

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH STUDIES

The Nyika Vwaza (UK) Trust (NVT) is a UK-based registered charity dedicated to conservation in the Nyika National Park and the adjacent Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve in northern Malawi. It is funded through a legacy endowment and ongoing public support, and has as specific objectives:

- *To assist in the long-term conservation and appropriate management and research objectives of the Nyika and Vwaza protected areas in Malawi.*
- *To encourage relevant training and education programmes for Malawians and those living in communities adjacent to the protected areas.*

Further details about the Nyika Vwaza (UK) Trust are available at www.nyika-vwaza-trust.org

The Nyika Vwaza Trust is offering financial assistance for research projects in northern Malawi on conservation issues as listed in note 3 on page 3 (see also the Research Papers on the NVT website).

The grants will be available between 1 April and 31 December of each year, or October through to June the following year depending on the start date as below, but may be extended on request. Grants should be regarded as offering supplementary finance to enable field studies to be carried out; they are not designed to cover course fees or salaries, other than a reasonable amount to meet living costs during the period of the study. NVT encourages counterpart funding in conjunction with other organisations.

Grants are normally offered twice in each calendar year:

Round 1: Applications should arrive not later than 31 July, available for studies between October and June the following year.

Round 2: Applications should arrive not later than 31 January, available for studies between April and December.

The grants will be offered to undergraduates or graduate-level researchers affiliated with University Departments or other organisations involved with the study of natural sciences or socio-economic aspects of biodiversity conservation and/or environmental management in and around protected areas. Socio-economic studies are especially welcome where they can contribute to wildlife protection and improved habitat management. Grants are also made available to unaffiliated, independent researchers who do not require institutional support, provided they are able to offer appropriate references for their work and proof of their ability to support themselves in all other respects.

The grants are designed to enable researchers to undertake studies in northern Malawi relevant to their areas of research. In some cases it is envisaged the studies may involve visits to similar ecological areas in Zambia and Tanzania. Applications for MSc-level fieldwork are particularly welcome. The Trust is also willing to consider grants for undergraduate level study field visits to the Nyika and Vwaza. Please contact the Trust Secretary for further details.

Each grant offered is up to a maximum of £5,000 to cover reasonable travel and maintenance costs, costs of field work materials and, where necessary, wage costs for hired field assistants and related ancillary costs. Salary or wage costs for the researcher are not covered.

The Trust may consider a programme of study extending over periods exceeding one year, but grants are initially offered for up to one year and any extension or second or subsequent grant will be conditional upon satisfactory performance and acceptable deliverables under the Grant Agreement.

Applications should identify the potential benefits and implications of the study in meeting the objectives as set out in the notes below. Proposals that implement baseline surveys are also welcome, as long as they are structured so as to be readily repeatable. The Trustees intend that the supported studies result in published output being made available in the public domain, and that the information is disseminated effectively and of benefit to Malawi.

The Trustees will require a written report within four months of the completion of the grant-supported activity.

Applications should be made in the specified outline below and should not exceed three pages. They should be submitted to the Trustees by email (secretary@nyika-vwaza-trust.org).

NOTES FOR APPLICANTS

Applications, not exceeding three pages, should be submitted including the following information:

Part 1 – The applicant

- Candidate's full name and date of birth
- Candidate's postal and personal email address
- A brief curriculum vitae (not exceeding 2 pages) to be submitted as an addendum to the application
- Name of supervisor and college/institution.

Part 2 – The proposed study

An outline of the proposed study and travel describing:

