



# International Society for Neuroethology

Newsletter/December 2021

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*Eric Warrant*  
President of the ISN



Hello everyone!

As I write, many of you are probably experiencing the stresses and strains of the end of term, trying to balance final university duties before the end-of-year shutdown while preparing for the coming holiday season. For many of us this means Christmas, and a long and much deserved rest with our families. Sadly this holiday season is again going to be rather different because of COVID-19. Even though this year brought with it the hope of protection via vaccination, the recent surge in the new Omicron variant has reinstalled anxiety and worry for many. Travel arrangements are in danger of

cancellation, borders are at risk of closure and many are facing possible lockdowns. Once again we are faced with an uncertain future.

It was this uncertainty that led us to recently send you all a survey to gauge your willingness to attend our Lisbon congress next July. Even though the situation is changing continuously, and the threat of COVID-19 is fluctuating wildly, we thought it would be instructive to know how you all feel about personal attendance at the congress. We are very grateful to all of you who have responded, as it will greatly help us to decide what to do. When we postponed the congress in 2020 we did so with great reluctance. However to run the congress with very few participants would be financially devastating for the society. When we decided back in March 2020 to hold the congress in 2022, we really expected COVID-19 to be well and truly behind us by that time. How wrong we were! Here we are again in the same situation, but just a few months earlier. The Executive Committee hasn't yet discussed the results of the survey, but even if they reveal that running the congress as planned next July is a viable option, we will nonetheless repeat the survey in February next year since the situation is changing quickly. We will make our absolute final decision regarding the Congress after receiving the results of this second survey. It is thus immensely important that you respond to this short survey when you receive it.

Being scientists, we all champion rationality, enlightenment and truth. And like me, you have probably watched aghast as these pillars of democracy and civilisation have been eroded by vested interests, extremist political and religious ideologies and totalitarian despots – and much of it fuelled by a toxic social media environment. For me, it is incredulous that anyone could question or downplay the need to urgently tackle climate change and biodiversity loss. But this is precisely what the government of my own country Australia is doing, mostly for selfish ideological reasons. I find it equally incredulous that anyone could question a life-saving vaccine developed as a result of cutting-edge scientific research, and instead put their trust in absurd conspiracy theories and outright lies (and often dying as a result). Or that hundreds of thousands (or possibly millions) of people in the United States believe that Donald Trump won their recent presidential election when there isn't a shred of credible evidence to support this claim. How is any of this possible?

While my inability to answer this last question causes me some degree of stress, there is one thing I do know with certainty. Science doesn't care about our politics, our ideologies or our beliefs. Scientific facts are precisely that – facts. Whether people wish to “believe” them or not.

And this is why scientific societies like our own play an ever more important role in upholding the truth and unashamedly proclaiming the facts. While the very nature of science requires that even scientific “facts” must be modified as evidence accumulates, this doesn't mean that science cannot be trusted (as some would like to claim). Quite to the contrary – this willingness to change an established view in the face of new evidence is the very reason why science *can* be trusted. In an era when many established institutions of government around the world can no longer be entrusted with the truth, when they knowingly develop policies and legislation based on ideological fairy tales rather than sound scientific facts, this is when scientific societies and learned academies – in collaboration with trustworthy news agencies beyond the clutches of political control – can help keep public discourse honest and factual. Thankfully, despite the erosion of rationality, enlightenment and truth, there are still vast numbers of people like us across the globe who strongly defend these values and actively champion them.

So as we now approach a season that is often associated with light and hope, I wish you and your family a wonderful time of relaxation and renewal and a very happy and prosperous new year. May the year ahead be one in which rationality wins over irrationality, and truth triumphs over lies!

My warmest regards, and I very much hope we all meet in Lisbon next year!

**Eric Warrant**  
**President, ISN**

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## INTRODUCING THE ISN SOCIAL MEDIA TEAM

If you follow ISN on Twitter (@neuroethology), you may have noticed a lot more activity! That is thanks to our new Social Media Team who work together to post, retweet, and like content that is relevant to neuroethologists. Please take a moment to get to know the people behind the tweets and if you haven't done so already, hit that follow button.



**Manal Shakeel**

I am currently doing my PhD at the National Centre for Biological Sciences in Bangalore, India. I am studying foraging and local search behavior in fruit flies and honeybees.

