About the Endangered Landscapes Programme

The project will designate new, and upgrade existing, conservation areas to create a transboundary protected and interconnected core area of 1.2 million ha, within wider Prypiat/Polesia area covering approximately 5.8 million ha around the border between Belarus and Ukraine. The project also aims to directly avert threats, such as wetland drainage, habitat change and fragmentation caused by infrastructure development, forestry and intensive, unsustainable resource extraction. In addition, improved management and better trans-boundary protection of large tracts of existing natural habitat will enhance natural processes that link the different wetland and terrestrial habitats in this unique mega-landscape.

Through ensuring this ecological connectivity for key species (e.g. Wolf, Moose, European Bison, Greater Spotted Eagle), the project will contribute to local economies through activities such as the promotion and development of culturally important products and ecotourism. An extensive research component to understand landscape development in the radiated and abandoned Chernobyl exclusion zone will complement the project's conservation activities, although it is not directly part of this project.

The project is led by the Frankfurt Zoological Society, which focuses on conserving the world's most outstanding high-biodiversity wilderness areas mainly through the establishment or expansion of protected areas and support for protected area management. Partners in the project also include the BirdLife partners APB BirdLife Belarus, the Ukrainian Society of the Protection of Birds (USPB) and the National Academy of Science Belarus.

This plan will track 'Key Performance Measures', including indicators that are expected to change over the project duration and post project. The monitoring will have a nested design that will include data collection from existing and newly-designated protected areas and restored sites, as well as from the matrix of the wider countryside outside these areas. You will develop, with partners, a detailed habitat map of the study area using field and remote-sensing data and a stratified baseline of biodiversity and ecosystem service indicators established. You will develop models to link the assemblage of species and services in relation to habitat and other environmental data, to produce a predictive tool from which targets can be set and the impacts of external factors such as climate change, as well as the implemented interventions, predicted. As new information becomes available, models can be refined and targets and performance measures updated within an adaptive management framework.

Standard methods will be used to monitor biodiversity and habitats, including breeding and non-breeding birds, mammals, bats, fish, butterflies, moths, dragonflies and damselflies. These will be monitored using both professionals and local volunteers, with support and training run through schools and local communities as part of a citizen science programme. Appropriate equipment will be provided through project funding, including binoculars and telescopes, passive sound-recording devices for bats and equipment for collecting water samples for eDNA analysis. Remote GPS tracking of individuals of key bird and mammal species and the use of camera traps will also identify usage of restored / connected landscapes and refine the predictive models. You will be responsible, with other project partners, for developing tracking projects on Greater Spotted Eagles and using eDNA techniques to establish baselines and monitor changes in aquatic ecosystems. There is a great deal of scope for using this project as a lever to attract funding to undertake additional research into the ecological processes behind rewilding and we would encourage the prospective candidates to think how best this may be achieved, e.g. through dedicated project funding or working through academic institutions.