Ph.D. Research Assistantship - Black bear ecology in South Carolina

We are searching for a PhD student to lead a new study estimating the abundance of black bears and influence they have on mammalian communities in the southern Blue Ridge Mountains of South Carolina. Black bears have recolonized and maintain a robust population that is routinely harvested within this corner of the state, leading to management questions surrounding how to estimate the abundance of black bears and what the size of the population is currently. The selected student will deploy camera traps and hair snares to compare population estimation methods, provide an estimate of current black bear abundance, and provide guidance to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources about estimating black bear abundance into the future. In addition to population estimation, there are a diverse range of questions the student can investigate on the potential topics of bear movement and connectivity, their role as an apex predator in the system (i.e., influences on the behavior of smaller carnivores and herbivores), and the response of bears to climate, resource pulses and humans. A unique aspect to this study is the ability to conduct replicated studies in a large area where bears are routinely exposed to humans and harvested, and in a large protected area closed to humans and harvest.

The selected student will be awarded a 4-year graduate research assistantship ($34,000/year, health benefits, travel budget, along with tuition waiver) to attend Clemson University. The student will be co-advised by Dr. Erin Buchholtz (https://buchholtzlab.weebly.com) and Dr. David Jachowski (https://www.jachowskilab.com) within the Department of Forestry and Wildlife Conservation.

Clemson University is the largest public land grant university in the state of South Carolina and nationally recognized as an R1 (“very high research activity”) institution. Clemson is a small town located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and along the shores of Lake Hartwell. Campus is surrounded by the 17,500-acre Clemson Experimental Forest, providing abundant opportunities for recreation, research and education.

Start date: January 2024

Minimum qualifications: Applicants are required to have an MS in wildlife ecology or a related field and be comfortable conducting field research in often hot, remote, mountainous conditions. Previous experience in (1) studying the ecology of wildlife in a field setting, (2) leading a small research team, and (3) recording and maintaining field data is preferred. Note: This position will not involve trapping or handling black bears. Top applicants will have a strong interest in the ecology of mammals, have experience in leading independent research projects, as well as evidence of strong scientific writing and basic statistics.

To apply: Applicants should submit a cover letter, CV, contact information for 3 references, unofficial transcripts, and (optional) a scientific writing sample as a single PDF titled “LastName_PhDapplication” to djachow@clemson.edu prior to September 1, 2023. The expectation is that the selected student would start at Clemson in January 2024.

Additional relevant information at https://www.clemson.edu/cafls/academics/graduate/wildlife-and-fisheries-biology.html and https://www1.usgs.gov/coopunits/unit/SouthCarolina