**The impact of large carnivore recolonisation on ecological function in Northern Greece**

*Assessing the impact of brown bears at the landscape scale.*

An opportunity for a fully-funded PhD studentship is currently being offered by the Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences at UWE Bristol.

Closing date for applications is Monday 6th February 2017.

About the studentship

This studentship provides an opportunity to monitor the ongoing recolonization of montane habitats by Eurasian brown bears (*Ursus arctos arctos*) in Northern Greece, and the impacts this may have on the ecological function.

Europe is one of the few continents in the world where large carnivores are actively expanding their range. This provides an opportunity to study the impacts that the restoration of large carnivores have on landscape-scale processes such as pollination, seed dispersal and grazing pressure by prey species. The impacts that grey wolves (*Canis lupus*) can have on ecological function are well described from some locations, most notably Yellowstone National Park, but there is currently little data to suggest how general these impacts are across different taxa and landscapes.

The Eurasian brown bear is recolonising patches of suitable habitat along a putative corridor which runs between core populations in the Pindos (Greece) and Rhodopi Mountains in Bulgaria. This project will assess the current level of landscape permeability for bears to move into recolonisation zones (i.e. habitats suitable for bear), assess the current level of bear activity in these areas and correlate this with parameters of ecological function.

The aims of this project are to:

1. Develop and evaluate novel methods to track the movement of bears through habitat corridors using invertebrate-derived DNA (iDNA)
2. Assess the functionality of landscape-scale habitat corridors for bear movements between core populations
3. Elucidate the impacts that bears may have on ecological function, even at low density

The student undertaking this project will receive in-depth training in ecological and genetic survey techniques and experience of working closely with strategic collaborators.

Funding details

The studentship will start on April 3rd 2017 and consists of an annual tax-free stipend of £14,296 subject to satisfactory progress, for three years. In addition, full-time tuition fees will be covered for three years.

**Supervision team and research environment**

This PhD studentship will be based at UWE Bristol. The supervisory team will comprise Dr Mark Steer (Director of Studies), Dr David Fernandez and Dr Joel Allainguillaume. The student will have regular meetings with the Director of Studies and input from other members of the team in response to the specific needs of the student and the research. This studentship develops UWE conservation research program in an exciting new direction, building on our expertise in landscape-scale ecology and novel monitoring mechanisms.

* Dr Mark Steer, Senior Lecturer in Conservation Ecology (UWE Bristol), is a practical conservation biologist with an interest in genetic survey techniques and ecological networks.
* Dr David Fernandez, Lecturer in Conservation Ecology (UWE Bristol), is a wildlife conservation biologist. He uses a multidisciplinary approach to monitor and study wildlife populations, identity and evaluate conservation threats, and translate the results of these studies into informed policy recommendations..
* Dr Joel Allainguillaume, Senior Lecturer in Molecular Genetics (UWE Bristol), is a molecular geneticist who’s work centres on the application of molecular and genomics approaches to address problems of agronomic, ecological and conservational importance.

The PhD student will join the Centre for Research in Biosciences (CRIB) which brings together world class multidisciplinary, collaborative research with focus on the following themes: agri-food, biomedicine, bio-sensing, plant science and environmental science. CRIB addresses both, fundamental and applied aspects of research. Close links with national and international academic partners, health organisations and industry ensure that our research has real social and economic impact.

The PhD student will be a member of the Faculty of Health & Applied Sciences, which provides a programme of training and support for PhD students. This includes access to any relevant UWE modules, or external university modules/courses to meet their specific training needs for 60 Master’s level credits. Additional short courses are available free of charge to all postgraduate research students through the Graduate School Researcher Development Programme which is delivered by the UWE Graduate School.

**Why choose this PhD? This studentship:**

* Provides in-depth training in ecological and genetic survey techniques and landscape-scale conservation strategies.
* Is a great opportunity to work closely with strategic collaborators in a research capacity, helping to guide practical conservation projects to safeguard terrestrial ecosystems and influence policy.
* Will generate vital data regarding the current status of bear populations in Greece and the impact that they have on the ecosystems in which they are found.
* To join a strong research centre with excellent facilities including laboratories at UWE Bristol.

We are looking for a highly motivated and enthusiastic student capable of working independently with a broad interest in ecology and conservation. They should be willing to learn and develop the interdisciplinary skills required for this project.

This project will involve long periods of fieldwork in northern Greece, therefore it is essential that the applicant is a fluent Greek speaker and desirable that they have an existing knowledge of the habitats and study areas. Experience of GIS is essential with experience of mapping and modelling habitat corridors desirable. Although the successful student will receive in-depth training it is desirable that applicants have some experience of molecular work. The successful applicant will be working primarily in an academic environment, supported by a range of experts and should demonstrate a willingness to engage with collaborating organisations, such as local NGOs and regulatory bodies to whom this work will be of interest.

Applicants must have a good honours degree (2.1 or equivalent) in Biological or Environmental disciplines. A relevant Masters qualification is desirable, but not essential if the applicant has relevant research experience. If the language of first degree or Master’s degree is not English, a recognised [English language qualification](http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/comingtouwe/internationalstudents/internationalstudyatuwe/englishlanguagerequirements.aspx) is required.

How to apply

Please read the further details document.

Download and complete the [application form](http://www2.uwe.ac.uk/services/Marketing/research/doc/graduate-school/studentships/Application%20Form%20%28Studentships%202014%29.docx) and send it directly to the [UWE Graduate School](http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/postgraduateresearchstudy/contactuwegraduateschool.aspx). Please ensure you **include the title** of the research project you propose to undertake and detail why you are interested in undertaking this PhD project and what relevant knowledge, experience and qualifications you would bring to the research.

Please also complete the [Equal Opportunities form](http://www2.uwe.ac.uk/services/Marketing/research/doc/graduate-school/EqualOpportunitiesForm.doc) and complete the first section of the [Application reference sheet](http://www2.uwe.ac.uk/services/Marketing/research/doc/graduate-school/ReferenceSheet.doc) before sending to your nominated referees.

For an informal discussion about the studentship, please contact Dr Mark Steer mark.steer@uwe.ac.uk 0117 32 83496.

Closing date

The closing date for applications is **Monday 6th February 2017.**