

Research Assistant/Master Student Position at Chimp Field Site Jan-Dec 2024

We are looking for a field research assistant to help collect observational behavioral data for my Ph.D. project on mechanisms and motivation in chimpanzee learning with the Development and Evolution of Cognition Research group at the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior. The data will be collected on wild chimpanzees at the **Budongo Conservation Field Station** from **Jan-Dec 2024** (12-month field stay). There is the option of combining this with a Master's project, given that the student is enrolled and officially supervised at a University.

Project

Over the last decades, research has documented a wide range of learned behaviors in wild chimpanzees. These behavioral repertoires are sustained through different learning strategies, i.e., explorative and observational learning processes. However, the use and development of these processes remain understudied. With this project we aim to understand how wild chimpanzees learn, how they make use of different strategies, and which factors influence their learning.

Field Site

The Budongo Forest Reserve is located in North-Western Uganda, above Lake Albert, which forms the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The area spans over 400km² of continuous forest cover with an incredibly diverse range of plants, insects, birds, and mammals. The Budongo Forest Reserve is home to multiple chimpanzee communities. For more info, see <http://www.budongo.org/about/>

Budongo is a fairly large field site that usually hosts multiple researchers at a time. Living conditions are basic. Food consists of a limited range of grains and vegetables (eg. mostly rice and beans) and is mostly vegetarian. The applicant will have their own room. Solar panels provide enough power to charge equipment, depending on the weather power is limited. Mobile reception usually allows to send WhatsApp messages, better connection can be found in villages/towns close by. Researchers do rarely leave the camp.

Tasks/Daily Work

We are looking for a good, motivated, and detail-oriented observer who will collect observational behavioral data on wild chimpanzees. Observational data is collected through daily focal follows: We follow one individual chimpanzee throughout the day, collecting general behavioral data in 3min intervals and additionally all occurrence data on behaviors that are of special interest to us. This type of data collection requires the ability to stay focused for many hours. While following the chimpanzees, the applicant will always be together with a local field assistant. The applicant will further assist with preparing and maintaining a field experiment. Aside from collecting data, the applicant will clean, sort, label, and store the collected data directly after data collection.

Work in the forest is demanding. We follow chimpanzees from morning till late afternoon, often covering long distances in a day. This requires stamina and physical fitness. The forest is often covered in thicket and parts of the forest are swampy, making it difficult to get ahead. The applicant should not be bothered by mud, insects, or anything else that is typical for a rainforest.

Position outline

- Field stay of 12 months from January to December 2024.
- Costs covered: One round trip (including flights, other means of transport, hotel stays), visa and permit fees (including transport and hotel stay in Kampala), camp fees, food.
- The position comes with a monthly living stipend.
- Potential Master project topics can be discussed individually. The topic will fall within the scope of my PhD project, but can be selected and adjusted according to the background, interests, and preferences of the student.

Requirements

- Ability to stay focused, motivated, and attentive to details over long periods of time and for repetitive tasks
- Physical fitness
- Resilience to psychological stress, isolated living, little private space
- Awareness and acceptance of cultural differences
- Good at working (and living) in groups
- English fluency
- Great interest in the topic, demonstrated by course work and achievements in animal behavior/primatology/comparative psychology/cognitive science or related fields
- Experience with R **desired (for Master students)**
- Experience with or training in linear models, ideally GLMMs **desired (for Master students)**
- Previous field experience or experience collecting behavioural observational data **desired**

Applications

Please send your applications (short motivation letter, CV preferably in English, German possible) to nslania@ab.mpg.de until **November, 20th 2023**. Since we will work and live together closely for weeks, it would be nice if you could tell me something about yourself (apart from primate-related things), too!

Nora Slania, 20.10.2023

PhD Student

Development and Evolution of Cognition Research Group

Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior