CASE studentship with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature

**Project title:**
The shaping of the global conservation agenda

**Supervisors:**
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**Project summary (30 words):**
Working at the forefront of conservation policy, this project will examine how conservation priorities differ between nations and amongst non-governmental organisations and how these differences shape the global conservation agenda.

**Project background:**
Conservation plays an important role in shaping the environment, lives and livelihoods of people throughout the world. Yet even amongst conservationists, there exist important differences in opinions over what the ultimate aims of conservation are and how they should be achieved. For example, there are ongoing, and sometimes heated, debates about the relative merits of sustainable use of threatened species as opposed to their strict protection, or the extent to which markets can be a force for conservation. To date, much of this debate has been dominated by a relatively small number of voices and there is limited understanding of the diversity and prevalence of different views amongst the broader conservation community. Recent work under the Future of Conservation project (http://futureconservation.org/) has started to address this gap by collecting data on the opinions of individuals working in conservation, but key decisions about conservation policy and practice are often taken at the level of national governments or national and international organisations. To date, there has been no systematic exploration of variation in the views of these organisations.

This project will work alongside the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) - the world’s leading association of conservation agencies - to explore the positions of conservation organisations on key issues. The IUCN’s membership comprises approximately ~1,300 organisations, including States, government agencies and non-governmental organizations, who come together every four years at the World Conservation Congress (WCC) to debate and agree major policy issues. At each congress, draft policy measures are voted on by IUCN members, with those that are approved being passed as Resolutions. The voting records of WCC participants provide a rich source of data for the project to explore which topics are the subject of broad consensus, which are more controversial, how views vary between different geographic regions and different types of organisation and how they have changed over time. The project will also compare the voting records of organisations at the WCC with their stated positions and actions in other international fora (e.g. CITES). These analyses will be complemented by in-depth interviews with key figures at selected conservation organisations to examine how organisations arrive at policy positions and explore the processes by which their voting decisions are made.

**Key research questions:**
The project will answer the following key research questions:

- Which issues in conservation are the subject of most consensus and divergence amongst conservation organisations?
• How do the positions of conservation organisations about key issues vary by factors such as geographic region and the type of organisation?
• Are there trends in the positions of conservation organisations over time which show the direction in which conservation is heading?
• How do conservation organisations arrive at their positions on key issues in conservation?

Methodology:
The project will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining the statistical analysis of existing data about voting on key conservation policy issues with the collection of new qualitative data on the processes by which conservation organisations agree their positions on key issues. Together these approaches will provide new insights into the diversity of views of the global conservation community and how they help shape the global conservation agenda. The research builds upon, and benefits from, the supervisory team’s previous work in this area under the Future of Conservation project and the collaboration with IUCN - the leading global association of conservation groups.

Timetable: Year 1: Literature review; Training and skills development; Collation and analysis of existing data sets. Year 2: Developing data collection protocols, stakeholder interviews; Year 3: Data analysis and writing-up; Dissemination activities

Training:
A comprehensive training programme will be provided comprising both specialist scientific training and generic transferable and professional skills. For example, we expect that the student would undertake training in statistical computing using R, including multilevel modelling and item response theory, and/or specific training in the design and implementation of interviews with key stakeholders and the analysis of qualitative data, as appropriate to complement their existing skills.

Requirements:
We are looking for an enthusiastic and creative student with interests in conservation policy and a proven track record of both collaborative and independent working. Strong quantitative skills and an openness to mixed-methods are essential, as are excellent communications skills; experience of working with conservation organisations would also be advantageous.

Further reading:


