tree projects are complicated puzzles. Planting, managing and preserving trees requires professionals. We are looking for you! To shape these complicated puzzles together with our customers. You carry out complex assignments and have a training role for junior advisors. This interaction allows you to grow as an advisor.

### **Your profile:**

- You have an HBO/WO working and thinking level, which is reflected in your work experience or through diplomas obtained.
- You have experience with tree technical issues.
- You enjoy guiding junior advisors.
- You are in possession of the ETT certificate.
- You dare to push the boundaries of the position.
- You enjoy commerce and know how to combine it with punctual administration of ongoing projects.
- You have strong communication skills and enjoy working in a results-oriented manner.
- You are analytical, exude confidence and listen carefully to your team.



## **Other employers**

Tauw, Ecoconsultancy, Royal Haskoning



## Job profile 4: Research, PhD or University

**Thijs Fijen**

 **Assistant Professor at Wageningen University and Research**



*Graduated 2013 – Ecology*

Being an Assistant Professor, Thijs is a researcher and teacher in the field of agro-ecology. The goal in his research is to take care for the biodiversity that we rely on, even when it is not directly of benefit to us all. “The creation of circumstances in which species can thrive and return is important, since we as humans are responsible for the biodiversity decline.”

Being a researcher, Thijs has several projects at a time. Topics he works on include the benefits from strip-crop farming for insect biodiversity and arable breeding birds. But also the scientific ecological bases to develop a label for nature-friendly solar parks. Next to this, he teaches courses for both bachelors and masters and Wageningen University that focus on ecology.

Previously, he did a PhD at Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ) followed by a PhD and Postdoc at Wageningen University and Research. In his current position, he also assists PhD students and tries to make the projects more realistic within their time schedule. Of course, the master program has a great impact on the

work he performs nowadays. Not only because he works as a teacher himself now, but also because it gave him the tools to be able to set up and perform experimental research. “The master helped to form a holistic view on ecology and all other aspects linked to that, from geology to land-use-planning.”

~Thijs  
“I hope to contribute to biodiversity conservation in agricultural landscapes and to inspire students to ‘fight’ for ecology.”

To get to the position he is in now, Thijs was doing extra research topics at other institutes and improved his statistical skills during his masters. He always knew he wanted to end up in research. “Every step in my master’s program was designed to improve my prospects of being successful

in my field. Networking is a crucial aspect of it." When it comes to vacancies, he always contacted the person advertising with a specific question on the project.

"A good way to prepare for a job interview is to look up recent research topics of the of the job committee. Do also not hesitate to ask friends what kinds of questions to expect." He stresses that you should explore options by talking to people. "Accept to make mistakes and explore options which in the end might not suit you. It is also important to know what you don't want to do.

## Rianne Kat

 **PhD Candidate and Lecturer at Wageningen University and Research**

*Graduated 2021 – Policy & Society*



Rianne studied in Wageningen herself and is now building her career within Wageningen University and Research as both a PhD candidate and lecturer at the Forest and Nature Conservation and Policy group.

During her time as a student, Rianne was always an active student. She became a student assistant, helped with courses and eventually became a teacher at the Forest and Nature Conservation and Policy group at WUR. The chair group focusses on

interactions between people and nature; something Rianne is very passionate about. New challenges however were raised when she figured that with lecturing without a PhD, it was not a place she would be able to stay for a long time.

At the group, vacancies became available for two PhD positions Rianne was interested in. One was about co-productions and transdisciplinary research on human-nature relations and how they relate to sustainability. The goal is to provide more insights in how organisations deal with sustainability. One of the cases she is exploring to

~Rianne

**"I like the dynamics of the PhD combination with the teaching; research on the one side and a more "hands-on" job with students on the other."**

work on is with the Herenboeren, a farming community that is dedicated to producing sustainable food together.

The interest in topic related to FNP was a good motivator, as well as the click with her promotor. "I was however a bit sad about letting go of the teaching, but they offered me to do the PhD in one more year. In that way, I could continue with lecturing besides my research".

"With teaching, it is quite clear: you have a group of students that need to learn something," Rianne explains. "It is easier to feel content at the end of the day. My PhD is a bigger project, in which you can get lost more easily."

"I do not know where I will end up. It might be in teaching, but can also be at a more established nature organisation. What I do know is that I am passionate about nature. What helped for me was to do extra internships in both my bachelor and master. This created a broader network and to distinguish myself from others with all these (small) things that I did." She added that it was only possible by creating some more space and time during her study. "I know it will not be possible for everyone, but if you can, give yourself the extra space you need."

