

Scholarship opportunity: Restoring a Kentish icon: feasibility of reintroducing the Chough to Kent

We are seeking applications for a [PhD in Biodiversity Management](#) supported by the University of Kent's Vice Chancellor's Research Scholarship Fund. Applicants need to be versatile with a demonstrable aptitude for conservation science, interdisciplinary research and quantitative analysis, together with an interest in bird conservation and/or reintroduction biology.

Supervisors: [Dr Bob Smith](#), [Prof Richard Griffiths](#), [Prof Jim Groombridge](#) & [Dr Dave Roberts](#)

Advisor: Professor Carl Jones MBE.

The science of reintroducing species back into the wild has evolved into a distinct branch of conservation science. The [Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology](#) has been working at the forefront of species conservation and reintroduction biology with partners around the world for over two decades. An opportunity has now arisen to apply this experience and expertise locally, with an analysis of the feasibility of bringing back the iconic Red-billed Chough to Kent. The Chough population has become highly fragmented with several isolated populations around the coast of Britain. The Chough was once more widespread and formerly occurred as far east as Kent where it became extinct c. 160 years ago. However, it still lives on in the Coat of Arms of Canterbury City and the University of Kent, and potential habitat remains in Kent, with large areas of nature reserves and farmland across the Dover area.

Partners

This project builds on the experience of Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust who led the Chough reintroduction to Jersey through the [Birds on the Edge project](#). The project will also partner with [Operation Chough](#), based at Paradise Park in Cornwall, who have led the ex situ components of the reintroduction programme; and [Wildwood Trust](#) in Kent, a leading centre for the conservation and rewilding of British Wildlife.

Aims & Objectives

1. *Habitat suitability analysis*: this will involve combining an ecological assessment of potential release sites with an impact and risk assessment of a potential reintroduction. This will require spatial analysis and species distribution modelling using GIS.
2. *Assessment of local attitudes to a proposed reintroduction*: this will use social science methods to gather quantitative and qualitative data on awareness, attitudes, and knowledge of the Chough and broader conservation issues among the wider local community.
3. *Systematic conservation planning assessment*: This will involve working with local NGO and government groups to map the different protected areas and management activities in the focal area, and identify sites where habitat management would support Chough conservation.
4. *Flagship species potential*: this will use choice experiments and other social science methods to identify whether the Chough would make a suitable flagship species for different target audience groups, including neighbouring communities and visiting tourists.

Training

The project will require a versatile student who will be trained in both social science and natural science survey methods, GIS and species distribution modelling. The student will be required to take forward dialogue with local organisations, identifying potential release sites with them through

applying the research, and help produce a reintroduction plan in conjunction with IUCN/SSC (2013) guidelines. The student will be expected to undertake some teaching as a Graduate Teaching Assistant on undergraduate programmes.

Funding

£14,296 (2016/17 rate) plus tuition fees at the Home/EU rate. This scholarship is administered under the [Graduate Teaching Assistant Scheme](#)

Applications

Applicants should have at least a 2:1 Honours degree and a good MSc in a relevant subject. Graduates who can demonstrate equivalent relevant experience to MSc level through professional work, research and publications may also be considered.

Applications should comprise of a covering letter (1 page) and CV (2 pages max including the names and contact details of two referees) and should be sent to Dr Bob Smith (R.J.Smith@kent.ac.uk) by **midnight on May 8th 2017**.

Further information

Application deadline: midnight on May 8th 2017

Interview: May 18th 2017

Start date: 16 September 2017

Programme: PhD

Mode of Study: Full time

Studentship Length: 3 years