



Carnivores, Livelihoods and Landscapes

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Graduate Research Position in Cheetah Conservation Genetics – Kenya

Degree Level: Master's or PhD

Duration: 18–24 months (MSc) / 3–4 years (PhD)

Status: Full-time (20–40 hrs/week) (Coursework, lab-work, fieldwork, and analysis)

Location: Fieldwork in Kenya; office location dependent on university requirements; laboratory work at KWS Forensic Science facility (Nairobi or Naivasha, Kenya)

Supervisors: Mary Wykstra (Executive Director, ACK) and Dr. Mary Burak (Program Director, ACK)

About Action for Cheetahs in Kenya (ACK) and CaLL

Carnivores, Livelihoods and Landscapes (CaLL) is an independent, non-profit predator-focused conservation organisation registered in 2009. CaLL works in affiliation with the Cheetah Conservation Fund (Namibia), the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), and the Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI). CaLL's mission is to link Kenya's carnivore programmes under an integrated organisation through which conservation efforts can be strengthened to assure carnivore survival, particularly in human-influenced ecosystems.

Action for Cheetahs in Kenya (ACK) is a flagship project within CaLL. Founded in 2001, ACK is a community-based research programme dedicated to the conservation of cheetahs in Kenya through research, awareness, and community participation. We work with national and international partners to address threats, secure important habitats, monitor cheetah populations, and generate knowledge about cheetahs and their ecosystems. Field operations include monitoring and community development in the Meibae Community Conservancy (Samburu County) and implementation of a National Cheetah Survey.

For more information, visit www.actionforcheetahs.org

Position Overview

ACK is seeking a motivated graduate student to join our research team and help translate field data into actionable conservation insights. This is an opportunity to work at the forefront of applied cheetah conservation genetics, contributing directly to management decisions that shape the future of Kenya's cheetah populations.

As a full-time collaborator embedded within ACK's research programme, you will lead genetic and spatial analyses using an extensive non-invasive sample collection and field observations gathered across key cheetah ecosystems. Your work will help answer critical questions about population structure, genetic diversity, landscape connectivity, and the ecological and human-driven factors that determine where and how cheetahs persist. You will also contribute to ACK's broader mission by refining monitoring protocols, supporting community-based conservation initiatives, and building research capacity within Kenya.

This position offers hands-on experience across the full research pipeline: from field sample collection

ACK aims to promote the conservation of cheetahs in Kenya through research, awareness and community participation. ACK works closely with local wildlife authorities and land holders to develop policies and programmes which support wildlife conservation and human livelihoods for the long-term development of sustainable human and wildlife zones.



to laboratory genetics work, spatial modelling, and scientific communication. You will work collaboratively with a multi-institutional team of researchers, wildlife managers, and conservation practitioners, and gain skills in grant writing, project management, and translating science into conservation action.

Funding & Support: This position **does not** include a tuition scholarship. ACK provides partial research support—including laboratory expenses, field equipment, and logistical assistance—with the expectation that students will actively pursue additional funding through grants and fellowships. Mentorship in proposal writing, budgeting, and fundraising will also be provided.

University Enrollment: Students currently enrolled in a graduate programme are expected to work with their existing university supervisors in collaboration with ACK. Students not yet enrolled will be supported in identifying an appropriate Kenyan university supervisor and an admission pathway. A workplan will be agreed upon by the university, KWS, and ACK.

Key Research Agenda

This position centers on cheetah conservation genetics, with opportunities to integrate findings across behavioural, spatial, and human dimensions. Focus areas can include:

- **Population genetics:** Assess genetic diversity, population structure, and gene flow among cheetah subpopulations using non-invasive sampling
- **Kinship & social structure:** Link genetic relatedness to behavioural observations and social dynamics
- **Landscape connectivity:** Combine genetic data with spatial modelling to identify corridors, barriers, and priority areas for habitat linkage
- **Monitoring optimisation:** Refine detection methods (scat surveys, camera traps, detection dogs) and evaluate their effectiveness for genetic sampling
- **Human–wildlife interface:** Integrate genetic insights with conflict and coexistence data to inform management strategies

Research priorities will be refined collaboratively with academic supervisors and ACK partners to align with conservation needs and the student's expertise.

**This is a summarised overview; a detailed description will be shared with shortlisted candidates.*

Qualifications & Experience

PhD Applicants

- Master's degree in genetics, biology, ecology, or a related field
- Demonstrated independent research capacity (e.g., thesis, peer-reviewed publication, or equivalent research output)
- Proven molecular laboratory skills
- Strong quantitative background in population genetics with proficiency in R-based analysis
- Familiarity with GIS and spatial data integration
- Field readiness for work in remote rangeland environments
- Strong organisation, communication, and collaborative skills
- Commitment to community-based conservation in Kenya



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Master's Applicants

- Bachelor's degree in genetics, biology, ecology, or a related field
- Demonstrated academic performance and interest in conservation research (e.g., coursework, internships, or undergraduate research experience)
- Foundational molecular laboratory exposure or willingness to develop wet-lab skills
- Working knowledge of R and/or GIS, with eagerness to expand quantitative and spatial analysis skills
- Familiarity with or interest in fieldwork in remote rangeland environments
- Strong organisation, communication, and collaborative skills
- Commitment to community-based conservation in Kenya

Additional Desirable Skills

- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Logistics and operational management experience
- Understanding of local wildlife and conservation issues in Kenya
- Experience camping or working in remote areas with basic living conditions
- Proven ability to work as part of a diverse, multicultural team
- Adaptability and ability to prioritise tasks with minimal supervision
- Valid driving licence with at least three years of driving experience

Note on International Applicants: We welcome applications from qualified candidates worldwide. International applicants are responsible for securing their own visa and research permit arrangements for Kenya. ACK can provide supporting documentation to assist. Applicants are encouraged to learn Kenya's research permit requirements through the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) before applying.

How to Apply

Submit the following as a single PDF to info@actionforcheetahs.org with the subject line:

“ACK Graduate Student Position, 2026 – [Your Name]”

Applications will close on **17 April 2026**.

Required application materials:

- CV (3 pages maximum)
- Academic transcripts (unofficial accepted)
- Statement of interest (1 page maximum): outline your research background, relevant skills, preferred degree track (PhD or Master's), and motivation for this position
- Writing sample (published paper, thesis chapter, or course essay)
- Two letters of recommendation — to be emailed separately by referees to the same address

Shortlisted candidates will be contacted by 1 May 2026 with interviews to follow in May.

**Incomplete or late applications will not be considered. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.*