



## MY WIKO TIME PUZZLE INGA GEIPEL

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“Gain time to think!”, the slogan of the College for Life Sciences, is not the only thing the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin provided me for six exciting months. Wiko provides and offers so much more! Here I can only give a glimpse of all the experiences, impressions, achievements, and feelings of my Wiko time.

I investigate living, behaving mammals that use their acoustic sensory systems with a sophistication we can barely understand yet. I see my work as gathering little puzzle pieces of information and trying to put them together to discover a picture of unknown

size. Inferring a picture from puzzle pieces applies not only to my work, but also to my life. Everything I learn or experience adds pieces to the puzzle, as did my time at the Wiko. My “Wiko time puzzle” has many small pieces, but the four pieces contributing most to make this time so memorable for me were science, people, music, and food:

### Science

I applied to the College for Life Sciences program because I needed time to step outside my daily routine of fieldwork to get a fresh view of my research and focus on what direction I want to move. I did this by interacting with my Co-Fellows and colleagues, giving talks, thinking, and writing.

Exchanging ideas with my Co-Fellows who are not natural scientists was always interesting and sometimes challenging, as it kept reminding me how much of my knowledge about bats I sometimes consider common knowledge (Yes, bats do have eyes and are not blind). These interactions helped me practice how to talk about my research with non-scientists. I appreciated the input of my neighbor Katrin, when she patiently listened to my practice colloquium talk and pointed out where a more general explanation was needed.

I especially enjoyed the scientific conversations with the few natural scientists who were present. I learned a lot about their topics of research and also gained different perspectives on my own work. Talking to Jeremy, Lars, and bird Hannah certainly helped me recognize that I am studying a system that absolutely fascinates me and to focus some of my thoughts. The conversations with Kevin about nature, bats, and light led to an exciting idea for a small cooperative project for which he plans to come to visit STRI and me in Panama. Asfawossen never showed any signs of getting tired of answering my questions about rain, climate, or speleothems or of talking about any random ideas. His broad knowledge of what seemed nearly everything impressed me deeply. With his knowledge about rain, Asfa contributed to a paragraph of one of the manuscripts I wrote during my time at the Wiko, which is accepted for publication (Inga Geipel, Marcus J. Smeekes, Wouter Halfwerk, and Rachel A. Page “Noise as an informational cue for decision-making: the sound of rain delays bat emergence.” *Journal of Experimental Biology*, accepted).

I used my time to think about new directions for my project and wrote two manuscripts that are both submitted and now in the mill wheels of the peer-review process of

journals. I outlined a project about the role of learning during the acquisition of foraging behavior in bats relying on echolocation. The discussions with my Co-Fellows, colleagues in Germany, and my invited colleague Krista Patriquin from Canada, an expert on bat sociality and learning, taught me about social learning in bats. The visit of my cooperation partner Jan Steckel from Belgium led to finishing a now published Method Paper in the *Journal of Experimental Biology*.\*

After working in Panama for the last few years, being in Berlin gave me the opportunity to network with the local “bat community” in Berlin and all over Germany. I attended three conferences, and at one I was an invited special speaker. I co-advised and cooperated on several student projects with Mirjam Knörnschild, currently at the Freie Universität Berlin. One student actually came to Panama for a three-month internship with me, and another project resulted in a Bachelor thesis that I advised.

I found the Tuesday colloquia quite interesting, as they gave little glimpses of the vast variety of fields of research and also an overview of the work of everyone around me. Sometimes, however, it was quite challenging for me to follow the topics, as there appear to be many “cultural differences” between how talks are presented in the natural sciences and in the humanities, social sciences, and arts. The most interesting discussions developed after the colloquium during lunch.

The fabulous library team, which gave excellent help in finding literature, contributed greatly to my research. When they introduced themselves at the beginning and offered to help with the search on any topic we need, I was a little worried that my topics could be a little too odd. But when bird Hannah and I asked whether they could help us find literature about “vomiting or emesis in animals”, Stefan only so much as raised an eyebrow and asked how urgent it was, before presenting us with a long list of references in short order.

## People

At the Wiko, the diversity of people from different academic fields is a wonderful experience. Conversations and discussions with my Co-Fellows exposed me to a vast, enriching

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\* Dennis Laurijssen, Erik Verreycken, Inga Geipel, Walter Daems, Herbert Peremans and Jan Steckel (2018). “Low-cost synchronization of high-speed audio and video recordings in bio-acoustic experiments.” *J. Exp. Biol.* 221, jeb173724. doi: 10.1242/jeb.173724.

range of political, social, and other topics, providing opportunity to learn about new things and reflect on my own opinions. These conversations, however, had sometimes also quite frustrating, saddening, and depressing topics.

The first Fellow I met when I arrived at the Wiko was Jeremy, the only other Fellow from the CfLS program who was there with me from the beginning of the academic year. Our friendship started right that day, when we sat outside in the sun at the Herthasee behind the Villa Walther, sharing a couple of beers with Alicia, still amazed at how lucky we were to get into the program. Besides being at a similar stage in our careers, we had many other common interests to discuss while sharing pre-aperitifs or standing outside in the cold after lunch or dinner. During our Wiko time, we talked about our science and research interests, the job situation of young scientists, moving between continents, job applications, abstracts for talks, music, and much more. It was wonderful to share and hear similar stories and I am very lucky that Jeremy became a friend I could talk to about various topics from the start of my Wiko time.

