

**The Department of Biology at Ghent University is seeking to fill a full-time PhD position vacancy (m/f) on Avian Foodweb Ecology in Fragmented Landscapes**

While habitat fragmentation is increasingly recognized as one of the prime drivers underlying the current global biodiversity crisis, changes in foodweb dynamics resulting from habitat fragmentation have so far received scant attention in functional biodiversity studies. By applying state-of-the-art tools from ecological, forestry and epidemiological research disciplines within a unique plot design, biologists, bio-engineers and wildlife vets of Ghent University aim to fill this gap by scaling up functional biodiversity research from a classical plot to a landscape level, and from producer dynamics to predator fitness. The research consortium that conducts this ambitious, 6 year research program will host 6 PhD students, each focusing on particular components of the terrestrial food web. **Project** This PhD project focuses on how tree diversity and the spatial configuration of broad-leaved forest fragments affect the ecology, health and performance of a secondary avian predator (great tit, *Parus major*), and how this shapes its predatory impact on arthropod populations (herbivore control). Higher nutritional quality in more diverse forests is thereby predicted to improve health by facilitating a better development of avian immunity and thereby reducing disease susceptibility. A highly fragmented habitat, in turn, is predicted to reduce health through an increase in the use of anthropogenic (lower quality) food and pathogen exposure at forest boundaries, owing to increased contact with human habitation. The successful applicant will implement a variety of field-, aviary- and lab-tools, and will work closely together with other PhD students, field assistants and postdocs. **Profile** You hold a Master degree in Biology or an equivalent Life Sciences degree, with a strong background in population and community ecology. You are an enthusiastic and motivated student who can deal with long hours in the field, aviary and lab. You have excellent organizational, writing and presentation skills and are capable of working both independently and within a multidisciplinary team. Prior experience with ornithology and/or foodweb ecology is highly recommended but not restrictive.

**Offer** A Ph.D. scholarship for one year (starting between 1 Jan and 1 Feb 2015) with a three-year extension after positive evaluation. Enrolment in the Ghent Doctoral School training program that offers various courses, training programs and conferences within and outside the university. Membership of the Terrestrial Ecology Unit, a dynamic research group that combines field, lab and modelling approaches to study various questions in ecological and evolutionary research ( <

<http://www.ecology.ugent.be/terec/index.php>

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[luc.lens@ugent.be](mailto:luc.lens@ugent.be)

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[luc.lens@ugent.be](mailto:luc.lens@ugent.be)

**The deadline for application is Friday 14 November 2014, 17 pm**

; interviews of short-listed candidates will start soon afterwards. For more information, contact Luc Lens ( <mailto:

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