

10 Books from Friesland



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FLANDERS &
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Theunis Piersma

Guests of Summer

An ode to the house martins, who bring summer to Friesland

Guests of Summer presents a lively picture of a small creature in our immediate environment that often goes unnoticed: the house martin. The book offers a fascinating insight into the life cycle and behaviour of a familiar yet enigmatic bird. Rooted in scientific research and larded with historical asides, *Guests of Summer* is above all an ode to a welcome summer visitor.

Why do house martins collect feathers in the air as they fly? And why only white feathers, not black? These are just two of the many questions Theunis Piersma asked as he observed the house martins around his house. They nest in large numbers in his home village in Friesland, Gaast, living close to the villagers. In the summer, that is. In winter they are away, which prompted a neighbour to ask Piersma, an ornithologist, where they go in winter.

Piersma's search for answers to these and other questions resulted in a lovingly

written 'biography' of the house martin. The reason swallows collect white feathers from the air, for example, is because they use them to line their nests, and white feathers, more than black, have disinfectant properties. *Guests of Summer* contains countless intriguing findings like these. In pursuit of his subject, Piersma did not limit himself to Gaast. The fact that the house martin is a migratory bird invites him to explain how ecological systems stretch right across the world.

As well as being an ode to the house martin, *Guests of Summer* – Piersma's first book in his mother tongue, Frisian – is an implicit salute to rural Friesland, where the living is good as long as the house martins return every summer. Piersma succeeds in getting this feeling over to readers who do not know Friesland and rarely if ever see a house martin. No wonder the book has already been published in both a Dutch and an English translation.



Publishing details

Sweltsjes fan Gaast (2014)
136 pp., 27,500 words

Publisher

Bornmeer
Steven Sterk
info@bornmeer.nl

Translations

Zwaluwen van Gaast (Bornmeer, 2014)

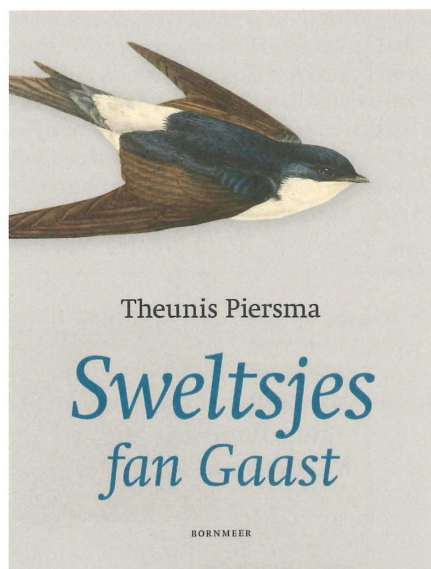
Guests of Summer. A House Martin love story (BTO Books, Thetford, 2016)

'This is a delightful book [...] written by a leading ornithologist and ecologist whose observations of the birds around him are informed by a love of birds but also an understanding of what makes them tick.'
– Mark Avery on the English edition

'Piersma's cheekiness, the self-mockery that pops up here and there [...] and the slightly ironic tone from time to time [...] mean that bird-lovers will not be the only readers to get great enjoyment out of this book.'

– Leeuwarder Courant

'Theunis Piersma has enriched our knowledge of birds and of language.'
– NRC Handelsblad



Theunis Piersma (b. 1958) is Professor of Migratory Bird Ecology in Groningen and a Wadden Sea researcher on the island of Texel. For his ground-breaking book about migratory birds he was awarded the Spinoza Prize, the highest scientific award in the Netherlands. With countless publications to his name, he is regarded as an international authority in his field. Moreover, he knows how to convey his scientific insights to the public at large.

Photo: Rob Buiter

Exploring the Literary Landscape of Friesland

Friesland, the most northwesterly province of the Netherlands, is bilingual; everyone speaks Dutch, but a large proportion of the population also speaks Frisian. That has been the case for centuries. The development of Frisian as a written language is a fascinating story. In mediaeval times Frisian was used for official texts in Friesland and its neighbouring regions on the North Sea coast. Between 1600 and 1900 it was mainly a spoken language, with an astonishing number of dialects, and the written form was used only by writers and poets.

From 1820 onwards Frisian literature was given a powerful boost in the province by the three Halbertsma brothers, who with their incisive and extremely popular writings laid the foundations for what was later to become Frisian literature. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century, however, that the language was given a place in public life and in education, and acquired the status of the second official language of the Netherlands.

No literature can exist purely because it has writers and poets; they need publishers and readers. Most Frisian publishers are to be found in Friesland, but many of their readers live outside the province. There are a number of literary magazines which offer a platform to writers, and they have become more important than ever because of their presence on the internet and the literary gatherings they organize. Alongside and around the magazines, a cultural infrastructure has developed over time that is supported by the state and by the province.

For writers and poets using Frisian, the potential readership is limited, but the sensuality and powerful imagery of the language, as well as its unique idioms and humour, have an appeal that refuses to tailor itself to practical considerations.

For many authors and poets, Frisian is the best language in which to express what they want to say. Frisian literature is both rich and broad.

All this explains why the Province of Fryslân and the Dutch Foundation for Literature have joined forces over the past four years to bring Frisian literature to the attention of other countries. In this brochure we present a diverse selection of Frisian prose, poetry, non-fiction and young adult literature, compiled by the Frisian publishing world, and information about all the Frisian titles that have been selected since this collaboration began: a total of twenty-five titles that represent the best of modern Frisian literature.

Frisian authors during the Frankfurt Book Fair

Friday 21 October, 3.30 – 4.30 pm, Hall 5.0, C88
Frysk auf dem Tisch – Taal op tafel – Language on the Table

Three authors featured in this brochure will present their work during the Frankfurt Book Fair. Poet Tsead Bruinja will read from his collection *Vacuum Cleaner Singers*, Willem Schoorstra will present, in words and music, *Rêdbâd. Chronicles of a King* about a Frisian king of the early Middle Ages, and Anne Feddema will read from his short story collection *Cheetah's Tears*.

Writer and poet Eeltsje Hettinga and video artist Lotte Middendorp will show a number of short poetry clips that are part of the digital literary project It Font (www.itfont.nl), in which poetry, visual arts, readings and music are closely intertwined.

Books from Friesland

is distributed to international editors and publishers. Please contact us if you would like to be included on our mailing list.

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