Max-Planck-Institut für evolutionäre Anthropologie - Zentrales Bewerbermanagement

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR EVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGY

The Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology (MPI EVA) brings together scientists from diverse backgrounds (natural sciences and humanities) with the aim of investigating the history of humankind from an interdisciplinary perspective using comparative analyses of genes, cultures, cognitive abilities, languages and social systems of past and present human populations, as well as those of primates closely related to humans.

PhD student (m/f/d) position in the field of psychology

City: Leipzig; Starting date (earliest): 01/06/25; Duration: 3 years; Remuneration: TvÖD; Reference number: FT-08-2025; Closing date: 20/04/25

Working field

The Department of Comparative Cultural Psychology at MPI EVA combines developmental, cross-cultural, and comparative psychology approaches to contribute to this agenda by studying human cognition and diversity.

We are looking for a PhD Student (m/f/d) for a doctoral project in the field of psychology focusing on self-awareness in nonhuman great apes drawing from different methods such as touch screens experiments, playback experiments, eye tracking, and behavioural experiments. The successful applicant will be funded for three years (extension up to five years is possible), ideally starting in June 2025.

Your project:
Humans have a strong, pervasive sense of self that includes our ability to recognize ourselves as individuals, feelings of agency, and different forms of introspection. What are the evolutionary origins of this self-awareness? Comparative psychologists have looked for hints of self-awareness in many nonhuman species and in many domains. Famously, whether nonhuman great apes can recognize themselves as individuals has led to the development of the so-called mirror mark test. Going beyond visual self-recognition, important questions remain to be answered. For example, can the behavior of nonhuman great apes provide evidence of a cross-modal self-concept that incorporates information from different sensory modalities (e.g., visual and auditory)? And would evidence from different self-related tasks (visual, auditory, audio-visual) converge on the same answer? In this PhD project, we will seek answers to these questions.

Within this project, we will employ different experimental methods to investigate the ability of great apes (primarily chimpanzees, and potentially bonobos and / or humans) to recognize themselves. We will develop the experimental protocols together, drawing from a range of available methods, including audio playback of vocalizations, touch-screen based problem-solving tasks, and eye tracking to test whether great apes match video recordings of familiar conspecifics to audio recordings from the same individuals,

including recordings of themselves.

Data collection will take place mainly at the Wolfgang Koehler Primate Research Center at Leipzig Zoo, Germany. The research center has a history of more than 20 years of conducting non-invasive and voluntary studies of great ape behaviour and cognition, with great ape study participants who are experienced in participating in touch screen and eye tracking studies. Our approach will adhere to open science principles, including preregistered study designs supported by power analysis.

You will be hosted in the Department of Comparative Cultural Psychology at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, advised by Daniel Haun (Director), Christoph Völter (Senior Scientist) and Matthias Allritz (post-doctoral scientist).

Requirements

- Excellent Master's degree in Psychology, Biology, Cognitive Science or a related subject
- Experience in designing and conducting scientific experiments
- Statistical knowledge and skills in data analysis, preferentially using R
- Excellent English language skills, both written and spoken
- Programming skills (e.g., PsychoPy, E-Prime, MATLAB) are desirable
- Experience in working with animals, in particular nonhuman primates is desirable
- Experience with playback experiments / bioacoustics is desirable

Most importantly, we are looking for cooperative, curious, and team-oriented candidates who are eager to learn and thrive within an international, interdisciplinary research environment.

What we offer

- An inspiring, international, and interdisciplinary research environment, working alongside leading domain experts in the field of comparative, cross-cultural and developmental cognition
- The opportunity to work with cutting-edge resources and receive the support needed to carry out impactful research
- Max Planck Doctoral funding for a minimum of three years, with the possibility of extension for up to five years. The salary will be based on the German "Tarifvertrag für den Öffentlichen Dienst" (TVöD), 65%
- The chance to contribute to transformative research exploring great ape cognition
- The preferred start date is June 2025 but a later start date might be possible.

Application

Electronic Applications will be considered until April 20, 2025.
Only complete submissions will be taken into consideration.

Your application should contain the following information:

- A Cover Letter detailing your motivation for the research topic, relevant experience, and expectations for the position (max. 2 pages)
- A Curriculum Vitae including copies of relevant university degree certificates (incl. latest grade report / transcript of records)
- Contact details for two references (incl. email)
- A Writing Sample (e.g., thesis or first-author publication), including a short statement on whether and to what extent AI tools were used in drafting the sample

Link to the application form only via the job offer on our career website: https://www.eva.mpg.de/career/positions-available/job/651/Abteilung%20Vergleichende%20Kulturpsychologie/en/?cHash=5b7dd85d7bb28948816c04b17fe16329#

Candidates of all nationalities are invited to apply. The Max Planck Society and the Department of Comparative Cultural Psychology are committed to equal opportunities and encourage applications from individuals with disabilities and those typically underrepresented in science fields, such as women and minorities.

More information at https://stellenticket.de/192983/LUH/
Offer visible until 19/04/25