The Department of Biology at Ghent University is seeking to fill the following full-time PhD position vacancy (m/f) in the Terrestrial Ecology Unit:

**Avian foodweb ecology in fragmented landscapes**

While habitat fragmentation is increasingly recognized as one of the prime drivers underlying the current global biodiversity crisis, changes in foodweb dynamics resulting from habitat fragmentation have so far received scant attention. By applying state-of-the-art tools from ecology, forestry and epidemiology within a unique plot design, biologists, bio-engineers and wildlife veterinarians of Ghent University aim to fill this gap by scaling up functional biodiversity research from a classical plot level to a landscape level, and from producer dynamics to predator fitness. This recently launched TREEWEB consortium hosts 6 doctoral students and 2 postdoctoral researchers, each focusing on particular components of the terrestrial food web. Researchers working in this project are jointly supervised by Prof. Lens and Prof. Bonte (Dept. of Biology), Prof. Verheyen (Dept. of Forest and Water Management), and Prof. Martel (Dept. of Pathology, Bacteriology and Poultry Diseases).

This PhD project specifically focuses on how tree diversity and the spatial configuration of broad-leaved forest fragments affect the ecology, health and performance of a secondary avian predator (great tit, *Parus major*), and how this shapes its predatory impact on arthropod populations (herbivore control). High nutritional quality in diverse forests is predicted to improve avian health by facilitating a better development of the immunity system and by reducing disease susceptibility. High levels of habitat fragmentation, in turn, are predicted to adversely affect avian health through increased use of anthropogenic (low quality) food and increased pathogen exposure at forest boundaries, owing to increased contact with human habitation.

The successful applicant will implement a variety of field-, aviary- and lab-tools, and will work closely together with other PhD students, field assistants and postdocs.

**Profile and requirements**

- You hold a Master degree in Biology or an equivalent Life Sciences degree, with a strong background in population and community ecology.
- You are an enthusiastic and motivated student who can deal with long hours in the field, aviary and lab.
- You have excellent organizational, writing and presentation skills and are capable of working both independently and within a multidisciplinary team.
- Prior experience with ornithology and/or foodweb ecology is highly recommended but not restrictive.
We offer

- A Ph.D. scholarship for one year (starting between 1 Jan and 1 Feb 2015) with a three-year extension after positive evaluation.
- Enrollment in the Ghent Doctoral School training program that offers various courses, training programs and conferences within and outside the university.
- Membership of the Terrestrial Ecology Unit, a dynamic research group that combines field, lab and modelling approaches to study various questions in ecological and evolutionary research ([http://www.ecology.ugent.be/terec/index.php](http://www.ecology.ugent.be/terec/index.php)).

Interested?

- Please send (i) a detailed curriculum vitae, (ii) a brief statement of your research interests and motivation for this project (max 250 words), and (iii) contact information of two referees who can supply letters of recommendation upon request, as a single PDF file to luc.lens@ugent.be.
- The deadline for application is Friday 14 November 2014, 17 pm; interviews of short-listed candidates will start soon afterwards.
- For more information, contact Luc Lens ([luc.lens@ugent.be](mailto:luc.lens@ugent.be)) or Liesbeth De Neve ([liesbeth.deneve@ugent.be](mailto:liesbeth.deneve@ugent.be)), or consult the TREENWEB page under development ([http://www.ecology.ugent.be/treeweb/](http://www.ecology.ugent.be/treeweb/))