



In memoriam Peter Hans Hovenkamp (1953–2019)

P.C. van Welzen¹, P. Baas¹, B. van der Hoorn¹, M. Roos¹, E. Smets¹

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Fig. 1 The Hovenkamp family, with Peter (right), his wife Gerda van Uffelen and their two sons, Jan (second from left) and Pieter (left).

Friday, 12 July 2019, fast rising water, a flash flood, in the Deer Cave of the Gunung Mulu National Park, N. Sarawak, surprised the two guides, Peter Hovenkamp, his wife Gerda, and seven others. Most group members could rescue themselves, but Peter and one guide were taken by the water and did not survive the flood. With the demise of Peter the Naturalis staff loses one of its more colourful and clever scientists.

Peter Hans Hovenkamp was born on 9 October 1953 in Utrecht, in the centre of the Netherlands. He finished his secondary school in 1971 and started to study biology at the University of Leiden, where he obtained his BSc in biology with geology in 1975 and his MSc in biology in 1980. For his MSc he did three internships, he studied the 'Biosystematics of the *Achillea millefolium*-complex in Europe' under the guidance of J.H. Wieffering (MSc) and Prof. dr. R. Hegnauer, 'The micro-associations in the *Calluna* vegetations' with Prof. dr. J.J. Barkman (fieldwork in the NE of the Netherlands), and 'Electron microscopic research on dedifferentiated epidermal cells of *Nautilocalyx lynchii*' supervised by Mrs. Dr. C.J. Venverloo and Prof. dr. K.R. Libbenga. During his study Peter was often appointed junior demonstrator (student assistant) at both Leiden University and Wageningen

University. In 1980 he became scientific assistant at the Rijks-herbarium (L, later National Herbarium of the Netherlands, presently part of Naturalis Biodiversity Center), a salaried PhD position for four years, to study the fern genus *Pyrrosia* for the Flora Malesiana project. He obtained his PhD in 1986. Positions in taxonomy were hard to get and it would not be until 1988 when he obtained a 50 % part time position as researcher on ferns at the Rijks-herbarium, which was later extended to 80 % when he became chief editor of *Blumea* (see below).

In his early years Peter was already interested and well-versed in biology, especially plants. In 1967 he joined the NJN (Netherlands Youth Society for Nature), in which he was active between 1970–1975 in the plant associations group, which he even chaired for some time. He especially liked to teach field work during camps and excursions of the NJN, and later when he was too old (in those days one could only be member till the age of 23) he was invited to guide on specific occasions. In 1984 he became secretary of the Bryological and Lichenological working group of the KNNV (Royal Netherlands Nature Society), a group in which he together with his wife Gerda was active, yearly visiting the field excursion weekend of the group. For years he held official functions: 1984–1988 as secretary, 1988–1990 as treasurer and 2004–2010 as chairperson.

¹ Naturalis Biodiversity Center, P.O. Box 9517, 2300 RA, Leiden, The Netherlands; corresponding author e-mail: peter.vanwelzen@naturalis.nl.

During his internship at the Laboratory of Experimental Plant Systematics of Leiden University (studying the *Achillea millefolium*-complex) Peter met Gerda, who was also doing an internship in the same institute, but then looking at gall midges in the catkins of birches. Their relationship started to flourish during a 2-week field trip to Spain, organised by the Rijksherbarium as part of the Leiden University curriculum, where Peter arrived unannounced. Their marriage was strong and durable and together with two sons, Jan and Pieter, they formed a warm and happy, hospitable family (Fig. 1).

The first author met Peter (and Gerda) as assistant during a course in experimental taxonomy. This was the start of the age of computerization and, as a novelty, there was a mobile terminal in the course room, connected via a telephone line to the central mainframe computer of the university. Peter helped to operate it. Unfortunately, every glitch in the telephone connection resulted in false data, thus after data checking and improving, not much time was gained. Peter has always been very skilled with computers and often developed his own programs (calculating Kroeber coefficients for pairwise phenetic resemblances between areas in species composition, simulating Monte Carlo sequences to find the 'correct' cladogram in tree space, etc.), took his time in exploring the boundaries of existing software, and always thought of handier ways in computer handling. During a spell of unemployment after completing his thesis Peter even earned a living as computer consultant.

