Shorebird conservation - fieldwork assistant in South Africa (Sept – Nov 2022)

Supervisors: **Dr Narhulan Halimbekh** (University College London), **Dr Robert Thomson** (University of Cape Town), **Prof. Tamás Székely** (University of Bath & Debrecen)

Climate change and other human activities are affecting organisms at global scale, causing downwards trends across many taxa. There are increasing numbers of studies aimed at understanding how climate change and human activities influence the survival and reproduction of wild populations. Social behaviours, especially mating and parenting behaviours, are associated with the survival and reproduction processes, and are highly variable in wild populations. Therefore, how anthropogenic changes influence social behaviours and related demographic processes has conservation implications especially in endangered species.

Fig 1. Chestnut-banded plover on the nest. © N. Halimbekh

The proposed field project will focus on endangered shorebird, the chestnut-banded plover *Charadrius pallidus* at the Berg River estuary, Velddrif, South Africa. The project will investigate the roles of climate change and human activities in influencing mating and parental behaviours, and their implications in the conservation of this threatened species. Our team is investigating the behaviour and ecology of chestnut-banded plover population at Berg River since 2020 and has established insights into the behaviour, demography and ecology of the population. The research will combine detailed studies of social behaviour, population monitoring with field experiments.

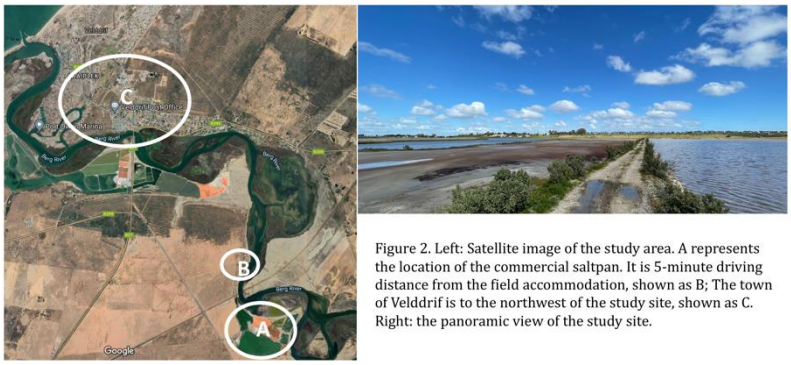

Figure 2. Left: Satellite image of the study area. A represents the location of the commercial saltpan. It is 5-minute driving distance from the field accommodation, shown as B; The town of Velddrif is to the northwest of the study site, shown as C. Right: the panoramic view of the study site.

We are seeking one research assistant with biological subject background, strong interest in fieldwork, biodiversity, animal behaviour, evolutionary biology and be willing to work in remote areas. The assistant will be working in the field from 1 September 2022 until 30 November 2022. Dr. Halimbekh will train the field assistant in site, where the assistant can learn the skills including bird identification, behavioural observation, bird-ringing and sampling, and the assistant will be able of run the fieldwork independently.

During the fieldwork, the following expenses will be covered:

- research-related expenses including car rental and gasoline
- accommodation (a cosy guest house near the research site)
- return airfare from Europe to Cape Town
- for an exceptional candidate contribution to living expenses is negotiable

Figure 3. The self-catering accommodation near the study site. © N. Halimbekh

Our project is a joint project between groups from three top universities (University of Debrecen, University of Bath and University of Cape Town), which have special strength in conservation and ecology, and are carrying out cutting-edge research using shorebirds as model organisms. Therefore, the candidate will benefit from our international network of experts and gain practical research experience. For further details of please visit https://elvonalshorebirds.com/. Interested candidates should get in touch by sending their CV (max 2 pages) to Dr Halimbekh (narhulan29@gmail.ac.uk) by 15th July 2022.

Selected references

- Ferguson, A. J., Thomson, R. L., Nelson-Flower, M. J., & Flower, T. P. (2021). Conditioned food aversion reduces crow nest predation: An improved framework for CFA trials. *Journal for Nature Conservation*, *60*, 125970.
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- Kubelka, V., M. Salek, P. Tomkovich, Z. Vegvari, R. P. Freckleton, and T. Székely (2018). Global pattern of nest predation is disrupted by climate change in shorebirds. *Science* 362:680-683.
- Székely, T. (2019) Why study plovers? The significance of non-model organisms in avian ecology, behaviour and evolution. *Journal of Ornithology*. 160, 923–933.