

August 2026
PhD positions
Freshwater Ecology

Four Fully Funded UC Connect PhD Scholarships

Working in New Zealand's Iconic Braided Rivers

The University of Canterbury and the Department of Conservation (DOC) invite applications for four interconnected UC Connect PhD Scholarships in their collaborative research programme.

Working as part of the [Freshwater Ecology Research Group \(FERG\)](#), you'll join a collaborative cohort of PhD students, University of Canterbury researchers and DOC staff investigating the ecological processes that sustain New Zealand's iconic braided rivers.

Together, these four projects will investigate the ecological processes that sustain braided river ecosystems, from ecosystem functioning and biological invasions to species persistence, ecological connectivity and freshwater restoration. The programme contributes directly to DOC's [Ngā Awa River Restoration Programme](#) and [Critical Ecosystem Pressures Programme \(CRESP\)](#), generating knowledge to support conservation management across the nationally significant Upper Rakitata catchment as part of the [Rakitata River revival programme](#). Combining ecological theory with applied conservation, you'll help answer fundamental ecological questions while producing science that directly informs freshwater management and restoration.

Choose Your Research Journey

Position one

Silent Invasion: Managing Invasive Aquatic Plants in High-country Spring Ecosystems

Investigate the ecological processes driving aquatic weed invasions in spring ecosystems, their effects on biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, and identify restoration approaches that best protect these freshwater habitats.

Work at the interface of invasion ecology, restoration ecology and conservation practice.

[Silent invasion: Managing Invasive Aquatic Plants in High-country Spring Ecosystems | UC](#)

Position two

Finding Refuge: Understanding the Upland Longjaw Galaxias in Dynamic Braided Rivers

How do rare species persist in environments that are constantly changing? Explore how floods, habitat connectivity and landscape dynamics shape the persistence of one of New Zealand's rarest freshwater fish while informing its long-term conservation.

Work at the interface of disturbance ecology, landscape ecology and conservation practice.

[Finding Refuge: Understanding the Upland Longjaw Galaxias in Dynamic Braided Rivers | UC](#)



Further Information

PhD study at the University of Canterbury
www.canterbury.ac.nz/postgrad/

School of Biological Sciences
www.canterbury.ac.nz/science/schools/biological-sciences/

Freshwater Ecology Research Group
www.ferg.org.nz

Primary supervisors

- [Prof. Angus McIntosh](#)
- [Dr Helen Warburton](#)

*Te Kura Pūtaiao Koiora
School of Biological Sciences*

Position three

Understanding How Stable Spring Habitats Help Sustain Dynamic Braided Rivers

How do spring ecosystems contribute to biodiversity, ecosystem functioning, ecosystem services and the resilience of braided rivers? Discover how stable spring habitats contribute to ecosystem resilience and help guide future conservation and restoration.

Work at the interface of ecosystem ecology, food-web ecology and conservation practice.

[Understanding How Stable Spring Habitats Help Sustain Dynamic Braided Rivers | UC](#)

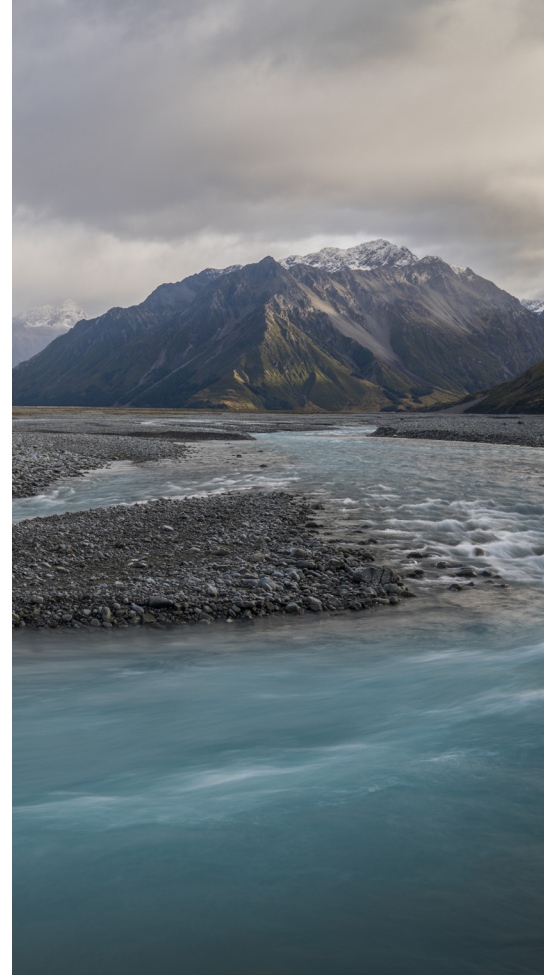
Position four

Where Rivers Meet Land: Understanding the Freshwater Foundations of Braided River Birds

What shapes the resilience of braided river bird populations? Investigate how flow regimes, aquatic food resources, predators and habitat interact to influence threatened braided river birds. Identify the factors that most strongly determine population resilience, and use this knowledge to improve conservation management, monitoring design and restoration.

Work at the interface of aquatic and terrestrial ecology, quantitative ecology and conservation practice.

[Where Rivers Meet Land: Understanding the Freshwater Foundations of Braided River Birds | UC](#)



Why Join This Programme?

- **Fully funded** three-year UC Connect PhD Scholarship
- **NZ\$32,650 annual tax-free stipend**, full tuition fees and additional research funding
- Join a collaborative **cohort of four PhD students** tackling complementary ecological questions
- Work alongside leading University of Canterbury researchers, DOC scientists and conservation practitioners
- Contribute directly to **DOC's Ngā Awa River Restoration Programme** and **Critical Ecosystem Pressures Programme**
- Access long-term ecological datasets, established monitoring programmes and specialist field equipment
- Conduct research in the spectacular braided rivers and high-country spring ecosystems of the **Upper Rakitata catchment**
- Develop internationally recognised ecological research while helping shape freshwater conservation and restoration in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Who We're Looking For

We're seeking enthusiastic students with a background in ecology, freshwater science or a related discipline who enjoy field research, quantitative ecology and collaborative science. We welcome applicants with diverse experiences and perspectives, including mātauranga Māori, kaupapa Māori research and community-led conservation.

Apply

Applications close 15 September 2026.

This is a [UC Connect Scholarship](#) and applications must be made through the [Scholarship Portal](#). *Emailed applications will not be considered.* Find out more or contact the primary supervisors via the project links.



Ngā Awa river restoration

working together from mountains to sea



*Te Kura Pūtaiao Koiora
School of Biological Sciences*