

Profile for an assistant professor position on Ecological and Environmental Ethics

The Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics (IBED) plays a leading role in several important teaching programmes of the University of Amsterdam with a strong interdisciplinary component such as the Bachelor programmes Future Planet Studies and Biology, and the Master programmes Earth Science and Biological Sciences. To strengthen the links between research and teaching, and in particular the underpinning of interdisciplinary teaching with interdisciplinary research, IBED is seeking to recruit an interdisciplinary tenure track assistant professor on the topic of **Ecological and Environmental Ethics**.

Background

There is an increasing ambition of and demand for scientists to provide citizens and policy makers with tools and knowledge for conserving natural resources and ecosystem services. Societal concerns about biodiversity decline, climate change, sustainable development of land use as well as fair distribution and access to natural resources create complex challenges. A major challenge that we face is how to address multiple and potentially competing objectives and diverse values systems related to possible future actions in complex environments.

Ecologists and earth and environmental scientists often lack the tools needed to integrate ethical concerns, environmental legislation and diverse socio-economic values into their research, recommendations and public engagement. A researcher with the right expertise in environmental ethics, political philosophy or philosophy of science and an understanding of current environmental policy can help develop, together with other scientists, a suitable framework to simultaneously address these competing objectives and diverse value systems. A researcher and educator with the right skills and interests could help cultivate a deliberative and reflective research and education community which combines our specific research expertise, societal challenges and policy needs.

Examples of challenges that are of specific interest within IBED:

- **Natural resource management.** Management of wildlife and natural resources always involves persons and institutions with conflicting interests (economic, philosophical, historical, cultural, religious). How do we effectively manage resources considering diverse human values and meet the potentially conflicting demands of providing food, maintaining livelihoods, and sustaining ecosystem services?
- **Climate change and energy transition.** Targets for renewable energy can have direct and indirect effects on biodiversity. How do we balance ethical concerns arising in the energy transition, meeting national and international climate, economic and conservation targets, accommodating legal agreements, and reducing the negative impact on biodiversity?
- **Conservation biology.** Ecological science has developed a set of approaches to protect species and biodiversity: reducing habitat destruction, pollution and exploitation, promoting diversity in agro-ecosystems. However, strategies may be imposed on people living in one place by more affluent people living in other places. How do we conserve biodiversity and consider needs of diverse societies? How do we maintain a strong connection to nature and conserve it at the same time? How do we balance different demands for land use such as agriculture and nature conservation?
- **Uncertainty in ecological systems.** Science provides insights and predictions about natural systems in the context of the inherent uncertainty that exists in the real world. These insights

are strongly related to the methodological choices made with regard to theory development, model development and experimental validation. How do we convey this uncertainty and stochasticity in ecological systems while also facilitating decision making? How does our scientific understanding and communication of uncertainty influence 'science-denial' attitudes in society?

- **Geo-engineering environment-climate systems.** Humans have the knowledge and ability to alter the dynamics of regional or even global systems through geo-engineering. To what extent can we experiment with large and often unique natural systems? How do we weigh and communicate the costs, benefits and risks?

Through this position we aim to:

- Provide a theoretical foundation in environmental / ecological ethics, environmental policies and history and philosophy of science in our education of BSc and MSc students, applied to topical issues in ecology, environmental sciences and sustainability;
- enhance the expertise in our institute and the Faculty of Science to engage with and give direction to reflective research and education on ethical questions and philosophy of science within research domains of IBED;
- contribute to societal and policy debates and decision making on ecological and environmental issues in the Netherlands as well as internationally ;
- help colleagues critically assess the societal and environmental impact of actions, or lack thereof and train MSc students, PhD candidates and staff in this;
- strengthen and extend interdisciplinary research across the boundaries of the natural sciences, the humanities and the social sciences towards integrating ecological research outcomes, ethical dilemmas and consequences for decision making
- foster interactions between academic and societal stakeholders

What are you going to do?

Teaching (+ 50% of time)

The candidate is expected to teach and develop education material within the bachelor programs of Future Planet Studies (IIS) and Biology (FNWI) and the master programs of Biological Sciences and Earth Sciences, with potential for collaboration with Amsterdam University College. The candidate can contribute to and develop BSc modules on ethical and philosophical issues relating to conservation biology and sustainability; develop interdisciplinary projects (e.g. relating to the energy transition), and various MSc modules dealing with applied ecological issues, and ethical and philosophical questions as they pertain to doing scientific research. Courses that the candidate should coordinate or contribute to are "Future Challenges and Innovative Solutions" (BSc Future Planet Studies), "Energy and Climate Change; Science, Policy and Economics", "Climate Change and Environmental Ethics" (MSc Earth Science). The candidate would also supervise (interdisciplinary) BSc and MSc theses. We envision that the candidate will develop an extensive research-based interdisciplinary teaching portfolio, also consisting of new course material and course modules to reshape the BSc and MSc curricula to cover contemporary topics in their area of expertise.