Besides inspiring conversations with Lars about bats and bees and his advice concerning publications and grants, I very much enjoyed our long walks and going to concerts with him. Thank you for often being still awake to share a good night beer after I came back super-excited from a concert and letting me stay at your apartment before I went back to Panama. You are an excellent flat mate.

I am quite sure that Andreas, Klaus, and I would never have crossed paths without the Wiko, but it is wonderful that we did. I am happy we kept in contact through the messages and calls across the ocean, and I am looking forward to visiting you.

Thank you, Asfa, for being my “Tuesday colloquium buddy”, explaining so much about climate change in the tropics, and becoming my friend.

Paweł’s and Anka’s story and our visit to Paweł’s Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk left a permanent impression on me. It was a very emotional trip and I feel grateful that I had the chance to visit his museum with him.

I enjoyed talking with Kris and sharing ideas, sometimes over excellent vegan brunch, as much as attending his yoga classes. I welcomed interruptions of work by conversations with Tim, when he arrived at the Wiko and became my office neighbor. I enjoyed the long walks with Matthias through the Grunewald, during which I heard so many wonderful stories about Iceland and countless other topics I didn’t even realize could be topics.

All the small conversations I had with Zeynep, Yassin, Barbara, Saug, and all my other Co-Fellows I enjoyed as much as Isidore’s bat questions and Stanislas’s jokes about them.

The Wiko personnel contributed greatly to making my time at the Wiko so wonderful. Thank you all for always being friendly, kind, and absolutely helpful. No question was too strange and everyone helped to solve each problem I faced. Thank you Vera, for helping with my confusing situation of living in Panama, but having warm clothes in Germany, which needed to be moved back and forth to Berlin and for your sweet comment that my paperwork smelled like forest and not, as I claimed, like the moldy stench of everything that has been outside in a tropical rainy season.

Ulrike, the heart of the CfLS program, was not only caring during my stay, but still provides me helpful information. Thank you for your time and support when I was struggling with where and when to apply for grants and jobs.

It was touching how many people were interested in me and my work and I so much enjoyed all the little interactions and chats I had regularly with everyone, especially the chats around lunch with Daniel, Thorsten, Karin, Manu, Linda, or with Martin and Lina after the Thursday dinners.

### Music

My previous contact with classical music had been quite limited and I didn't actively listen to it until I met Andreas. Hearing him play certainly widened my musical horizon and I enjoy listening to his CDs with him playing Bach. Andreas gave a heart-touching little goodbye concert for Jeremy, Alicia, and me when we had to leave, which was absolutely wonderful. Besides Andreas answering patiently all my questions about his music, we had long and intense discussions about a variety of political and social topics while sitting on his couch and drinking wine. He became a good friend, whom I miss dearly.

After three and a half years in Panama, with very few opportunities to go to live concerts of music I liked, Berlin offered so many wonderful opportunities to see live bands playing, which I took right away. I attended 15 concerts, starting the first night I arrived in Berlin. Sometimes I was joined by Jeremy, Alicia, and/or Lars, who impressed with his performance in the mosh pit. I think many will remember the confusion Alicia, Jeremy, Isidore, Lars, and I created when we had to leave one Thursday dinner a little early to go to a concert in the Berghain's Kantine.

## Food

One of the absolute highlights on a nearly daily basis was the extraordinary vegan lunches and dinners Dunia and her team created for me. Every time it served a different deliciousness and created desserts (Karin, thank you for always making sure that I would get a dessert) that blew my taste buds! Before my stay at the Wiko, I never thought that I would experience the duration of a weekend as long, but the time between the Friday and Monday lunches became quite long. Besides the great food, the lunches and dinners were an excellent opportunity for food for thought through conversations with the changing constellations of Fellows to sit with.

I absolutely enjoyed the few evenings we went to eat at a Turkish restaurant discovered by Zeynep or the wonderful Ethiopian food Asfa introduced us to.

Noticing that my field pants must have shrunken a little during the months I didn't wear them could also be interpreted as that the food choices in Berlin were abundant and wonderful; eating at many different vegan restaurants with my sister, friends, and Co-Fellows and having the opportunity to order vegan pizza to the Villa Walther did their fair share.

There are many, many more pieces to my Wiko puzzle piece, intertwined with each other, like watching and discussing superheroes movies with Sian, Kevin, and Asfa; spending wonderful, close time with my sister Karen; having the possibility for my parents to visit me, introduce them to the people at the Wiko, and spend time with them; visits from friends and home; the comfortable housing at the Villa Walther; the birding around Grunewald; our absolutely fun goodbye dancing party, where everyone danced at some point; the "thirsty Thursdays and fuzzy Fridays" ... just to name a few.

Probably as everyone would say, the time at the Wiko passed a lot faster than I wanted, but left me with a lot of ideas, thoughts, new friends, and wonderful memories, adding a large piece to my life. Thank you all for contributing to it!