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Field Assistant for Dissertation Research on Human-Primate Conflict in St. Kitts

Hiring Organization:

Kerry Dore, Ph.D. candidate, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Date Posted:

2010-12-17

Position Description:

I am looking for volunteer field assistants to help collect data for my dissertation research on crop damage by vervet monkeys on the island of St. Kitts in the West Indies. The project has been underway since September 2010 and will continue until August 2011. The applicant(s) could come for any amount of time during the next eight months, though ideally they would stay for the duration of the project. I can help the applicant find housing. Ideally two individuals could room together, as living in St. Kitts is expensive. For the first half of this project I had two field assistants who shared an apartment and alternated days in the field. I typically visit farms from 7AM to 2PM Tuesday-Friday, however the months of January and April will have 6-day workweeks because travel will reduce the amount of days in the month in which to collect data. Fieldwork requires using a GPS to map crops and determine their acreage as well as identifying damage from monkeys, pigs and livestock. Damage is recorded in half acre-grid cells, so the field assistant will also assist me in establishing the boundaries of the grid cells on the ground using a GPS and counting crop items on the farm to determine the percent of crops lost to these pests. It is extremely hot and counting crops can be very time-consuming, but otherwise the conditions in St. Kitts are very comfortable, with things like Internet and TV readily available as long as the power is working. The island is very small and somewhat remote but is incredibly beautiful and the people are, on the whole, friendly and welcoming.

This project is very multi-disciplinary. At the moment I am not actively following the monkeys, rather, I am taking an indirect measure of their behavior. St. Kitts presents a very difficult environment in which to do primate behavior. Therefore, the focus of this study is on the patterns of crop damage by the monkeys and the farmers' perceptions of this damage. A big part of this study is interviewing and talking with farmers, so the applicant would ideally have an interest in cultural anthropology as well. This project falls into the new discipline of ethnoprimateology, which is a merging of primatology and cultural anthropology. This project also incorporates methods from geography and geographic information systems. It is essentially an applied conservation project.

That being said, the applicant would be expected to do a side project of their own at either the St. Kitts Biomedical Research Foundation of Yale University or the Behavioral Sciences Foundation of McGill University – two very well respected facilities, which house a combined 3,000 vervet monkeys. It is an incredible opportunity to have the chance to do a behavioral study of these animals, as they live in natural social groups and many animals are wild-born. I will help with project design, proposal writing and IACUC applications. The two previous field assistants did a tool-use and taste-aversion study. Both field assistants are available as references if the applicants are interested in knowing what it is like working for me and living on the island.

Qualifications/Experience:

Anyone who is enthusiastic and has an interest in primate behavior and conservation in real-world scenarios. This is an ideal opportunity for someone looking for additional research experience before applying to graduate school. It could be a good first-time field experience. The applicant should be comfortable being in a country where most citizens are black and an outgoing personality will be helpful in getting to know people. It is easy to become isolated if you do not actively seek out new people. There are a good number of American students here at Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine.

Please send me a letter of interest and a resume/CV. I want to know what you are like informally as well. Please provide information about the type of project you would be interested in doing at one of the biomedical facilities. Three references should also be included.

Salary/funding:

This is a fully volunteer position. Applicants would be required to provide their own travel and housing. It typically costs \$700-800 round trip to St. Kitts from the east coast/midwest. An apartment would likely be more than \$600 US per month - though as I've said, if there is interest from more than one person, people could live together to save money. Food is very expensive here, as it is mostly imported.

Term of Appointment:

As long as possible

Application Deadline:

As soon as possible

Contact Information:

Kerry Dore
Cayon, none
Saint Kitts and Nevis

E-mail Address:

kerryam3@uwm.edu

Questions and Comments

Questions about a specific job listing should be directed to the contact person listed for that job. Questions and comments about using the Primate-Jobs web site can be directed to Ray Hamel at hamel@primate.wisc.edu or (608) 263-3512.

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