

# Just 2000 envelopes to go

In February, WUR entomologists asked the Dutch to ‘swat a mosquito and send it in’ so they could study the dead mosquitoes. The Entomology Mosquito Radar project can’t complain about the response. Photos Guy Ackermans



They have received between 5000 and 6000 envelopes with mosquitoes, says PhD candidate Rody Blom. His task is to open them, along with any colleagues who have time to spare on Mondays and Fridays. They have already sifted through 3500 envelopes.

Today Blom, Master’s student Jet Griep and postdoc Emily Pascoe are working at tables with piles of envelopes. First, they check whether the envelope contains a mosquito. They distinguish between *Culex* (the com-

mon Dutch house mosquito), *Culiseta* (a larger mosquito) and *Anopheles* (the genus that transmits malaria). Everyone who sends in a mosquito also fills in a form with their details including their postcode, so Blom knows where the mosquitoes come from. That lets him see for example whether more mosquitoes survive the winter on the coast compared with inland.

If the dead mosquitoes still contain blood, the researchers can do a blood meal analysis. They use the DNA in

the blood to try and work out what animal the mosquito bit last. The mosquitoes will eventually be sent to Erasmus University in Rotterdam where they will be examined to see if they contain pathogenic viruses. Examples are the West Nile virus, which can cause fever and flu symptoms in humans and horses, and the Usutu virus, which can kill songbirds. ‘We want to get a better understanding of how viruses spread in mosquito populations,’ explains Blom. He still has 2000 envelopes to go.



PhD candidate Rody Blom.

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A lot of people included a card or drawing in their envelope. Nearly all contributors wrapped the mosquitoes in empty bottle tops, just as instructed. Blom keeps the bottle tops, which will go to the foundation for guide dogs for the blind. *AS*