



## **LIVING GRASSLANDS: POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP IN FAUNAL DIVERSITY FOR 2026**

**Value:** R335 000 for 12 months plus research costs. Award does not include any benefits and is exempt from taxation.

**Closing date:** 20 March 2026

**q**

Living Grasslands is a transdisciplinary Biodiversa+ project seeking a Postdoctoral Fellow (Postdoc) in faunal diversity to explore wilding as a Nature-based Solution (NbS) for grassy ecosystems. The Fellowship is for 12 months but seeks candidates who want to benefit from a unique “sandwich programme” that offers a second year through the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden, entailing exceptional opportunities for international collaboration with favourable rates of remuneration (current rate ~ 39 500 SEK per month before tax for this second year). The Fellowship provides a challenging and exciting research environment for a candidate wanting to collaborate across disciplines, gain international partnerships, benefit from working with a large team, and advance scientific knowledge while contributing to solutions for grassland conservation and restoration.

The Postdoc will be based at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and conduct fieldwork in the uMzimvubu Catchment (near Matatiele, Eastern Cape, SA) as part of a transdisciplinary team including three other Postdocs (a plant scientist and two social scientists). The two natural science Postdocs will be under the general supervision of academics at UCT and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). Key project members are at UCT, SLU, University of Fort Hare, Nelson Mandela University, and Utrecht University (knowledge institutions) as well as Conservation South Africa and Environmental & Rural Solutions (NGOs collaborators). Community members, other NGOs, landowners, and government are other stakeholders with whom you will interact.

Biodiversity in uMzimvubu Catchment is threatened by direct wildlife extirpation, habitat loss, unplanned fire and grazing, and alien plants invasions. The Catchment is also home to people of diverse cultural backgrounds, many of whom face enormous socio-economic challenges including severe poverty and among the highest unemployment rates in South Africa. At the same time, the catchment hosts a growing number of innovative restoration and conservation initiatives that aim to restore ecological functioning while lifting people’s livelihoods. This setting provides us with a ‘living lab’ where wilding outcomes can be tested. As a postdoc in faunal diversity, you will:

- Develop research questions and gather new data on faunal diversity along diverse gradients, making use of existing long-term restoration sites and fence-line contrasts between e.g., land owned communally, privately, or the state. This will allow us to perform space-for-time experiments to test whether and how existing restoration interventions are already affecting biodiversity and their livelihood values such as ecotourism, carbon storage, traditional medicine, wild foods, and recreational/aesthetic values.
- Set up participatory monitoring methods (e.g., using smart sensors such as camera traps and acoustic sensors) as part of collaborating with and building capacity in local, young citizen scientists (Ecochamps), who are part of a well-established, government-NGO program capacitating people in citizen science and natural resource management.
- Work in a transdisciplinary way with the Postdocs and key project members to co-create research questions and seed findings into inclusive wilding scenarios, e.g., via a series of participatory workshops.



- Lead and contribute to knowledge products (conference presentations, journal papers) and knowledge utilization (e.g., white paper with policy recommendations).

The position is open to any eligible person, South African or otherwise, who is in possession of a PhD degree in ecology or another field relevant to the focus of this postdoc obtained **in the last 5 years**, and who has not previously held comprehensive professional or permanent academic positions. Candidates may apply for the fellowship prior to obtaining their PhD but may not hold the fellowship until their PhD has been awarded.

Applications should be emailed with the subject line “**Living Grasslands Postdoc**” as a single PDF file containing :

- A cover letter that clearly motivates your interest in the biodiversity-livelihood nexus and why you are a suitable candidate for the position. Relevant to the position is 1) a demonstrable ability to design research questions and sampling strategies, where experience in participatory monitoring, and/or citizen science is an advantage; 2) experience with monitoring animal taxa using routine and novel technologies e.g., eDNA, the SA Bird Atlas Project, species ID-ing phone apps, camera traps, and acoustic sensors; 3) ability to work effectively both independently and as part of an interdisciplinary team; 4) strong project management and organizational skills; 5) experience with quantitative statistical modelling, ideally in R; 6) knowledge of South African biodiversity and the local socio-ecological context is seen as a strong merit; 7) interest in working inter- and transdisciplinary (experience = merit); 9) affinity with stakeholder engagement (experience = merit, particularly in relation to stakeholders mentioned).
- A curriculum vitae that includes a web-link to the applicant’s Google Scholar profile, a list of publications with DOI numbers, and details of conference presentations.
- Certified copies of all academic transcripts and degree certificates.

**Applications (cover letter, curriculum vitae, academic transcripts) must be submitted electronically in a single PDF file by 20 March 2026. Receipt of applications will be acknowledged. Also, 3 referees must be requested to email references with the email subject line as above to the email address shown below by the closing date.**

Send applications by email to Ms Soraya Abrahams ([soraya.abrahams@uct.ac.za](mailto:soraya.abrahams@uct.ac.za)). For enquiries and further information, please email both Heidi Hawkins ([heidi.hawkins@uct.ac.za](mailto:heidi.hawkins@uct.ac.za)) and Joris Cromsigt ([joris.cromsigt@slu.se](mailto:joris.cromsigt@slu.se)).

*All applicants are subject to the policies surrounding the postdoctoral sector at the University of Cape Town and South Africa. The funding may not be held concurrently with other substantial funding, unless with prior permission. The programme reserves the right to make no awards at all, to cancel the award if the conditions are not met, and to effect changes to the conditions of award.*