MSc thesis opportunity Behavioural Ecology group, Wageningen University, The Netherlands ***Mate preference in great tits - a matter of taste?***

We are looking for MSc students to work on an exciting project testing birds for mate preferences in winter (experiments), and studying reproductive investment in nesting great tits in the spring (fieldwork). Female choice for top quality males is expected to result in the evolution of exaggerated male secondary sexual characters. A strong directional preference for the 'best' males and their specific heritable traits would theoretically cause a fast decline in genetic variation among males. In natural populations under sexual selection however, diversity in ornaments and genes is still present. How, then, is genetic variation within populations maintained in the presence of sexual selection? Our project proposes that individuals may vary in their mate preference. Variation in mate preferences may weaken the strong directional selection on ornaments and thereby it may allow diversity to persist. Mate preferences Which characters are important when females choose males? Do males choose attractive females? Which characters are important to them? Do individuals vary in their preference? Does this variation depend on the choosers' own characteristics? Starting from December 2014 or January 2015 Reproductive investment Which characters influence reproductive investment? Do individuals find a partner with characters that meet their previously tested preferences? How does the difference between partner preference and the actual partner influence reproductive investment and extra-pair paternity? Starting from March or April 2015

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r more information contact Lies Zandberg (
lies.zandberg@wur.nl
) or

Camilla Hinde (
camilla.hinde@wur.nl