As a student Peter had a special interest in mosses, but also showed a broad and detailed knowledge on plants and biology in general. From the start of his PhD he also developed a keen interest in ferns, which culminated in his thesis, the revision of the genus *Pyrrhosia* (Hovenkamp 1986), but he also made major contributions to the revision of the ferns for the second series of Flora Malesiana (parts of the families *Nephrolepidaceae*, *Oleandraceae*, *Polypodiaceae*, *Tectariaceae*). His last endeavour was the revision of the genus *Diplazium*, which he started to unravel, but could unfortunately not finish. He was very satisfied with

his contribution to the phylogenetic classification of the ferns (PPG1 2016) and even made preparations to have all ferns in the Naturalis collections re-arranged according to this system. A legacy we now have to complete. Peter was not only interested in Malesian ferns, he was co-author of the ferns for the Flora of the Netherlands and contributing to the study of the European *Dryopteris filix-mas* complex.

During his career Peter saw the rise of phenetic, phylogenetic, molecular, and image recognition techniques. They all attracted him, and usually by his own efforts, he learned how to use them to his own advance. Especially, the phylogenetic techniques had great appeal, and he was teaching these in various courses (see below). Peter also developed his own historical biogeographic technique (Hovenkamp 1997, 2001; (partly) implemented in computer programs: Arias 2010, Arias et al. 2011, Domínguez et al. 2016), which did not involve the extremely subjective areas of endemism, different in every analysis, but instead he used time sequences in shared boundaries between allopatric sister clades of various taxa. Even during the 11th Flora Malesiana Symposium in Brunei Darussalam, just before the accident, he was developing plans for a molecular scan of all specimens in combination with image recognition and species circumscriptions.

From 2002–2004 Peter was Associate editor of *Cladistics*, the Journal of the Willi Hennig Society. In 2008 Peter became Editor-in-Chief of *Blumea*, one of the scientific journals of Naturalis Biodiversity Center. Here too, he introduced his own way of working, averse from any mainstream ideas. He did not care much about SCI-impact factors; the quality of the content of the manuscripts and the intended readers were more important than all kinds of publication metrics. He created his own automation of manuscript handling and as editor, with his critical personality, he was the person to ask the authors difficult questions, point at weaknesses and confusing texts, all to the benefit of the manuscripts. All in all, he kept a high standard and *Blumea* is, still, a journal with a more than good

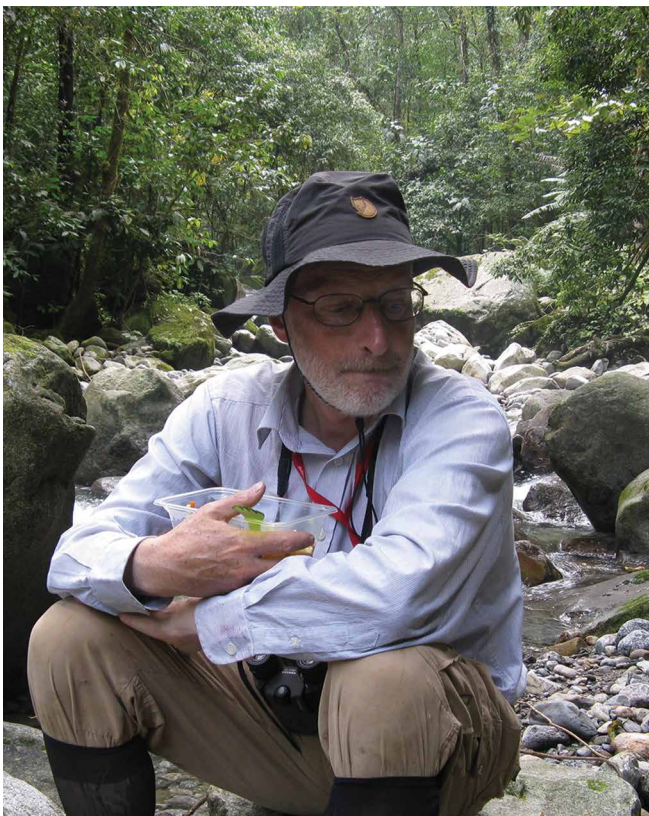


Fig. 2, 3 Peter during the expedition to Mount Kinabalu, September 2012. Photos by Nicolien Sol.

reputation and a stock of manuscripts awaiting publication. As active member of the Dutch Fern Society Peter was editor of 'VarenVaria' ('Fern Miscellaneous'), its periodical. Because of his critical and thorough nature, Peter was often invited to review manuscripts, and the Journal of Biogeography will honour this with a separate obituary.