Outside lab, I enjoy doing theatre.



**Jerome Beetz**

My name is Jerome and I am currently postdoc in Basil el Jundi’s lab at the University of Würzburg in Germany. There I perform neural recordings from the sun compass system of tethered flying monarch butterflies to unravel neural mechanisms underlying migration behavior. As a member of the ISN social media team, I hope to inspire scientists to think more comparatively. Over the last years, I experienced that many neural principles of a behavior are shared by invertebrates and vertebrates and I am convinced that we and the ISN as a whole may profit from scientific discussions between those fields. At least this is one of the biggest advantages that the ISN provides because the society is represented by scientists working on a huge diversity of behaviors, techniques and organisms.

During my free time, I enjoy playing soccer and am probably one of only a few Germans who don’t like the taste of beer.



**Manon Jeschke**

Hi, my name is Manon and I’m a first year PhD student at Bielefeld University in Germany. I’m working in the field of insect navigation and in particular, I’m interested in how bees navigate in cluttered environments and how they select routes.

In my free time I love to go hiking, although I’m afraid of heights. No matter how scared I am, at the end the view is always worth it



**Olga Dyakova**

My research interests lie at the intersection of engineering and biology. Particularly, I am fascinated by behaviour and sensory processing. I got a PhD degree in medical science in September 2017 in the Department of Neuroscience at Uppsala University. My thesis was focused on the processes of natural images in the visual system, and I was mainly working with hoverflies. Then, I worked as a postdoctoral researcher at The Autonomous University of

Barcelona. Since early 2021 I’ve been focused on teaching.

I’m a fan of hoverflies and poetry, and I love being in nature.



**Pauline Fleischmann**

I am postdoc (or “temporary principle investigator”) with my own research project at the University of Würzburg. My research focuses on the compass system of *Cataglyphis* desert ants. My aim is to understand how desert ants learn to navigate and how their tiny brains make their incredible navigational performances possible. Desert ants are well-known for navigation by means of path integration using a step integrator and celestial compass cues. We have shown that during initial learning walks, *Cataglyphis* ants rely on the geomagnetic field as a compass cue and only switch later to using celestial cues.

I prefer field work to lab work, tea to coffee, and cats to dogs.



**SCIENCE IS ALSO PROUD**

Written by early career members of the Inclusion and Diversity Committee, **Ayelén Nally** and **Lukas Weiss**.

Since 2018, November 18<sup>th</sup> (1) has become a visibility and awareness day for LGBTQQIP2SAA (2) people in science. Representation and visibility of this community is scarce in science. The objective of this day is therefore to increase diversity and inclusion, and help reduce discrimination and the existent inequalities for entry, access and permanency in the field.

While improving the current situation for many LGBTQQIP2SAA scientists is essential and imperative, we can all start by reflecting on our societies, workplaces, families, and everyday actions. For example: Do the scientific programs of my country/university/institute have an inclusive gender perspective? Do they include LGBTQQIP2SAA categories in their forms? Do they accommodate name changes rapidly in records? Is my workplace a friendly environment where all kinds of people can feel safe and welcome? Do I participate in creating or improving it? Does my workplace have a space to discuss gender or LGBTQQIP2SAA topics? Do

we have a prevention and/or action protocol towards violence? Do we have training on it? Could I recognize casual insensitive humor, even when is not maliciously intended? Do I help reproducing cis-heteronormative stereotypes by action or omission? Does my workplace have a program for entry, access and permanence of LGBTQIP2SAA people? Do I facilitate this for them? Do I assume someone's gender identity, pronouns or sexual orientation?

We believe that being an LGBTQIP2SAA or intersectional identity scientist shouldn't be an obstacle but rather a characteristic that can enrich our work with heterogeneous trajectories, perspectives, ways of developing questions and thinking. Inclusive and diverse science is better science! We proudly celebrate LGBTQIP2SAA existence and resistance, especially in science, as all LGBTQIP2SAA predecessors who found the way to a more diverse STEM community.

- (1) <https://prideinstem.org/lgbtstemday/>
- (2) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Pansexual, 2-Spirited, Asexual, Allies.



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## LIFE AFTER GRADUATE SCHOOL – PART 1: FINDING A POSTDOCTORAL POSITION IN NEUROETHOLOGY

In this first installment of a series on career development, early Career Representative, **Saumya Gupta** demystifies the process of becoming a postdoc.

