PhD Opportunity at the University of Waikato

Fuel for Recovery: Using food-web science to improve translocation success



Conservation translocations are a cornerstone of threatened species recovery in Aotearoa New Zealand, yet outcomes vary considerably among species and sites despite intensive invasive predator management. One potential reason is that habitat assessments typically focus on predation risk while overlooking food availability as a fundamental driver of population establishment and persistence. This PhD project will investigate how invertebrate food resources influence the success of translocated bird populations, using the North Island robin (toutouwai) as a model to inform conservation of the critically endangered Chatham Island black robin (karure/kakaruia). The student will combine field ecology, molecular diet analysis, invertebrate monitoring, and population modelling to quantify the relative importance of food limitation, competition with invasive insectivores, and predation in determining translocation outcomes.

We are seeking an independent and highly motivated applicant with:

- A strong academic background in animal community ecology, behavioural ecology, conservation biology or a closely related discipline.
- Experience in ecological field work
- Experience in invertebrate identification and molecular techniques (or a strong willingness to learn)
- Strong statistical analytical skills (preferably in R)
- Excellent communication skills in English (written and spoken)
- A full driver's license

This PhD position is fully funded by the George Mason Endowment Fund for Natural Environmental Research for 3 years (an annual stipend of $35,000, plus tuition fees). We encourage both international and domestic students to apply for this position, which will be jointly based in the Invertebrate Behavioural Ecology and EcoDiv labs at the University of Waikato in Kirikiriroa/Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand. The candidate will be under the Chief Supervision of Dr Chrissie Painting, and co-supervised by Dr Andrew Barnes (University of Waikato) and Dr Kevin Parker (Parker Conservation).

Interested candidates should send applications as **a single PDF** document comprising 1) a letter of motivation that clearly outlines your interest in the advertised project, 2) a curriculum vitae, 3) academic transcripts, and 4) contact details for two academic references to Dr Chrissie Painting (chrissie.painting@waikato.ac.nz). **Deadline for applications: 30th November 2026 or until filled.**