- a) the research objectives including their wider relevance to conservation, and with particular reference to the objectives of the Trust,
 - b) justification for the study; the problem that the study intends to address,
 - c) indication of methods and approach to be used,
 - d) intended and quantified outputs,
 - e) indication of how the results can be used by conservation managers,
 - f) indication of any research centres it is proposed to visit,
 - g) proposed starting and expected completion date,
 - h) an outline budget for travel, living and research expenses up to a maximum of £5,000, indicating the main items and costs.
- Proposals for basic surveys will be considered, as long as they can act as a baseline for future monitoring, as will monitoring projects. The establishment of demonstration trials can also be included.
 - Non-Malawian applicants are encouraged to include a suitably qualified Malawian partner in the study team, either resident in Malawi or studying overseas. An additional grant of up to £1,000 may be available to cover these costs.
 - For candidates affiliated to an institution, a reference from the candidate's supervisor and from the Head of Department or another person responsible should be attached. The supervisor is asked to comment on the candidate's potential, on the added-value of the study/travel in relation to the proposed topic of study, confirmation that there are specific contacts with the overseas research centres proposed and the feasibility of achieving the objectives of this particular grant. Other comments that will assist the Trustees in selecting outstanding candidates and proposals for this award will be much appreciated.
 - The Head of Department or other person responsible for ensuring compliance with the organisation's health, safety and security procedures is asked to confirm that appropriate steps will be taken to promote safe work by the researcher. They should also endorse the supervisor's recommendation and provide any other comments that may assist the Trustees. The Trust will not be held responsible for any adverse incident involving the researcher during the period of the grant.
 - Successful candidates will be informed of the outcome of their submission by email within one month of the deadline dates set out on page 1.
 - The funds awarded will be paid as a grant to the College/University Department or organisation as appropriate. The organisation will be asked to provide a receipt on the Trust's pro-forma when the grant is received. In the case of an independent researcher, funds will be paid direct to the researcher.

Research study reports.

Recipients of NVT grants will be required to submit a report, formally endorsed by their supervisor where applicable, within four months of the completion of the study topic. This report should be sent by email to the Secretary of the Trust, secretary@nyika-vwaza-trust.org.

The report and study conclusions are required by the Trust as a basis for influencing future management activities in the protected areas. Reports will be made accessible on the Trust's website as a form of dissemination. Original photographs in digital format illustrating the work would be welcomed for inclusion.

As a condition of the grant, four hardcopies should be produced by the researcher within three months of completion and distributed to: Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) – Divisional Office, Mzuzu; DNPW offices at Chelinda or Vwaza (as appropriate); Department of Forestry, Mzuzu University; and the Lilongwe Wildlife Trust, Lilongwe. This can be a separate budget item in the proposal.

The Trust reserves the right to return any final report for clarifications or minor modifications before final acceptance.

Format and content of report.

The Report should be headed Nyika Vwaza Trust Research Study Report, with the name of the researcher and the name of the organisation, if applicable. This should be followed by an informative title for the study topic.

The report should contain an abstract of the principal conclusions and any recommendations, followed by a summary of the objectives and initial justification for the study. It should also contain the names and locations of any Research Centres visited, the names of the principal contacts and the start and finish dates of the study.

The major part of the report should be a brief but informative summary of the study undertaken and any conclusions, and use graphics and pictures where appropriate. This should be sufficient to provide the Trustees with a clear understanding of the issues addressed and how the conclusions affect the wider implications for longer-term objectives of conservation management of the protected areas. Detailed aspects of the research may be added as appendices.

Publications consulted or to which reference is made during the study should be listed and proposed future related studies or collaboration should be mentioned.

Publications arising from the research study should formally acknowledge the support of the Nyika Vwaza (UK) Trust. It is the intention of the Trust to publish the reports on its website and also use the reports (or material from the reports) to inform the Trust's supporters via its Newsletter. Agreement to this is a condition of the grant being awarded.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR PROPOSALS

1. The Nyika Vwaza (UK) Trust is a registered charity in the United Kingdom (charity number 1105105) and is managed by a Board of Trustees. The Trust places importance on helping local communities in the areas surrounding the Nyika and Vwaza areas with collaborative management, in sharing benefits and in carrying out educational programmes in those communities.

2. The Trust is willing to fund applied research across northern Malawi, but our especial focus is on the **Nyika National Park** and **Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve**. Both areas are managed by the Malawi Department of Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) with the operational headquarters at Thazima, the border gate to the Nyika Park.