### Planning Ahead

Before you start applying for postdocs, make sure you have a clear idea about your long-term career goals. Focusing on your career plan may allow you to identify what you want to achieve from a postdoc. For example,

some people might want to expand their skill set, or others might want to use their existing skill set to pursue research that might be different from what they did in their PhD. Potential projects that will fit well into your career plan can increase your chances of success in finding a permanent position.

Once you have a general idea about your future research direction, talk to your PhD advisor and mentors, as they might be able to help you identify potential postdoc advisors. In addition, you might want to start building an academic network around your area of interest. Go to conferences, attend talks related to your area of interest, make a list of researchers you might want to work with, and reach out to them for informal conversations. Sometimes these interactions early on can help you to connect with a PI later when you are looking for a postdoc position. Fortunately, the neuroethology community is close-knit, making it easy to approach PIs. Another great way of networking is by using social media. Follow researchers in your area of interest on Twitter and engage with them to establish connections. You can read more about using social media for career networking in one of our [previous newsletters](#).

### Where To Apply?

There might be several labs all over the world that you are interested in applying to. How do you eventually narrow it down to a small list of labs? Think about what is important to you and what would make you happy. It is critical to think about professional aspirations and research interests, but it is equally important to prioritize your personal preferences, such as geographical location and family situation. Consider all factors to make a list of labs that you would be excited to join and rank them in the order of priority.

Suppose you are flexible in terms of location and want to find a funded project that aligns with your research interests. This is especially relevant for foreign nationals who might have limited opportunities to apply for funding. In this case, you can keep a close eye on job boards popular in your region where people in your research area post jobs. These days most labs post ads about open positions on Twitter and their lab websites. So, following relevant Twitter handles and checking lab websites of PIs is a good idea. The weekly emails from the International Society of Neuroethology (ISN) regarding employment opportunities to members or the [career opportunity page](#) at ISN's website is a great resource to find open neuroethology positions. Remember, not all positions are advertised and sometimes PIs do have the resources to fund a postdoc.



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## When To Start Applying?

Sending in applications and contacting potential advisors 12 months before you want to start the position is a good rule of thumb. This gives you ample time to discuss research projects with PIs and identify funding sources. It also enables you to have some buffer time to find other positions if your top choices do not work out. If you are applying for fellowships, you might want to start as early as 18 months before your start date. This is because some of the fellowship applications can be lengthy, and it can take months before you hear back about the decision from the funding agency. Also, if you are planning to move abroad for your postdoc, consider the visa processing times and moving logistics. The key is to apply *early*.

## How To Apply?

The application process for postdoc positions can be intense and time-consuming. Even if you are sending an email to a PI to inquire about a potential opportunity in their lab, you still need to convey your research interests, why you are excited to work with them, and why they should hire you. Many PIs post specific instructions on their lab website regarding the application materials, which you should follow when sending the initial email. If no instructions are given, email them a CV with the contact information of three referees and a cover letter.

Regardless of how well you know the PI, send them an updated CV that details all your academic accomplishments. Here are some links that you can refer to while preparing a CV:

[38 tips on writing an academic CV](#)  
[CVs and cover letters, Harvard University](#)

A cover letter can be sent as an attachment or as the body of an email. Writing a strong cover letter carefully tailored for each PI's group can play a major role in getting at least an interview with the PI. Mention your long-term career goals, the kind of science you want to do in the future, why you selected their group, and what do you hope to achieve from the postdoc experience in the cover letter. In addition, take this opportunity to capture the interest of the PI by highlighting how your skills and your ideas will help move forward their research program. You can find some excellent online resources on how to write a cover letter and some of those are linked below:

[Write a killer cover letter for a postdoc application](#)  
[Postdoc applications: CV and cover letter](#)  
[How to write a great postdoc cover letter](#)

## The Interview Process

If the PI finds your application interesting, they might ask for a phone/zoom interview and/or call you for an in-person interview. In either case, you will have a meeting with the PI, where they will evaluate whether you will be a good fit in their lab. They might ask you questions about your dissertation work, research projects that you would want to pursue in their lab, or just general questions about what you hope to get out of the postdoc experience. Be sure to prepare for some of the [common questions asked during the postdoc interview](#). However, these interviews should not only be about the PIs evaluating you, but about you evaluating the PIs. So, ask questions about their mentorship style, expectations, etc. Before you meet the PI, it might be helpful to contact former postdocs and ask for their opinions of the PI and the lab. Their feedback can help you in coming up with relevant questions.

