



Open PhD Position in Environmental Humanities – Exploring Negative Values of Nature in Wetlands

We invite applications for an interdisciplinary PhD position at the intersection of biodiversity conservation, environmental ethics and the social sciences. The project studies how people respond to the negative aspects of nature—such as mosquitoes, flooding, beaver-related damage, and fog—in the Thurauen wetlands in Northern Switzerland.

The successful candidate will collect and analyse qualitative interview data, contributing to a broader investigation into environmental *disvalues* (negative environmental values). The project is led by Dr. Anna Deplazes Zemp, a biologist and environmental ethicist, based in the Department of Molecular Life Sciences of the University of Zurich, and will be co-supervised by Prof. Dr. Joëlle Salomon Cavin, a human geographer at the University of Lausanne. The research will further involve collaboration with Prof. Dr. Claudia Keller, a literature and cultural studies scholar at the University of Fribourg, and it will inform a partnership with the WWF Switzerland, where we will develop narrative tools to foster constructive, non-polarised discussions on the negative aspects of nature.

The project is embedded within the National Research Programme on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (NRP82) (<https://www.nfp82.ch/en>, <https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/234974>), providing an excellent opportunity to engage with an active interdisciplinary research network.

Objectives and tasks

- Literature analysis on different approaches to deal with negative values in the context of the Thurauen and similar wetlands in Switzerland.
- Approximately 30 semi-structured interviews with residents, visitors and different stakeholders in the Thurauen wetlands to explore their responses to negative values in wetlands.
- Transcription, coding and analysis of the interview data using qualitative methods.
- Collaboration with other project members at the Universities of Lausanne and Fribourg to integrate findings into the broader academic discussion on environmental disvalues and environmental narratives.
- Working with project members at the WWF Switzerland to incorporate interview insights into the development of ‘narrative tools’ (e.g. a story collection) designed to foster constructive, non-polarised dialogue around negative aspects of nature.

Candidate profile

We are looking for a highly motivated candidate who brings the following qualifications and qualities:

- A completed Master’s degree in biology/ecology, geography, anthropology, political science, or other social sciences. As the project is based in a biology department, a basic understanding of biology or ecology is an advantage.
- Excellent command of German (spoken and written) is a requirement.
- Very good written and spoken English skills.
- Knowledge, interest, or experience in biodiversity conservation, science policy, or science-society relations in Central Europe.

- Familiarity with qualitative social science methods (e.g. interviews, thematic analysis) or a strong willingness to acquire these skills quickly.
- Enthusiasm for working in an interdisciplinary, collaborative research environment.
- Available to start the PhD project between November 2025 and February 2026.

We offer

- A fully funded, four-year PhD position.
- A vibrant interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research network in the environmental humanities and environmental sciences.
- The opportunity to contribute to a theoretically grounded project with direct practical relevance for biodiversity conservation.
- Access to excellent research infrastructure and support at the University of Zurich, with the possibility of a research visit at the University of Lausanne.
- Training within the Framework of the Life Science Zurich Graduate School.

Application documents

Please submit your application as a **single** PDF file containing:

- Curriculum vitae (including names and contact details of two referees)
- Motivation letter explaining your interest in working at the interface of biodiversity conservation sciences, social sciences and environmental ethics.
- Optional: A sample of research work (e.g. a chapter from your Master's thesis, research essay or paper etc.)

Deadline

Please send the application to anna.deplazeszemp@uzh.ch by **September 30, 2025**.