### **Vacancy: PhD Role of Fire Feedbacks in Spatial Resilience of Forest-Savanna Boundaries Utrecht University**

#### **Job context:**

There is an urgent need to understand the effects that global change can have on the Earth, its system components and ecosystems. One area of critical concern is the imminent abrupt and irreversible critical transitions of ecosystems through tipping points. Recent discoveries indicate that such tipping could be evaded and even reversed in ecosystems through spatial pattern formation, thereby creating pathways of resilience.

For our ERC-Synergy project Pathways of resilience and evasion of tipping in ecosystems (RESILIENCE) we are offering a PhD position for a self-motivated candidate with a strong interest in the role of fire-feedbacks in tipping points, especially in forest-savanna boundary areas.

#### **Main activities:**

The aim of RESILIENCE is to fundamentally advance our understanding and predictions of tipping points and critical transitions in ecosystems and reveal how these can be evaded and even reversed through spatial pattern formation.



RESILIENCE will develop a new theory for emerging resilience through spatial pattern formation and link this with real tipping-prone biomes undergoing accelerating global change: savanna and tundra. The candidate will benefit from the expertise of the four Principal Investigators (PIs) in the RESILIENCE project: Max Rietkerk, an ecologist at Utrecht University, Arjen Doelman, a mathematician at Leiden University, Ehud Meron, a physicist at Ben-Gurion University, and Isla Meyers-Smith, an ecologist at the University of British Columbia.

In this PhD project *The Role of Fire Feedbacks in Spatial Resilience of Forest-Savanna Boundaries* at Utrecht University, you will study forest-savanna boundaries and develop spatial ecosystem models, revealing how spatial patterns of fuel connectivity affect (the evasion of) forest-savanna tipping points. For this project, satellite images from Africa and South America could be used, relating static and moving forest-savanna boundaries to fire. This will increase our understanding of forest-savanna resilience and will be used to predict the movement of forest-savanna boundaries with global change. We follow a joint modelling and validation approach, in collaboration with other PhD candidates, postdocs and senior researchers from the different involved universities.

**Your profile:**

We are looking for a PhD candidate with:

- a relevant Master's degree and a strong scientific background in the field of environmental sciences, ecology, physics or mathematics, preferably spanning two of these disciplines;
- excellent English language skills;
- experience in programming (e.g. Matlab, Python);
- experience and interest in spatial data analysis.

Utrecht University's Faculty of Geosciences studies the Earth: from the Earth's core to its surface, including man's spatial and material utilisation of the Earth – always with a focus on sustainability and innovation. With 3,400 students (BSc and MSc) and 720 staff, the faculty is a strong and challenging organisation. The Faculty of Geosciences is organised in four Departments: Earth Sciences, Human Geography & Spatial Planning, Physical Geography, and Sustainable Development.

The position is embedded at the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development, in the Environmental Sciences group. The Copernicus Institute is the scientific institute for sustainability research and teaching of Utrecht University. The mission of the Environmental Sciences group is to understand the interactions between terrestrial ecosystems and global environmental change.

**Other employers**

Alterra, The Royal Museum for Central Africa



## Job Profile 5: Entrepreneur

**Rutger de Jong**

 **Freelance ecological garden designer**

*Graduated 2012 – Policy*



In 2019, Rutger launched his own company: Mijn Ecotuin. It is a business on ecological garden design and advice. As a freelancer, he also has other duties to fulfil.

As an own boss, Rutger does not only do all the garden advising himself. The main goal is to design gardens and make planting schemes that suit the preferences of the client. Next to this, he needs to do administrative things such as taxes, invoices, taking care of his website and getting orders. A 'normal' day of working does not exist. "Sometimes it is hectic, sometimes it is quiet. That is how it works with running your own business. It is not about what you did in a day, but what you do in a year."

Working by yourself might give a certain insecurity but it gives a great amount of independence. This is different from other jobs, which Rutger likes a lot. "One day I had a discussion with my boss, and he said: 'I am the boss. If you think you know it all, you should start your own business!' And that is exactly what I did."

*~Rutger*

**"I discovered that you cannot expect a study programme to prepare you for every position. You will learn on the go."**

From the MFN program, the most dominant aspect that comes back in his work is the societal aspect. "I underestimated the societal impact on biodiversity issues during my studies. My customers are not all bird watching, hitch hiking stereotypes, but come from various parts of society and yet share the same concerns." Of course, the ecological background obtained during MFN is of major importance. It created knowledge on current problems and concerns about biodiversity loss.

Thinking about a job, Rutger always saw himself ending up at WWF. He was able to do his internship at



WWF Guianas. After graduation, jobs at the Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group (FNP) as an education and research assistant, and as a freelance study advisor at multiple study programmes have passed by. "I have never been successful with applying to vacancies. The jobs I have had, were all through my own network."

