Dear Prospective Student,

Thank you for expressing interest in my lab and ongoing research at the SUNY ESF Roosevelt Wild Life Station. I strive to provide a challenging graduate education experience, which translates to a relatively small cohort of students focused on related issues and using similar methods and techniques to foster synergistic learning. It is important to realize that student interest in wildlife research tends to outpace the financial support available for such work, so any available positions are very competitive. With that in mind, please forgive this largely form letter.

There are generally three ways to get into graduate school, especially if your interests are to work on expensive-to-study larger animals like I do.

Method 1: Full support on professor's grant. This is by far the most desirable approach. Find an advisor with existing projects that have funded graduate positions and at least partial funding for the expensive field activities. Like many researchers, once I secure the funding required to support a graduate student, I conduct a national search to fill available graduate positions. Available graduate fellowship positions are advertised on the following internet job boards or listservs:

- The Wildlife Society (http://careers.wildlife.org/home/index.cfm?site_id=8764)
- Society of Conservation Biology (http://www.conbio.org/professional-development/scb-job-board/)
- Texas A&M University Wildlife Jobs Board (http://wfscjobs.tamu.edu/job-board/)
- Ecological Society of America jobs listserv (https://www.esa.org/nextgencareers/resources/job-sites)
- Conservation Job Board (http://www.conservationjobboard.com/)

These sites are excellent resources for a prospective graduate student and, after school, as you look to enter the workforce. My philosophy is to allow students as much flexibility in developing their research questions and approaches (empirical, modeling, etc.) within the bounds of existing avenues of funding within my lab. **Unless otherwise advertised on these sites, research funding in my lab will already be dedicated to existing student projects**. But keep checking these sites regularly because positions become available at any time as new funding sources come online.

Method 2: Partial support via teaching assistantship. Students with a strong academic record may be awarded a competitive Teaching Assistantship (TA) that pays salary and tuition during the academic year, and allows students time to focus their research ideas and work with an advisor to try to secure the funds required to complete their degree program. Should you choose this route, you would be responsible for writing grants to procure your own research funding, and need to recognize that grant proposals typically have a 10-25% success rate (with calls for proposals on an annual basis only, so time is also a big limitation). Moreover, TA's are highly competitive at SUNY ESF, and not at my discretion to award. Receiving a TA requires strong academic standing (generally GPA ≥

3.5) and high GRE scores. More importantly, while teaching can enhance your own professional development, the time required can detract from research progress and constrain research options. TA's require a minimum of 20 hours of work per week on campus during the academic year, usually associated with the instruction of a class, which may severely constrain the possible avenues of research a student might undertake (note most field work on large mammals takes place away from campus during winter months when a TA needs to remain on campus). Students always underestimate the cost to their own graduate program of being on TA support – with this avenue typically requiring an extra year or longer to complete degree requirements. TA's also do not come with summer salary, so it is unwise to enter a program without significant funding already secured (such as through a research grant held by the professor). It is common for students in my lab to be partially supported by research and partially by a TA. As with full grant support, I advertise partial grant-support positions on the job boards mentioned earlier.

Method 3: Come with your own support. Enterprising and motivated students can develop graduate projects perhaps with employers such as government agencies or non-governmental organizations, secure some funding, and then team up with an academic advisor to initiate the project. Foreign students should pursue a Fulbright Scholarship or other relevant avenues for support from their home country. If attempting this route, it is important to communicate that early to me, so that any field work undertaken before you begin your program of study has had the benefit of advanced faculty review. Alternatively, students able to cover their own stipend and tuition (such as via a Fulbright Scholarship or NSF GRF) can more easily be placed on an existing field research project within my lab.

If a research (thesis)-based degree is not your interest, the course-based M.P.S. program could enable you to assist with ongoing research projects in my lab to gain valuable field and analytical skills as well as graduate-level academic training. This route is particularly useful for professionals seeking continuing education opportunities or those wishing to round out their professional experience with specific education in wildlife conservation. Importantly, the M.P.S. program requires that students cover their own salary and tuition, as these programs are typically not eligible for support via teaching or research assistantship.

There are certainly other models for getting into graduate programs, although these are the most common in the wildlife field. Submitting a formal application to a program such as ours guarantees you visibility for potentially unadvertised positions as well as for consideration for a TA. But recognize that such applications are subject to high rejection rates despite your qualifications, as it requires that the timing of your application coincides with a window of opportunity (meaning existing funding or assistantship). Checking the web sites I mentioned ensures that there is at least a window of opportunity you can apply to.

In terms of the details, it is my policy to not accept students into a Ph.D. program who have not already completed a M.S. program of study. Moreover, I also will not accept any

graduate student without having research funding secured for a significant portion of their graduate program. The wildlife biology program at ESF can support only a limited number of students through competitive TA's, so the only assured funding is through external sources (which are hard to acquire!). If you have a strong academic standing, wish to be considered for a TA, and intend to apply to the ESF graduate program then you should speak with me first. If you are seeking a Ph.D. and have interest in theoretical ecology or modeling based on existing data, then this is a viable way to proceed. But for M.S. students or those desiring a strong field component to their research, this option is generally not viable unless tied to an existing line of funding in my lab. And at present, all resources within my lab are dedicated to already accepted students. Keep your eye on those job lists to see what fully paid opportunities may become available in the near future.

Keep in mind that there is a huge pool of exceptional students jockeying for positions in graduate schools, especially to study charismatic species. With 50-100 emails in my inbox every day, please don't be dismayed by this largely form letter, or the fact that I may be unable to meet with you until a formal application has been submitted and a funding opportunity identified.

Best of luck to you in your academic pursuits.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jacqueline Frair