

## **Position – Volunteer Field assistants for research on sperm whales at Kaikoura, New Zealand**

A volunteer is required to assist with fieldwork for a study on the foraging ecology of sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) and food web dynamics in the submarine canyon of Kaikoura, New Zealand. This PhD project is part of the ongoing research by the **Marine Mammal Research Group (Department of Marine Science, University of Otago, New Zealand)**.

**Fieldwork dates:** volunteers are needed for **16th June – 31st July 2015**.

A minimum commitment of 3 weeks is required, preferably starting on the 16th June or 9th July. Commitment to the full 6-week period is encouraged but not required.

**Application deadline:** 20th of April

**Location:** Kaikoura, on the east coast of the South Island of New Zealand. We will be based at a small but comfortable house in South Bay (Kaikoura).

**Research involved:** the study aims to collect information on abundance, distribution, habitat use and diet of sperm whales at Kaikoura, with a wider focus on understanding the food web dynamics in the Kaikoura submarine canyon and the factors influencing the ongoing decline of the sperm whale population. Data collection involves doing acoustic tracking of sperm whales, photo-identification, acoustic transects for getting whale distribution data, acoustic recordings, collection of sloughed whale skin and fecal samples (for stable isotope analysis), plankton tows, and in-situ oceanographic sampling. All work is boat-based, from 6m RV Grampus.

**Field and house duties:** assisting with loading/unloading equipment, boat launching and retrieval with towing vehicle, driving the boat, searching for sperm whales, taking photos for photo-identification, data collection, equipment cleaning and basic maintenance, data entry and photo-id matching, a share in communal cooking and housekeeping duties, and generally working hard and having a good time.

**Expectations:** field assistants need to be available full-time, including weekends, and be prepared for early morning departures (7 am), and long days on the water (up to 10 hours) for multiple consecutive days. Expect also several consecutive days off the water due to bad weather

conditions. Fieldwork is physically demanding but awesome if you enjoy it. In general, expect to work hard and learn a lot while having a good time in an amazing place.

Kaikoura is a truly unique natural setting, located on the coast between the high snowy peaks of the Kaikoura mountain ranges and the Pacific Ocean. There are few places in the world where sperm whales can be reliably found close to shore; Kaikoura is one of them. The marine life in the area is spectacular, including New Zealand fur seals, dusky dolphins, Hector's dolphins, a plethora of seabird species (including albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters) and occasional visits from humpback whales, blue whales and orca. This is a great opportunity to gain valuable experience in field techniques for boat-based cetacean research, practical skills, and be involved in a project with conservation and management implications.

#### **Essential prerequisites:**

- Experience in driving and working on small boats, and being comfortable with working on small boats in open ocean conditions (up to 12 nautical miles from shore)
- Be reliable, hardworking, adaptable, independent, and patient, and have a positive and enthusiastic attitude
- Have a mature attitude towards marine mammal research
- Fluent in English or Spanish

#### **Highly desirable prerequisites:**

- Experience in field research with marine mammals
- Experience in photo-ID survey techniques and/or acoustic recording techniques
- Driver's license and experience with a towing vehicle
- The project is well suited to upper level undergrads and graduate students with a background in Marine Science, Marine Biology, and Ecology, Zoology or related fields
- Strong interest in the marine environment and conservation

**Expenses:** This is a **volunteer position and therefore unpaid**. However accommodation and transport while in Kaikoura are provided at no cost. Assistants are responsible for their own travel costs to/from Kaikoura (direct 3h bus available from Christchurch) and sharing of food expenses. Personal expenses are not covered. Assistants are responsible for arranging their own visa if necessary.

**Application process:** If you are interested in this position please send an email to **Marta Guerra** ([marta.guerra@otago.ac.nz](mailto:marta.guerra@otago.ac.nz)) by 20th April. The email should include a brief outline of why you

would like to work on this project and relevant experience against the above prerequisites, and the dates when you are available to assist on the project. Please also attach a brief CV and include two relevant referees. Applications will be considered as they are received, so early application is recommended. Short-listed candidates will be contacted to schedule a Skype interview.