"I think that is my best advice to give; network!" He states that you should put aside your anxiety, pick up a phone and just call somebody about their job. "I would still apply to online vacancies, but invest most of your time in getting to know other people so they get to know you."

### **Vacancy (Junior) Project employee Rooftop Revolution**

#### **Job context:**

Do you use your (construction) technical knowledge and project coordinating skills to contribute to a sustainable world? Do you have the substantive knowledge to convince roof owners to invest in a sustainable roof by working out the financial and technical aspects with them in a roof advice and business case? Do you want to participate in the most beautiful roof projects and at the same time shape a growing non-profit in a small and fun team? Then you're in the right place! Because we are immediately looking for a (Junior) Sustainable Roofs Project Employee.

#### **Main activities:**

As a (Junior) Project Employee Sustainable Roofs you work on various projects within multifunctional roof utilization. For example, by issuing advice on the use of roofs for private individuals and homeowners' associations. You will participate in large neighborhood campaigns in which we green dozens of roofs simultaneously with municipalities. Your goal is to take roofing projects from idea to realization by using our products and services. You are able to acquire the substantive knowledge required to convince roof owners to invest in a sustainable roof and you can work out the financial and technical aspects into appropriate roofing advice. You also provide support in advising roof owners and involved parties, such as governments, real estate parties and residents. In this way you use (construction) technical knowledge, knowledge of sustainability and project coordinating skills to contribute to the growth of Rooftop Revolution and a sustainable world.

- Participate in neighborhood campaigns: communicate with residents, government officials and business partners, write campaign material, work according to a tight schedule;
- Under the guidance of your project manager colleagues and then independently,

take up and implement roof advice projects;

- Thinking about further development of projects and products;
- Thinking about and contributing to the further development of the organization.

#### **Your profile:**

- You are enthusiastic, enterprising and proactive;
- You are structured and careful and know how to tackle things;
- You are solution-oriented and creative;
- You have social and communication skills and enjoy working in a team;
- You have empathy and know how to stimulate others;
- You are results-oriented, keep the goal in mind, but remain flexible;
- You feel comfortable in a start-up environment;
- You have an excellent command of the Dutch language, spoken and written.
- Relevant (technical) education (HBO or WO);
- Demonstrable relevant study, internship or work experience;
- Sufficient basis to develop the knowledge required to prepare and further develop roofing advice;
- Demonstrable affinity with sustainability and/or climate-proof cities.

### **Other employers**

Worldwood, Eneco Energy, Peru for Less

# Competencies

## Knowledge, skills and attitude needed for the job

**In addition to an educational degree, organisations and companies in the labour market demand certain competencies from graduates. As you have read in the vacancy examples in this booklet, a small section usually describes the competencies that an organisation or company is looking for. These competencies reflect knowledge, skills and attitude.**

Throughout your study you develop a wide variety of competencies, such as academic writing skills, presentation skills, and the ability to collaborate across disciplines. It is important that you show in your CV and during your job interviews that your competencies are of good quality. You can do that by explaining how you have strengthened them during your education, which includes internships and thesis work. For many students, the course Facilitating Interactive Processes provides great examples of how they developed, applied, and reflected on their competencies in practice.

Here we provide a list of important competencies that are retrieved from vacancies in the field of Forest and Nature Conservation. When you start orienting on the labour market, you can check the list to strategically help you prepare for an application. Part of that preparation is also a plan on how you will further strengthen your competencies while performing on the job. You can still be a good candidate without having all demanded competencies. It is important that you demonstrate insight in both your qualities and strengths as well as 'weaknesses' - competencies to be developed further.

For a better overview, the competencies are categorised in five different groups, but they do have overlap.

### *Knowledge: social & cognitive*

- Strategic and analytical skills;
- Broad interest in (human -) nature topics;
- Ability to make connections and see new opportunities;
- Ability to grasp the complexity of a situation or problem;
- Decision-making abilities.

### *Communication*

- Team player and good organiser;
- Interpersonal and presentation skills;
- Collaboration and networking skills;
- Knowledge of other languages is an asset;
- Ability to work independently and as part of a dynamic team.

### *Reflection and leaning*

- Independent and critical thinking;
- Personal and practical ethics;
- Reflection and personal leadership;
- Sensitivity around stakeholders;
- Project management and organisational skills.

### *Academic skills*

- Writing skills;
- Information literacy;
- Relevant field experience is an asset;
- Data science technology skills;
- Academic English writing skills.

### *Attitude*

- Flexible and able to adapt to changing circumstances;
- Inventive and assertive attitude;
- Ability to join interdisciplinary (academic) communities;
- Values diversity and inclusion;
- Responsibility for an adequate attitude of learning, sharing and respect.

