

# Senior Researcher Behavioural Biology (3-5 years, fulltime)

The Department of Animals in Science & Society offers a position to an interested Behavioural Biologist to contribute to the ongoing research program within the Division of Animal Welfare and Laboratory Animal Science [[www.uu.nl/diergeneeskunde.dwm](http://www.uu.nl/diergeneeskunde.dwm)].

The overall aim of the research programs within both the Department and the Division of Animal Welfare is to extend our knowledge about the mechanisms underlying emotional states and cognitive processes in animals, and how these processes contribute to the ability of animals to adapt to and cope with environmental conditions, changes and challenges. We aim to develop a biologically grounded understanding of animal welfare as a function of the animal's adaptive capacities and the animals' perception of its own internal state. We believe that, if based on a firm biological basis, welfare principles should be robust and independent of context of use of animals by humans (companion animals, livestock, wild or laboratory animals).

Since adaptive capabilities are regulated by individual experiences during development, in interaction with the individuals' genetic make up, we seek to address the critical role of internal (genetic background, set-points of neural activity) and/or external factors (e.g. life events, impact of the environment) on processes that regulate the animals' adaptive capacities and through this, determine the animals' perception of its state of welfare. A specific point of interest is the biological significance of individual variation in such adaptive capacities and coping 'style' (coping strategy) within groups or populations of animals.

In summary, we work on the principle that an animal's welfare lies on some continuum from poor to good and that we should seek to manage animals and their environment not only to avoid negative welfare/ suffering, but actively to promote good welfare. Our understanding of internal feedback and emotional control systems convinces us in addition that an animal's welfare status is in major part a function of its own perception and response to its own condition. Further, as a fundamental construct of a strictly biological basis for understanding and assessing animal welfare, our group strongly promotes the view that welfare is related to an animal's adaptive capacities.

An adaptive response may take some finite period of time; crucially therefore our assessment of welfare should not simply consider the status of any individual at a given moment in time, but needs to be integrated over the longer time periods required to execute such change. We believe that that self-assessment/ perception of a given status shows significant inter-individual variation and that there is also significant variation in adaptive capacity and coping strategy; in consequence, even under identical conditions, the actual welfare status of different individuals may vary widely. Understanding this underlying variation in self-perception and in adaptive capacity forms a major part of the Division's research interest.

Current projects include work on:

- the (neurobiological) regulation of cognitive-emotional processes and the resulting adaptive capacity in laboratory mice;
- neurobiological and behavioural indicators of chronic stress (in a range of different species including rats, mice, wild deer and domestic dogs);
- individual variation of adaptive capacities within/between inbred mouse strains;
- variation of behavioural response patterns as a function of social grouping in rats and mice;
- studies of response patterns to environmental challenge in domestic dogs as indicators for the differing adaptive capacity of individuals and differences in coping strategy.

A summary of our approach on welfare as a biological concept may be found in

Ohl, F. and van der Staay, F.J. (2012) Animal welfare - at the interface between science and society. *Vete Journal* 192, 13-19.

Ohl, F. and Putman, R.J. (2013) Applying Wildlife Welfare Principles to Individual Animals. Report for Scottish Natural Heritage, Inverness. <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2072>

Ohl, F. and Putman, R.J. (2014) Animal Welfare at the group level: more than the sum of individual welfare? *Acta Biotheoretica* 62, 35-45.

For further information about the department and its broader activities, please visit the department's home page: [www.uu.nl/diergeneeskunde.dwm](http://www.uu.nl/diergeneeskunde.dwm).

The new post advertised here offers an exciting opportunity for the right candidate to develop their own research interests and research career within a dynamic and expanding Department. The successful candidate will be expected to contribute to and enhance our existing research programs; thus he or she will be expected to help coordinate and, where appropriate, assist in supervision of ongoing projects of current post-docs and PhD students. However, the appointee will also be expected to develop his/her own personal program of research. This should be an independent program of work (but complementary to current themes and approaches within the group, in exploration of welfare issues from the biological perspective that welfare is a dynamic function of an animal's self-perception and adaptive capacity). It is expected that the successful candidate will gain his/her own funding and seek to appoint their own PhD students, as well as assisting with general supervision of existing students within the Department.

## **Profile**

The successful candidate will have:

- a PhD in Behavioural Biology, Behavioural Neuroscience, Cognitive Neuroscience, or related discipline
- an excellent track-record in research, both at pre-doctoral and post-doctoral level, with research interests overlapping with or complementary to one or more of the domains which are central to the department (i.e. emotional and cognitive behaviour in animals; animal welfare)
- a proven ability to attract independent research funding
- experience and proven skills to set-up and supervise animal studies
- the capacity to work both independently and within a team
- fluency in English language

## **Position**

We offer a full-time position for five years, with a potential for tenure given a positive evaluation after three years. The gross salary depends on qualifications and experience and ranges between €3,259 and €5,070 per month for a full-time appointment (salary scale 11/12, Dutch Universities Conditions of Employment). The salary is supplemented with an annual holiday pay of 8% and an end-of-year bonus of 8.3% per year. Other secondary conditions include e.g. a pension scheme, partially paid parental leave, and flexible [employment conditions](#).

## **About the organisation**

Utrecht University has great ambitions for its teaching quality and study success rates. This also applies to its clear research profiles which are centred around four themes:

Sustainability, Life Sciences, Youth & Identity, and Institutions. Utrecht University plays a prominent role in our society and contributes to finding the answers to topical and future societal issues and is the only Dutch university and in fact the only university in continental Europe in the Times Higher Education Ranking of the Top 50 Social Sciences Universities 2012/2013

The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Utrecht University is the only place in the Netherlands where veterinarians are trained. This means that our Faculty is the centre of expertise and point of reference for veterinary issues for the entire country, and increasingly for the world abroad as well. Our activities include providing primary health and welfare care for a variety of types of animals, monitoring food safety and the prevention of zoonoses (diseases transferable from animals to humans). The Faculty is considered one of the leading veterinary medicine faculties in Europe and is ranked in the top five world-wide.

## **Additional information**

Additional information about the vacancy can be obtained from prof dr F. Ohl: +31 30 253 2967, [f.ohl@uu.nl](mailto:f.ohl@uu.nl)

**Please do submit your application online [as below], but feel encouraged to send a copy to this address also.**

The preferable starting date is in September/October 2014. Interviews will be planned in July/August.

### **Application**

Please send your application accompanied by a letter of motivation, a curriculum vitae and the names and contact info of at least two persons who are able to provide professional reference.

**Applications have to be submitted online at**

**<http://www.uu.nl/NL/Informatie/sollicitanten/Pages/vacatures.aspx>**.

**Please note that the deadline for application is 1<sup>st</sup> of July [not 15<sup>th</sup> of June as currently indicated on the website].**