

Ph.D. Opportunity on a Human-Wildlife Coexistence Project

Project: Human-wildlife interactions and effectiveness of a toolkit in mitigation of Human-Wildlife Conflict within communal conservancies of Namibia

The Namibia University of Science & Technology (NUST) and the Ecology Department at the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) are seeking one candidate to study human-wildlife interactions in Namibia for a Ph.D. project. The student will be registered for a Ph.D. project at NUST and will be supervised directly by scientists affiliated with NUST and CCF. The Ph.D. project will be part of a broader program involving a larger team and further details of the broader context will be discussed with shortlisted candidates at the interview stage.

Duration:

3 years

Stipend:

Yes

Proposed Start Date:

2024 (exact date TBD)

Project Summary:

Navigating human-wildlife coexistence is a challenging conservation endeavour for rural communities, protected area managers, scientists, and policy makers worldwide. In Namibia, communal conservancies support rural communities and wildlife, but are also affected by human-wildlife conflict (HWC). This Ph.D. project aims to document and model the nature and extent of human-wildlife interactions and measure effectiveness of a toolkit in mitigation of HWC within two conservancy clusters of eastern and western Namibia through (i) development of a spatially explicit model for carnivore and elephant occurrence and mapping areas of conservation importance for biodiversity; (ii) assessment of the extent of perceived losses to wildlife and mapping of risky areas; (iii) generating baseline data on socio-cultural aspects of local communities, human-wildlife relations, farming practices and locally adapted HWC mitigation measures; and iv) evaluating efficacy of a new HWC mitigation toolkit.

Methodology:

The Ph.D. project will involve a mixture of intensive data collection in the field and desk-based data analysis. Main field methods will include camera trapping and questionnaire surveys with rural communities. The student will be expected to deploy camera traps and monitor them in collaboration with game guards, community members and CCF project team. The student will also administer questionnaire surveys assisted by other project personnel. Additionally, the student may need to visit sites of HWC incidence and may also be asked to assist the CCF scat detection dog team for recording animal sign. The student will also be expected to compile and/or inspect historic data on wildlife and HWC records from dedicated databases maintained by various project partners.

The student will be responsible for data entry and organization from camera trap and questionnaire surveys. He/she will analyse the data using statistical and spatial techniques as well as social science methodologies. In preparation for analysis, the student will assemble a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database of relevant environmental and anthropogenic factors.

The Ph.D. thesis will be expected to integrate the ecological and social information from the surveys for examining human-wildlife interactions. Based on the statistical outputs the student will identify risky areas and map HWC hotspots within the study regions. Once the hotspots are identified, the student will work with the broader program team to design, pilot and assess the effectiveness of a HWC mitigation toolkit within selected sites.

Requirements:

The ideal candidate should have a keen interest in interdisciplinary research, involving wildlife ecology and social sciences and a strong academic track-record (M.Sc. degree in wildlife/natural resources/ecology/conservation or a related field). He/she should have critical thinking, quantitative analytical skills, possess a keen interest in conservation science and animal ecology, be an independent thinker and be able to work in remote and harsh conditions for long periods of time. Proficiency with Q-GIS/ArcGIS, use of remote sensing data, data management and handling large datasets, and working with R studio will be advantageous.

Applicants should ideally be Namibian nationals or permanent residents and speakers of some of the local languages of the study sites, however SADC residents with exceptional potential fit to this position may be considered. Candidates must possess a valid full driver license, have experience driving a 4x4 vehicle and working with local communities, ideally on HWC issues. Prior camping and extensive hiking experience are highly preferred. Preference will be given to students who have demonstrated background working independently and in small teams, collaborating with multiple stakeholders, and working closely with local community members. The student will work in collaboration with other Namibian students and international researchers, and ability to communicate effectively in English will be essential.

In addition to data collection, analysis and thesis write-up, the student will be expected to lead scientific research articles based on the thesis under the supervision of the Ph.D. committee. He/she will need to participate in regular meetings, have input in reports, write online blogs and social media posts, and prepare posters to popularize the project. In addition, the student will be expected to write popular science articles presenting their project and results.

The successful candidate will be registered at NUST but primarily expected to live on site at CCF and to carry out frequent field data collection in the study sites.

To apply:

Interested candidates should send:

- a motivation letter of maximum 1-page (detailing why you are well-suited to undertake this Ph.D. project, including your previous experience, your skills, your general area of interest and long-term career goals)
- a detailed CV of maximum 5-pages that includes your academic and professional qualifications, previous work experience, skills, a list of scientific and/or popular publications which you have (co)authored, and a list of presentations or posters at conferences and workshops
- names and contact details of two academic referees
- proof of academic qualifications (including diplomas and transcripts)
- 2 examples of written work (e.g., paper/article, report, book chapter, M.Sc./Hons thesis, conference/workshop abstract)

We expect the documents above as .pdf format attachments to one e-mail to be sent to the following address: bogdan@cheetah.org Please use "Ph.D. Application HWC" in the subject line of the e-mail. We look forward to your application by 1-July-2024. Due to volume of applications, we will not be able to provide feedback on individual applications. Only shortlisted candidates will be conducted to set up interviews, which will take place virtually on Zoom.