Research (+/- 40% of time)

We are searching for a candidate that has a solid foundation to integrate ethical considerations and philosophy of science into ecological research, with a genuine interest in ecology, environment and biodiversity and an awareness of environmental policy. The candidate builds on this expertise when developing new research in collaboration with other researchers within the Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics and the UvA HPS community. Within IBED the candidate will be embedded within the department of Theoretical and Computational Ecology.

An additional 10% of time is expected to be spent on organizational issues.

Beyond IBED, we are looking for a candidate who would collaborate with the UvA community in history and philosophy of science. Interests include: the public understanding of science; the relation between moral virtue and the practice of science; and the role of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity in science. Within UvA's Faculty of Science there are philosophy of science positions in the Institute of Physics and the Institute for Logic, Language and Computation, and we strongly encourage and will facilitate collaboration among institutes. Furthermore, we will stimulate collaboration with researchers in other faculties, the Vossius Centre for the History of the Humanities and Sciences, and the recently launched Platform for the Ethics and Politics of Technology.

The following examples illustrate the varying research profiles that could be possible:

- articulate and systematically explore ethical considerations about the limitations of knowledge in the assessment of risk in ecological and environmental systems;
- develop a framework in which ethics, environmental policy and ecological research including methodological choices can be integrated
- historically and/or philosophically analyse use of concepts and arguments in public debates, also related to dealing with uncertainties
- clarify and address inconsistencies in ethical arguments or value systems relating to IBED research (e.g. topics like conservation biology, energy transition, geoengineering).

Furthermore, you are expected to:

- publish high quality papers that have an impact on the field and a wider societal impact, present at relevant conferences and supervise PhD students;
- attract external funding to sustain and expand the research line;
- actively pursue collaborations with relevant stakeholders inside and outside academia.

Profile

This position might be of interest to you if you:

- Hold a PhD and have a strong research record in environmental ethics, history and philosophy of science or environmental policy, applied to ecological and environmental challenges. Your research record should be evidenced by excellent publications in the international scientific literature.
- Have strong didactic skills – as evidenced from previous academic teaching and development of educational material, and have high affinity with university teaching and the development and organization thereof, and are experienced with supervising BSc, MSc and preferably also PhD students. We expect candidates to submit a short teaching statement with their application.

- Have the ability to critically assess the environmental and socio-economic impact of (in)actions, and an affinity for quantitative analysis of ecological processes.
- Have the proven ability to apply your expertise in collaborative projects with domain scientists (e.g. fields like ecology & evolution, environmental sciences, epidemiology).
- Have a relevant network in the field and experience in acquisition of research funding
- Have excellent communication skills, both orally as in writing, and a growing scientific publication record.
- Are fluent in English and in Dutch, or willing to learn Dutch to a level appropriate for teaching in Bachelor programmes taught in Dutch
- work well in a collaborative environment and can serve as role model for students as well as junior lecturers and junior researchers.

Our offer

We offer a temporary employment contract for 32 to 38 hours per week for the duration of two years in the position of Associate professor level 2. During these two years 3 assessments will take place to evaluate the performance of the candidate. In case of a positive evaluation a permanent position will be offered. Otherwise the contract will end after two years.

The starting salary will be in accordance with university regulations for academic personnel and depending on experience and qualifications. It will range from a minimum €3,746 to €5,127 (scale 11) gross per month (salary scale) based on full-time employment of 38 hours per week. This is exclusive 8 % holiday allowance and 8.3% end-of-year bonus. A favourable tax agreement, the '30% ruling', may apply to non-Dutch applicants. The Collective Labour Agreement of Dutch Universities is applicable.

Are you curious about our extensive package of secondary employment benefits like our excellent opportunities for study and development? Then find out more about working at the Faculty of Science.

About the Faculty of Science and the Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics

The Faculty of Science has a student body of around 7,000, as well as 1,600 members of staff working in education, research or support services. Researchers and students at the Faculty of Science are fascinated by every aspect of how the world works, be it elementary particles, the birth of the universe or the functioning of the brain.

The Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics (IBED) is one of eight research institutes of the Faculty of Science. The research at IBED aims to unravel how ecosystems function in all their complexity, and how they change due to natural processes and human activities. At its core lies an integrated systems approach to study biodiversity, ecosystems and the environment. IBED adopts this systems approach to ecosystems, addressing abiotic (soil and water quality) and biotic factors (ecology and evolution of plants, animals, and microorganisms), and the interplay between those. The IBED vision includes research encompassing experimental and theoretical approaches at a wide variety of temporal and spatial scales, i.e. from molecules and microorganisms to patterns and processes occurring at the global scale.

Questions?

Do you have questions about this vacancy? Or do you want to know more about our organisation?
Please contact: Prof. Judy Shamoun-Baranes

Job application

The UvA is an equal-opportunity employer. We prioritize diversity and are committed to creating an inclusive environment for everyone. We value a spirit of enquiry and perseverance, provide the space to keep asking questions, and promote a culture of curiosity and creativity.

Do you recognize yourself in the job profile? Then we look forward to receiving your application, including a motivation letter, a CV, a short teaching statement and a list of publications.

The first interview round will include a short presentation. The second interview round will include a trial lecture geared towards students.