



Maynooth University

Ollscoil Mhá Nuad

Department of Biology

Details of the Scholarship Award

The Department of Biology at Maynooth University is pleased to announce that a PhD Scholarship will be available for a suitably qualified and successful applicant intending to commence their PhD studies in September 2026.

Project Title: The rare and declining hairy wood ant (*Formica lugubris*) in Ireland: Investigating future translocation options and feasibility

Supervisor and Environment: The position will be supervised by Dr Tara Dirilgen, based in the [Department of Biology](#) at Maynooth University, Ireland. The student will work closely with the project steering committee and will join the [Terrestrial Ecology Lab](#) research group.

Project Description

This National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) funded project is seeking a highly-motivated and enthusiastic student for a PhD position investigating hair wood ant translocation options and how they can be applied to Ireland.

The Hairy Wood Ant (*Formica lugubris*) is a near threatened species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red list, which has shown a significant retraction in its range in Ireland over the past century. It is now confined to a handful of conifer plantations across the island. The future of this species in Ireland is unknown, facing many challenges from various land use practices and a changing landscape. This is a monogynous species (1 queen per nest), meaning methods to artificially translocate this species to restore to its former range are not straightforward, and currently unknown.

Value of PhD Scholarship Award

The award is fully funded for up to four years, commencing September 2026.

The following funding is available for the successful applicant:

- Student stipend: €25,000 per annum;
- Annual Tuition Fees Support (to cover EU fees).

Duration of PhD Scholarship Award

The scholarship is awarded for up to four years of full-time study, subject to satisfactory annual academic progression.

Role of the Student

The project topic is pre-specified with defined deliverables as outlined herein. These must be completed in accordance with the requirements set out in the Research Student Programme Stages as outlined in the [MU Regulations for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).

The PhD student will (i) identify potential nest sites across Ireland, (ii) modify and develop protocols suitable for translocation, and (iii) trial translocation protocols in lab and field setting. It will involve fieldwork to collect specimens and run trials, and working with a network of stakeholders.

The PhD student will work closely with landowners, stakeholders, therefore, communication and management skills will be important.

Mode of Study

Awardees must be resident in Ireland and available to pursue their programme of research on a full-time basis at Maynooth University for four years.

The successful candidate's research programme will be under the general supervision of their nominated supervisor(s) who will specify study times, research times, vacation periods and other operational requirements.

Awardees will normally be based at the Maynooth University campus and may only conduct research elsewhere with the permission of their supervisor and the Head of Department.

Eligibility Criteria

Minimum first class or 2.1 honours in their primary degree, or have a relevant Master's degree in entomology, conservation science, zoology, ecology or cognate discipline. A full, clean drivers licence is required.

Application and Selection Process

Please include the following in your application:

- Cover letter [detailing interest and motivations for the project] (max 2 pages);
- Curriculum Vitae [detailing research experience] (max 3 pages);
- An example of scientific writing (e.g. manuscript, essay, lab report, publication);
- Names and contact details of two referees.

English Language requirements: Applicants who are non-native speakers of the English language must provide written evidence of competency in the English language that satisfy the programme-specific requirements set out by the [Maynooth University International Office](#).

All Scholarship Awards are conditional on approval for registration by the University, following a formal application on the University's application portal, MUApply.

All eligible candidates will be considered for open positions. Applicants may be shortlisted for interview (online) and, if so, will be contacted directly by the Department. Late applications will not be considered.

Informal queries can be sent to tara.dirilgen@mu.ie

Closing Date: Please apply by 5pm on 3 June 2026.

Please submit applications directly via this [application form](#).



HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH



NPWS

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna
Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service