If you have an in-person interview (or a second online interview), you might be asked to present your graduate work and meet the lab members. Ask who is going to be the audience in the talk and prepare accordingly. The PI will probably evaluate your oral communication skills, among other things, so be sure to practice the talk several times. Your meeting with lab members can ultimately play an essential role in your decision on whether to join the lab or not. So, regardless of whether you were formally invited to meet the lab or not, reach out to the lab members. Get a sense of the lab culture by asking the lab members to share their experiences (both positive and negative), working environment of the lab (do lab members help each other formally or informally, or do they mostly do independent work), and their opinions of the PI. Not everyone might be willing to discuss potential issues, so it might be beneficial to have a private meeting with as many lab members as possible. Working in a toxic environment can be harmful for your well-being, so make sure not to ignore any red flags while making the important career decision of choosing a postdoc.

Best of luck!

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### EARLY CAREER REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE: FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS ON THE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Members who participate in the ISN Mentorship Program recently responded to a survey about their experiences. Early Career Representative **Claire Rusch** reports on how the program is going thus far.

Do you know where the word ‘mentor’ comes from? In Greek mythology, Mentor is a close friend of Odysseus. When Odysseus left to participate in the Trojan war, he asked Mentor to guide and advise his son, Telemachus. In the end of the 17th century, Francois Fenelon, a French author, wrote “The adventures of Telemachus” and gave a lead role to Mentor. Soon, due to the popularity of the book, the modern application of the term mentor appeared. Today, we define mentoring as a positive relationship, in which a more experienced person (the mentor) guides a less experienced person (the mentee) by sharing knowledge.

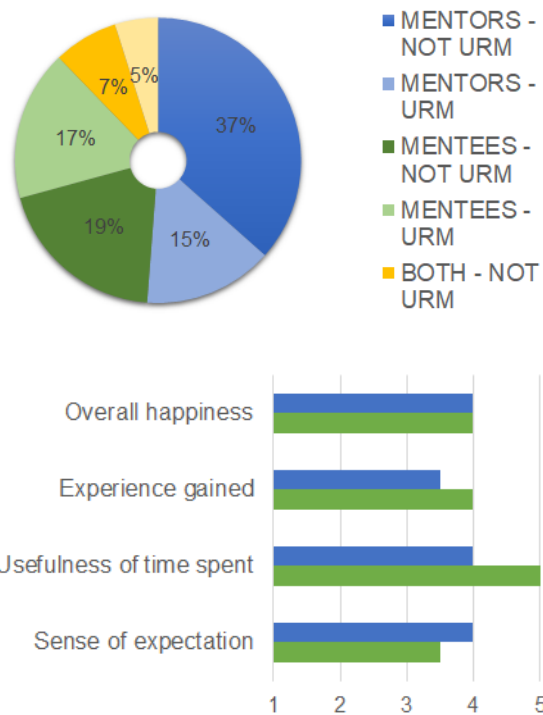
In STEM, there is a tradition of both formal and informal mentoring. Early career scientists, from graduate students to postdoctoral fellows, usually work with an advisor who, hopefully, helps them navigate academia and prepare for the next step of their career. On top of this formal mentoring, informal mentors are often found in the most senior members of a lab, committee members or senior professors in the department. From the mentors' side, informal mentoring can also be extremely beneficial. The sense of satisfaction from helping others develop and sharing their success can be a powerful reward. Many researchers see sharing experience and tacit knowledge about academia as an integral part of their job, a way to give back to the community and be the mentor they had or wish they had. Many senior academics report that informal mentoring made them better mentors for the members of their labs and that they benefit from the new perspectives and enthusiasm that younger scientists can show.

Overall, there is little doubt that seeking out informal mentoring is important, especially at the beginning of an academic career and even more for underrepresented minorities (URM). Many studies have shown that the positive affirmation found through informal mentoring contributes toward the integration of young scientists in their discipline and ultimately impacts their persistence and career in science (e.g., Hernandez et al., 2017; Atkins et al, 2020). Sometimes, informal mentoring is kinder and more supportive than formal advising as the mentors actively engage in mentoring and may better reflect the identity, background, or goals of the mentee. But identifying potential informal mentors and approaching them is not an easy task, especially for those who already feel marginalized or unwelcome in the academic world.

