JOB DESCRIPTION

Job Role: Postdoctoral Research Associate

Job Purpose: To deliver nationwide engagement with the UK's extensive network of expert amateur natural history societies, forging formal collaborative relationships and leading expert specimen collections for full genome sequencing. Attend society meetings, local nature reserves, field trips, and key sampling sites. Coordinate with taxonomic specialists and amateur naturalists to identify, collect, and preserve specimens according to precise DToL standard operating procedures. In addition to fieldwork, the role is heavily focused on public engagement and capacity building – organising local 'bioblitz' events, facilitating 'taxonomy jamborees' at Sanger, delivering technical workshops on genomics, and promoting the Sanger–developed Darwin Collectors' App to place DToL's scientific progress and data directly in the hands of naturalists across the country.

Accountability: Line management of the Postdoctoral Research Associate will be provided by Dr Nova Mieszkowska (Institutional Principal Investigator, Darwin Tree of Life), who is accountable to the Director of Science.

Essential experience, skills and qualifications:

- A PhD (completed or submitted and awaiting examination/corrections), or equivalent relevant research experience, in biodiversity science, ecology, taxonomy, genomics or a related discipline.
- Sound practical knowledge of UK biodiversity, field identification and natural history recording, with the ability to work effectively alongside taxonomic specialists.
- Experience planning and undertaking biological field sampling, including accurate specimen labelling, preservation, metadata capture and sample traceability.
- DNA extraction, PCR, process Sanger sequences and conduct associated analysis e.g. alignments, tree building.
- Demonstrated experience engaging, coordinating or collaborating with external groups, volunteers, citizen scientists or professional research partners.
- Excellent written, verbal and interpersonal communication skills, including confidence presenting science and delivering practical training.
- Strong project organisation and data–management skills, with the ability to work independently, manage competing priorities and meet reporting deadlines.
- Willingness and ability to travel extensively across the UK, work outdoors in variable conditions and attend occasional evening or weekend events.
- A full, valid UK driving licence, suitable for driving the dedicated project vehicle.

- Commitment to safe working practices, relevant legal permissions, ethical sampling and inclusive public engagement.

Desirable experience, skills and qualifications:

- Established links with UK natural history societies, biological recording networks or specialist taxonomic communities.
- Experience organising bioblitzes, field training days, outreach programmes or multi-partner public engagement events.
- Knowledge of genome sequencing workflows, sample-quality requirements or the Darwin Tree of Life programme.
- Experience using biodiversity databases, digital specimen records, GPS/GIS tools or citizen-science collection apps.
- Experience in multi-institutional, grant-funded projects and in evaluating or reporting outreach impact.

Key responsibilities and skills:

- Build and sustain formal collaborations with amateur natural history societies, recording agreed activities, contacts and collection priorities.
- Plan and lead UK-wide field visits, specialist collection trips and community bioblitz events, coordinating logistics and the dedicated electric project vehicle.
- Work with taxonomic experts and DToL partners to prioritise target eukaryotic species, verify identifications and secure specimens suitable for genome sequencing.
- Collect, label, preserve, document and transfer samples in accordance with DToL standard operating procedures, permitting requirements and biosecurity measures.
- Organise taxonomy jamborees, workshops and society presentations; communicate genomics clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
- Promote and support uptake of the Darwin Collectors' App, helping participants record high-quality specimen and collection data.
- Maintain accurate records of engagement, sampling, specimen provenance, outcomes and project deliverables; report progress to the project team.
- Collaborate across disciplines, support volunteers and colleagues, and follow health, safety, safeguarding and fieldwork risk-assessment requirements.

This role is funded by the Darwin Tree of Life project (Garfield Weston Foundation), start date March 2027, duration 20 months.