3. Research topics of interest to us are primarily those associated with biodiversity conservation and/or land management, but other topics such as socio-economic or similar issues within surrounding communities can be considered. Research we are prepared to support is expected to assist managers and decision-makers and add to the existing body of information on the area, rather than be duplication of what is already known. Purely academic research can be considered, but may be assessed as of lower priority. Proposals that form part of a BSc, MSc, PhD or other degree are welcomed.

In order to provide some indication of topics of particular interest to the Trust, a series of Conservation Research Notes have been compiled which indicate the current state of knowledge and what we believe

are the main knowledge gaps (see below). Although proposals on such topics are more likely to be approved, other topics will also be considered if they are likely to result in applied conservation benefits.

- I. **Invasive species.** Some of the major issues on the Nyika concern invasive plants such as *Rubus ellipticus*, *Pinus patula* and the indigenous bracken fern taking over some of the grassland areas. Some research studies have recently been done on this, but what is still required is to find the determining factors in their spread, what effects their spread may be having on other biodiversity, and how these species might be controlled by management. These topics are elaborated upon in two Research Notes on the NVT website – [Research Note 2 - Bracken](#) and [Research Note 7 - Extent and Impact of Alien Plants in Nyika National Park](#).
- II. **Fire Management programme.** Hot fires cause considerable damage to the environment as they threaten the remaining montane forests and alter the composition of the grasslands from palatable to coarser, less palatable grass species. Although controlled burns have been used to protect the remnant evergreen forest areas, lack of resources means that they may not be carried out consistently, leading to uncontrolled fires causing extensive damage. What impacts these fires – both wild fires and controlled burns – are having on the grassland biodiversity is not yet clear. This is elaborated upon in [Research Note 3 - Fire Ecology](#).
- III. **Birds.** Much work has already been done on the birds of the area, but the Trustees are keen to encourage further studies of species believed to be threatened in order to understand more clearly their current conservation status and the possible threats to them. These include bustards and cranes. This topic is elaborated upon more in [Research Note 4 - Birds](#).
- IV. **Law enforcement.** Park management is ill-equipped to control poaching for commercial gain of animal and plant species, in particular collection of orchid species unique to the Nyika. The Trustees are keen to encourage the involvement of local communities in the protection of endangered species of plants and animals for conservation and to benefit their communities, and to promote coexistence between people and wildlife. For orchids see [Research Note 1 - Orchid Harvesting](#) and for wildlife conflicts more details are available in [Research Note 6 - Human-Wildlife Conflict](#).
- V. **Alternative and Improved Livelihoods.** Economically and socially-viable alternative and improved livelihoods for communities living on the edges of the Nyika and Vwaza that can lead to reductions in poaching levels and human-wildlife conflict will be part of any balanced conservation research programme. Alternative and improved livelihoods should reduce poverty levels, increase food security and improve land use practices, as well as increase marketing and sales of wild products from community lands. It is hoped such studies, demonstrations and related extension activities would lead to a change in the mind-set amongst poaching communities and provide valid economic alternatives. This topic is elaborated upon more in [Research Note 6 - Human-Wildlife Conflict](#).
- VI. **Vwaza Marsh.** This area has been far less studied than the Nyika and, although it supports a range of wildlife, many are there only during the dry season. Determination of the key resources driving this, especially water supplies, are required along with further baseline studies. See [Research Note 5 - Vwaza Marsh Biodiversity](#).

4. Additional support from the Trust. NVT maintains a group of natural history specialists (the Technical Advisory Group), who are all well known in their particular fields of study, and can offer support to candidates by introducing them to the relevant specialist(s). In addition, the Trust has compiled a [bibliography](#) of existing references and may be able to supply e-copies of some upon request. The Trust will not be able to offer other academic support beyond introductions.

5. Living and working conditions. Whilst living and working conditions in Malawi are generally acceptable, conditions are likely to be more difficult in the more remote Nyika National Park and at the Vwaza Reserve. Mzuzu, the principal town in northern Malawi is about 140 km from the main camp at Chelinda. The Trust may try to provide assistance with permits (if required) to work in the protected areas and may be able to help with transport and accommodation arrangements.