PhD placement/PIPS: Evaluating a landscape scale conservation strategy in Madagascar

Placement supervisor:
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Placement department:
Trait Diversity and Function

Placement overview and objectives:
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew is leading a consortium of conservation and development partners as part of a major £10m investment in Madagascar, through the Defra Biodiverse Landscapes Fund. Building on over 100 years of combined community-based conservation experience in Madagascar, and mobilising a predominately Malagasy team, we seek to deliver a data driven and evidence-based model for the sustainable management of Madagascar’s protected areas (PAs), that tackles poverty, biodiversity loss and climate change in unison.

For as long as protected areas solely represent resource-rich islands in a landscape of critically compromised natural capital, they will inevitably be subjected to increasing pressure. The biodiversity and carbon they hold will be eroded, along with the ecosystem services they provide, whilst dependent livelihoods will become increasingly vulnerable. By investing in local needs and enhancing the natural capital of the surrounding landscapes we hope to reduce pressures on the natural ecosystems on which these communities rely. Reducing such pressures, allows the protection and restoration of PAs within Madagascar to ensure provision of myriad ecosystem services that will continue to feed and support communities in the future.

Our activities in Madagascar span from landscape reforestation and restoration, through to climate smart agriculture, village savings and loan schemes and community patrols. There are multiple opportunities to support this innovative new conservation programme, that would particularly suit someone interested in developing skills in impact evaluation, monitoring and evaluation and understanding conservation effectiveness.

You would have the opportunity to join a diverse international team, focused on one of the world’s most biodiverse countries. A major feature of this project is integration and management of data, to critically evaluate the most impactful and cost-effective conservation and livelihood interventions. We welcome applicants with diverse interests and backgrounds to contribute to this approach.
Tasks to be undertaken/possible projects:

Project ideas.

- Counterfactual analysis of conservation impacts on target protected areas in Western Madagascar
- Using vegetation survey data to understand forest recovery.
- Supporting the deployment of large-scale app-based citizen science data collection.
- Understanding the impact of agricultural expansion on protected areas.
- Building a landscape scale natural capital model.

Required skills and experience:

- Basic familiarity with a coding language such as R
- Basic understanding of ecology or related discipline would be advantageous (however, we are interested in people with a different academic background joining our team to bring new and challenging ideas).

Skills and areas of knowledge that can be developed:

- Understanding how large scale, international and collaborative conservation programmes operate.
- Understand how a diverse group of NGOs and conservation organisations operate outside of academia.
- Understanding major conservation and livelihood challenges in Madagascar
- Understanding robust statistical approaches to understand conservation effectiveness.

Location of work:
Kew, Richmond. Hybrid working.

Length of placement:
3 months but can be longer if you desire.