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# Job search

## The steps to landing that dream job

### 1 Orientation phase

Start with orienting yourself. What is important for you, what skills do you really enjoy using or which topics are you endlessly intrigued by? What kind of organisations or companies speak to you? As there are many different options within the field of Forest and Nature Conservation, it is important that you define your own focus. It is likely that throughout your BSc and MSc program you have already started carving your own pathway. It can help to reflect on the choices you made, on the courses and projects you enjoyed most, and on the people that have inspired you. What do they have in common?

If you are unsure about the path that suits you well, there are various opportunities throughout your study to explore this. For example, through Modular Skills Training courses that focus on Career Exploration or Personal Motivation Assessments. Student Career Services is a great source of support and inspiration. They offer a variety of career events every year. Would you like to brainstorm about your career? Reach out to your study advisor!

Perhaps you are very clear about what it is that you want. Great! You can now start looking for concrete job vacancies. Even if you are not yet convinced about the type of job you are looking for, scanning vacancies can be helpful to expand your horizon and learn more about the concrete tasks and responsibilities in various positions. And a friendly reminder: keep an open mind. New opportunities can also cross your path at unexpected times and places.

### Searching for vacancies

Don't underestimate the power of a great network. Let your own network know that you are looking for a job. You can strategically use social media for this, especially LinkedIn. Reaching out to your network can include contacting the people whom you know through your internship, thesis, and other assignments. You can also express your interest in people that have interesting positions and ask whether they are open to talk to you about their experiences.

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### 2 Applying

Once you have found a vacancy that you are interested in, it is time to get to work! Depending on the application procedure, the process generally involves writing a motivation letter, updating your CV and sharing references. Some things to keep in mind:

When you apply, take a close look at the organisations aims, required competencies, values, and activities. Pay specific attention in you motivation letter on how you match these aspects. This way you can demonstrate that you fit the organisation.

Note that you can change your CV when you send it to different organisations or companies. Each organisation had specific interests and values. You can comply to the uniqueness of each organisation by submitting an adjusted and updated CV.

Be reminded that you can ask others to check your motivation letter and CV before submitting it. They might see errors or unclarities that you did not notice yourself.

### 3 Interview

When you are invited for a job interview, it is important that you prepare by having a thorough look at the organisation or company's mission, vision and activities. Getting to know the organisation better also allows you to prepare some questions, through which you can demonstrate that you have prepared well for the conversation.

It can also be helpful to prepare your answers to certain interview questions. For example, why are you suitable for the job, and what (professional) experience you have that is relevant to the position. Providing concrete examples is always useful but can be difficult to come up with on the spot. Brainstorming in advance on relevant projects, challenges and learning moments can support a smooth conversation.

### 4 Follow-up

Please be reminded that at the end of the job interview, you can ask when they will inform you about the outcome. If you do not hear from them after the indicated time, you can always contact them. Many organisations do not automatically provide each applicant with feedback. If for whatever reason you are not chosen for a particular job or invited to an interview, be assertive and ask for feedback on the interview, your motivation letter and CV. This can help you in your next application and demonstrates you motivation and eagerness to learn.

### **Work on skills**

As part of your MSc program, you have the opportunity to take Modular Skills Training courses offered by Education and Learning Sciences. We all have certain competencies we would like to improve or gain more confidence in. These courses help you do that. They range from Negotiation Skills to The Art of Public Speaking. Find all the courses in the course catalogue on Osiris.

### **Traineeships**

In addition to job vacancies, you can also search for traineeships. This is an opportunity to gain work experience, while actively investing in further developing your skills and knowledge. Relevant traineeships include: Groen Traineeship, Rijkswaterstaat, NIOO-KNAW, Staatsbosbeheer, Witteveen+Bos and Arcadis.

### **Student Career Services**

WUR Student Career Services checks CVs, motivation letters, LinkedIn profiles and give advice on finding a job or internship. They regularly host Career Days and help students explore their wishes and talents through workshops.

[Student Career Services - WUR](#)

### **Browse the internet**

The following websites are examples of places to find information:

Government:

- [www.werkenvoornederland.nl](http://www.werkenvoornederland.nl)
- [www.gemeentebanen.nl](http://www.gemeentebanen.nl)

Academia:

- [www.academictransfer.com](http://www.academictransfer.com)

Within the broad domain of forest and nature:

- [www.netwerkgroenebureaus.nl](http://www.netwerkgroenebureaus.nl)

Environment and sustainability:

- [www.environmentjobs.com](http://www.environmentjobs.com)

Master Forest and Nature Conservation

[wur.eu/mfn](http://wur.eu/mfn)

