

Vacancy for a PhD position (4 years)  
Ghent University and KU Leuven (Belgium)

**Diversity of FORESTs affecting human health and well-being  
(Dr. FOREST)**

Horizon 2020 ERA-NET BiodivERsA-project (2020-2023)

**Project background**

To elucidate the effects that biodiversity may have for human health, additional research is needed that moves beyond single case studies with loosely defined “biodiversity” aspects to well-designed studies that allow for generalisations and evidence-based recommendations for promoting health co-benefits derived from ecosystems. Central to addressing these critical challenges are the questions of *how* does biodiversity matter for human health and well-being, and *what* interventions or policies are required to promote contact with biodiverse environments for human health and well-being.

By (i) adopting a rigorous experimental design, (ii) scientifically assessing the relationship between forest biodiversity and various human health risks or benefits, (iii) engaging stakeholders on different levels of the political system, (iv) using various knowledge exchange and communication channels, (v) working in teams composed of both natural and medical scientists, ensuring interdisciplinary collaborations and synergies across both fields, and (vi) compiling evidence-based forest management guidelines for biodiversity conservation and optimal delivery of multiple human health benefits, Dr.FOREST will provide mechanistic understanding on the relationship between forest biodiversity and human health and will translate these insights into solutions for management and policy.

Dr. Forest is a European project with eight partners, coordinated by Freiburg University (Germany). Here, we advertise for a PhD candidate to advance knowledge on forest diversity - human health relationships. Main supervisor is Prof. Kris Verheyen (UGent). The project is co-supervised by Prof. Bart Muys (KU Leuven) and will become a joint-PhD (UGent – KU Leuven).

**Vacancy Description and Candidate Profile**

The successful candidate will gather and analyse data on the relationship between forest diversity and selected ecosystem (dis)services with a direct link to human health (e.g. microclimatic buffering, pollen allergy and non-wood forest products) and will synthesise the effects of forest diversity on multiple human health risks and benefits using Bayesian Belief Networks. Fieldwork will take place in multiple regions across Europe.

**Research Environment**

The successful candidate will be mainly based at the Forest & Nature Lab ([www.fornalab.ugent.be](http://www.fornalab.ugent.be)) of Ghent University, Belgium. ForNaLab consists of 35 staff members and is headed by Prof. Kris Verheyen, Lander Baeten, Jan Mertens and Pieter De Frenne. The research group is part of the Department of Environment at the Faculty of Bioscience Engineering, Ghent University (<https://www.ugent.be/bw/environment>).

The Forest & Nature Lab aims at understanding the interactions between the ecological processes, composition, and structure of terrestrial ecosystems, with a clear link to management and policy. ForNaLab is actively involved in numerous national and international projects and networks, including FLEUR ([www.fleur.ugent.be](http://www.fleur.ugent.be)), forestREplot ([www.forestreplot.ugent.be](http://www.forestreplot.ugent.be)), TreeDivNet ([www.treedivnet.ugent.be](http://www.treedivnet.ugent.be)), TreeDivBelgium ([www.treedivbelgium.ugent.be](http://www.treedivbelgium.ugent.be)) FunDivEUROPE ([www.fundiveurope.eu](http://www.fundiveurope.eu)) and smallFOREST (<http://u-picardie.fr/smallforest/uk/>).

## Interested?

Please send us your CV, transcript of records and a one-page cover letter explaining how you would approach the position, and answering the following selection criteria, to kris.verheyen@ugent.be by **10 January 2020** (all documents should be merged together into one single PDF file)

## PhD Candidate

- You have a Masters, or Honours, degree in Bioscience Engineering, Biology, Ecology or equivalent degree in Life Sciences with some background in Ecology
- You have excellent study grades
- You are an enthusiastic and highly motivated student and you have a strong quantitative background (maths, stats)
- You are a team player with good (English) communication skills and are motivated to work in a collaborative project with other PhD students, postdocs and technical assistants
- You have good knowledge of both the biotic and abiotic components and processes in temperate forest ecosystems
- You have a strong interest in ecology, forest management, environmental health and safety

Our offer:

- We offer a PhD scholarship for four years (full time, ca. €1900 net per month)
- Preferable start date is **17 February 2020**
- Collaboration in a dynamic scientific team
- The possibility to gain experience in doing scientific research, with many travelling opportunities and field work across Europe
- The opportunity to obtain a PhD double degree at Ghent University and KU Leuven in a topical field of applied environmental sciences