Peter was the son of two teachers and according to him this influenced his way of teaching very positively. He put a tremendous and meticulous effort in developing his courses and lectures, not only learning the theoretical background of difficult statistical techniques like Likelihood and Bayesian, but also trying to find ways to easily transfer his knowledge to the students. He had a dry and very slow way of teaching, with many pauses between words, which, unfortunately for him, was not always liked by the students. However, Peter passed the intended message to them and students learned greatly from his expertise. During the last few years, Peter speeded up his way of talking and added jokes, which greatly improved his relationship with students. Peter had a great impact on teaching, as he was one of the first to develop a general course in advanced taxonomic skills (phylogenetics, biogeography, phylogeography), which was greatly appreciated and which was taught within the framework of the Netherlands national graduate school 'Biodiversity'. He also gave lectures and practicals in a whole array of other courses. He was always the person you could ask to teach and he never refused.

Peter loved field trips, excursions and field work. He has been on three expeditions to the tropics, one to New Guinea (together with ETH Zürich, 1991) and to Gunung Lumut (2005, Borneo, Kalimantan) and Mount Kinabalu (2012, Borneo, Sabah; Fig. 2, 3). The latter even resulted in a publication in *Nature* (Merckx et al. 2015) about the origin of the Kinabalu endemics. In the Netherlands he already assisted in excursions during his student life, and continued up to this year showing first year students the basic identification tools and general knowledge. Peter was not only interested in nature, also culture was important. Together with Gerda he visited many places, saw a lot, and collected much knowledge. In advance he read extensively to go well prepared on his trips. Peter (in fact his whole family)



Fig. 4 Peter playing the bass clarinet during the Royal Concert (30 March 2019) of the Harmonie St. Matthias (photo Henk Keijzer, <https://sintmatthias.nl/koninklijk-concert-30-maart-2019/>, published with permission).

loved to make or enjoy music. Peter played bass clarinet (Fig. 4) in a concert band 'Harmonie St. Matthias' and loved visiting all kinds of concerts. Music was a joy in his life. Another good thing in life which Peter appreciated was good food and wine, he had an advanced knowledge of wine and was a gourmet cook.

As Peter always developed his own skills and never posed himself as an expert, one had to find out oneself that he in fact was a major scientific advisor with great knowledge, not only in taxonomy, phylogeny and biogeography, also in cladistics, computer software, philosophy. As a person Peter was not charismatic and often chased away students with his difficult questions, but once you started to know him, he also grew upon you and appeared to be extremely friendly and helpful, but you had to ask. Peter loved discussion and he generally liked to play the role of the devil's advocate, often coming with an opposite opinion and generally having or finding quick arguments to support his controversial ideas. It always proved to be very difficult to make him change his opinion. We can imagine, that during his years as chairperson of the 'works council' (representative group of personnel aiding or checking the directorate, installed by Dutch legislation in the larger companies), Peter likely was a very critical member with sufficient arguments to tackle whatever he considered to be a problem/challenge for improvement. Peter was difficult to anger, loved humour and fun in life, in fact, being contrary was often not really serious and a way to express his humour. Likewise, the minutes he made during the meetings of the research group 'Biodiversity Discovery' were generally peppered with ironic remarks.

With Peter's sudden passing away, after overcoming the initial disbelief, we now realise that we will miss a stronghold in taxonomy, an appreciated pain-in-the-ass, and a solid pillar of knowledge. People are replaceable, but some far less so than others.

Our thoughts go to his wife Gerda and his sons, Jan and Pieter. Hopefully, it is a comfort that we will dearly remember Peter.

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