With this in mind, previous ERCs Miriam Henze and Sara Wasserman developed an informal mentoring program in 2019 and accompanied it with a guidelines handbook. They sought out mentors and mentees of different career levels, background, and identity. Two years later, with around 100 participants in the program, we thought it was

a good time to ask for feedback and reflect on the strength and weakness of our program.

We received feedback from 42 participants: 15 mentees, 22 mentors and 5 members that are both mentors and mentees (Fig. 1, left). A little over one third of the participants identified as URM (Fig. 1, top). We asked similar questions to both groups about their expectations and happiness with the program with a scale ranging from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest (Fig. 1, bottom, see legends for the question prompts). First, we are happy to report that both mentees and mentors reported a high level of satisfaction with the program (mentees and mentors: median = 4)! Mentees thought the time spent with their mentors was helpful and they felt supported (median = 5 and 4). When asked if they had a clear sense of the expectations of the mentors, their scoring was a little lower (median = 3.5) but still above the middle of the scale. For the mentors, we observed very similar trends with scores between 3.5 and 4. Expectations from their mentees were clearer for mentors - not surprising given mentors are more experienced. They also felt that



**Fig 1. Top:** Pie chart representing the distribution of the survey respondents (blue: mentors, green: mentees; lighter shades: URM). **Bottom:** Median score for the 4 questions of the survey for mentors (blue) and mentees (green). Responses were asked with a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest agreement and 5 the highest. The four questions were: 1- How happy are you with the program?, 2- Did you gain any valuable experience through this mentorship program?, 3- Do you think that the time you spent with your mentee was helpful to them? or Do you think that the time you spent with your mentor was helpful to you?, and 4- Do you have a clear sense of what expectations your mentee has?

the time spent mentoring was helpful for their mentee. However, their scoring was a little lower when asked if they gained any valuable insight from this program - although they still felt positive about it on average. From this data, our goals for the program could be to help mentees better grasp and set up the expectations for their mentoring partnership. Providing more structure and fostering communication between the mentee and the mentors may also help increase the value of the program for the mentor themselves. This was verified when looking at the suggestions and comments the participants provided. Indeed, as expected when looking at the scores, a suggestion that was often provided concerned making expectations clearer. Although expectations and a framework are proposed in the mentoring guideline available on the ISN website, we plan on providing a document with talking points that mentors and mentees could use to get the conversation flowing, especially for the first meeting(s) and to set up expectations on both sides.

Some mentors were justifiably frustrated by the perceived lack of motivation of their mentees, asking for them to be more proactive. This is a field where we, the ECR, can definitely help! As a mentee, if you think you have difficulty entering in contact with your mentor, please reach to us, we can help facilitate the communication. We also plan to send an email two or three times a year to participants asking how it is going since we know work and life can easily get in the way. I would add that, as there is often a power differential and potentially fear of bothering the more senior members, mentees may appear unmotivated and not proactive. We are not all the equal in our ways of dealing with social and professional relationships. For instance, I remember being frustrated by the lack of response of a mentee before realizing that they were like me: the more time that had passed without them emailing me, the more fearful they were at sending an email. So, if that happens to you as a mentee, please do not hesitate to reach out to us for help in re-starting the conversation. Similarly, if you grow frustrated as a mentor, please also reach out so we can help mediate any potential conflict. Another case where you should reach out is if you don't feel comfortable with your mentee or mentor or do not get anything positive from the interactions. Sometimes, the dyad does not work, and it is totally OK.

Finally, an excellent suggestion that we received from both mentors and mentees is to facilitate one-on-one meetings during the ISN conference. We will definitely look into that! We would also suggest inviting your mentor/mentee to the seminars, talks or posters you are giving whenever possible, especially now that most are online.

To the reader that may still wonder how and why mentoring matters, or wants to know the science behind mentoring, we recommend reading the quite extensive report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine: "The science of effective mentorship in STEMM" published in 2019 (and available for free in their webpage [here](#)).



Make sure your ISN membership is up to date to receive weekly announcements, job posts and meeting updates.

Stay tuned for news about the 2022 ICN in Lisbon, Portugal!



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**NEUROETHOLOGY**

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