

Postdoc position available in Animal Combinatorial Communication (Comparative Communication and Cognition Group, Department of Comparative Linguistics, University of Zurich)

Background

Human language is an extremely powerful, generative communication system. With a small number of sounds, language is capable of generating an unlimited number of expressions. How this basic ability evolved and how unique this is to human language are two unresolved problems. In the Comparative Communication and Cognition Group, we study the vocal communication skills of non-human animals as a way to shed light on these questions and better understand the evolutionary progression of language.

As part of a larger Swiss National Science Foundation-funded project I am looking for a highly motivated and competent Postdoc to work on animal combinatoriality (in chestnut-crowned babblers and chimpanzees), both under natural settings in the wild and in captivity or semi-captive setups (e.g. Australia, Uganda, UK). Key projects will involve: (i) the implementation of playback experiments to probe the limits of sound sequence comprehension in chimpanzees and chestnut-crowned babblers (in collaboration with psycholinguists); and (ii) the collection and analysis of observational vocal data as a way to identify combinatorial structures in the communication systems of both species including the development and application of automated sound analysis approaches/techniques (in collaboration with linguists and data scientists/engineers).

Requirements

Essential:

PhD in psychology, biology, linguistics or a related discipline

Experience using observational and experimental approaches (e.g. playbacks) to understand behaviour in field and/or captive conditions.

Competence in acoustic and statistical analysis (e.g. in Praat/R)

Excellent communication skills

Evidence of effective working in a team but also ability to work independently

Desirable:

Basic knowledge or interest in linguistic analysis of animal signals

Previous experience working with primates, birds or both.

Previous experience implementing machine-learning approaches to automate animal call analysis

Funding

I can offer competitive funding for 2.5 years (with possibility to extend) and will be able to cover all fieldwork travel costs.

Applications

Interested candidates should apply by emailing me (Simon.W.Townsend@warwick.ac.uk) the following documents:

1. CV (including publication list) plus contact details for two referees
2. Cover letter indicating how you meet the essential and desirable requirements
3. Brief statement of interest outlining why the candidate is specifically interested in the topic (max 1 A4 page)

Deadline: April 4th. Estimated start date: **Summer/Early autumn 2017**. For more details, please contact Simon.W.Townsend@warwick.ac.uk