

DOLPHIN RESEARCH ASSISTANTS REQUIRED IN IRELAND - DEADLINE EXTENDED

The Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation (SDWF) is seeking research assistants to conduct boat- and office-based bottlenose dolphin research May-September 2015 in Kilrush, Co. Clare, Ireland. The application deadline has been extended until 5 March. For more information about the SDWF see www.shannondolphins.ie and www.facebook.com/ShannonDolphinAndWildlifeCentre

The SDWF is a registered charity dedicated to the conservation and research of dolphins and wildlife in the Shannon Estuary with offices based in the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Centre, an interpretive centre open to the public and used to promote educational awareness of the dolphins and wildlife in the Shannon region. The SDWF was established by Dr Simon Berrow in 2000 following pilot work carried out by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) from 1993. The SDWF has a strong research background and has collaborated with a number of Irish and international research groups. Long-term monitoring of the bottlenose dolphin population in the Shannon has been carried out using photo-id since 1993 and static acoustics since 2001. The Shannon River estuary is presently the only candidate Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for bottlenose dolphins in Ireland and is home to a resident population of dolphins living year-round in the estuary.

The SDWF is seeking voluntary research assistants for the 2015 field season to carry out dolphin research and education. Research assistants will be required to conduct monitoring surveys from dolphin-watching tour boats, spend a considerable amount of time on bottlenose dolphin photo-identification and related office tasks, and assist in the management of the dolphin centre on a daily basis. Photo-id training will be provided on the boats and in the office.

Research assistants will also assist with a PhD project on bottlenose dolphin social and foraging behaviour on board the RV *Muc Mhara* when weather conditions allow for fieldwork. This research will consist of boat-based photo-ID and behavioural observations of bottlenose dolphins in the Shannon Estuary and presents an opportunity to gain experience in field techniques for small cetacean research, while contributing to a project with a strong scientific aim and a high conservation value.

There may also be opportunities for assistants to help with research conducted on board the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group's research vessel *Celtic Mist* and to assist the IWDG with cetacean strandings should the opportunity arise.

These positions provide an excellent opportunity to develop skills in cetacean research and education and to assist with one of the longest-running bottlenose dolphin population monitoring programs in the world.

WORK PERIOD

16 May 2015 - 19 September 2015

We are seeking skilled research assistants to commence on 16 May 2015. Research assistants are required full-time for four months, finishing 19 September 2015. Because of the training required, preference will be given to applicants who can commit to three or four months. However, those available for a shorter period of time will also be considered.

LOCATION

Research assistants will be based in Kilrush, Co. Clare, Ireland, a small town located in west Clare on the northern shore of the Shannon Estuary. The Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Centre is located less than 10 minutes' walk from the town centre. West Clare is a beautiful place to work, but applicants are asked to be aware that it is also somewhat geographically isolated with limited facilities and variable weather patterns.

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Conducting monitoring surveys from two dolphin-watching tour boats operating in the Shannon Estuary, collecting photo-id data and recording data on tour boat encounters with dolphin groups. Surveys involve one to four daily boat trips and are weather dependent – i.e. many days in a row if weather is good.
2. Photo-identification and database entry in the office, including fin identification, fin-matching, photo processing, sighting data entry and maintenance of our long-term photo-id catalogue. Research assistants should be prepared to work long days in the office entering data and analysing and organising photographs, including working with historic archived photographs and related data.
3. Dolphin centre duties, including general administrative tasks, receiving visitors to the dolphin centre, engaging with and educating members of the public, managing merchandise, updating websites and supporting and promoting SDWF, and raising awareness and membership participation. Also, general maintenance of research equipment and facilities. Research assistants will also take part in various fundraising events for SDWF throughout the summer.
4. PhD research assistance
 - (1) Field duties include conducting surveys and focal follows of bottlenose dolphins in the Shannon Estuary. Searching for and spotting dolphins, taking photos, recording video, making and recording field observations, photo-identification, driving the boat, equipment cleaning and basic maintenance, data entry. Expect early starts, cold weather, up to 10 hours on the water for multiple consecutive days, and up to a week between days off.
 - (2) Office duties include photo-identification and database entry, including fin identification, fin-matching, photo processing, sighting data entry and maintenance of our long-term photo-id catalogue. Computer programs used for data are: FinBase, IMatch, Microsoft Access, Excel and Word.

As boat-based research is highly weather dependent, it can vary between weekdays and weekends. Assistants need to be available full-time including weekends and be prepared to work long, consecutive days, in the office during bad weather and in the field during good weather. Research assistants should be prepared to spend weeks at a time in the office when the weather is bad and many consecutive days on the boat when the weather is good.

All volunteers will be given training in boat-based work and office tasks including observation and photo-identification of bottlenose dolphins, photo processing and database entry.

REQUIREMENTS

Essential

- Genuine interest in marine mammal biology, the marine environment and conservation
- Basic computer proficiency in MS Office
- Previous photo-identification experience or a strong desire to learn photo-id skills
- Excellent verbal and communication skills
- Enthusiastic with a positive attitude to hard work and long hours
- Sociable and team-oriented with the ability to get on well with others in a small team (3-4 people)
- Work well both in a team and independently
- A detail-oriented work ethic with an ability to work in a meticulous manner
- Conscientious, reliable, hard-working, and self-motivated
- Flexible and patient as fieldwork is highly weather dependent
- Prepared to work long days in the field or office
- Comfortable working on boats
- No history of debilitating seasickness
- Good English language skills
- Must be 18 years or older

Preferred but not essential

- Enrolled in or completed a degree in Biology, Marine Biology, Environmental Science, Animal Behaviour, Ecology, Zoology or related fields
- Previous field research experience, especially in marine mammal research
- Prior experience working on boats
- A strong interest and knowledge of bottlenose dolphins and/or Irish cetaceans
- Experience in interacting with the public
- Familiarity with DSLR cameras and GPS equipment and software
- Prior experience with MS Access and IMatch
- Driving Licence (and possibility to bring your own car)
- Possibility to bring your own laptop for data entry

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Research assistants will be based in Kilrush, Co. Clare, Ireland and will be expected to work and live as part of a team. Unfortunately, there is no monetary compensation for these positions and a contribution of €300 per month towards accommodation and utilities is required. Accommodation is in a shared house within walking distance of the dolphin centre and town of Kilrush. Research assistants are responsible for their own food costs and travel expenses to and from Kilrush, Ireland.

To apply, please send your CV (including two relevant referees and their contact information) and a covering letter with a brief description of yourself and what you hope to gain from this experience, details of why you would like to work on this specific project and any relevant experience you have to Isabel Baker (shannondolphins@gmail.com) by 05 March 2015. Please also specify the dates you expect to be able to join the project. Please put "SDWF Research Assistant" in the subject line of your email.

APPLICATION DEADLINE

05 March 2015

The closing date for applications is 05 March 2015. However, early application is recommended. Shortlisted candidates will be required to undertake a Skype interview in March.