

Monday June 21st 2010

Today was the first day of the concluding studytrip of the course Orientation on International Scientific Careers. It was an early gathering at the station because we wanted to leave Groningen at 07:30, in which we succeeded. After a welcome word of the committee chairman and the bus driver we went on the road. Our first destination was Enkhuizen, where the seed enrichment company Syngenta is situated. A little bit delayed we arrived at the greenhouses surrounding the company. The staff welcomed us warmly and they started with a short introduction about Syngenta, followed by some words about the RUG University and the course by one of our own instructors.

At that point the first student presentation started, the case study about methods to improve drought resistance. Two students presented several methods to improve drought resistance in the Brassica plant, a family of crop plants with which Syngenta works. There was a large number of both breeders and scientists of Syngenta present at the presentation, so an interesting discussion started afterwards about how to choose the best method, what to choose as a backup plan and targeting whole genomes of plants. After a cup of coffee there was an informal session of interaction between students, instructors and Syngenta staff. In two rounds we had the opportunity to ask anything to the breeders and scientists in four groups of ten people. We ended our visit at Syngenta with a tour around all the company facilities, both the greenhouses and the factory. We got a real insight in the processes Syngenta is dealing with. We found a new orange gadget for our national feeling as well: the breeder showed both purple and orange cauliflowers, and how to maintain the colour after cooking. We thanked the company for the interesting morning and headed off to Leiden.

In NCB Naturalis we were welcomed with a cup of coffee again, and we were impressed by the beautiful lecture hall. It was a pity though that this hall wasn't filled with people at all when our contact person from NCB Naturalis started his introduction. After words about the history, present and future of NCB Naturalis and another introduction about the RUG and the course, two students started their presentation about the funding of exhibitions and collections by stakeholders. Since it's the year of Biodiversity, it was very interesting to talk about the huge amount of specimens NCB Naturalis has in its collections. Although there were only two people of NCB Naturalis present, the statements which were set challenged the public to start another interesting discussion. Recommendations were given to NCB Naturalis, which were really needed. An important part of their weakness is communication in the company itself, but moreover the communication between NCB Naturalis and their public, for example their stakeholders. It's very hard to find a way in showing the public the value of collecting all these specimens, but we got an exclusive chance to get a taste of this. In three groups of seven people, we were led through the huge tower in which NCB Naturalis stores all their specimens. We as biologists weren't able to do anything but admire these massive collections. We spend the rest of our time in the tower, going from department to department to get more and more impressed. At five NCB Naturalis closes their door, which was a pity, because you can spend hours and hours in there...

Safely we arrived at our hostel in The Hague, enjoying the last sunshine while reviewing this successful first day of our studytour.

