**Research Grant Announcement**

**Darwin Initiative Project: "Upscaling Pollination to Enhance Biodiversity and Human Welfare in Nepal" (Nepal Pollination Project)**

**Project Overview**

Pollination is a critical link between biodiversity and human welfare, supporting approximately 75% of global crop species, including many economically and nutritionally important fruits, vegetables, and seeds (Klein et al., 2007). Smallholder farmers in developing countries are particularly reliant on insect-pollinated crops for their livelihoods and for essential dietary micronutrients such as vitamin A and folate (Smith et al., 2015; Timberlake et al., 2022). However, pollinator declines driven by agricultural intensification, habitat loss, and climate change are increasingly threatening food security, nutrition, and rural incomes worldwide (Potts et al., 2016). Pollinator declines in the Himalayan region, including Nepal, are already leading to negative impacts on people's livelihoods and health, as the yields of nutritious, high-value crops decline. Nepal hosts exceptionally rich pollinator diversity, including one of the world's most diverse bumblebee assemblages and five of the nine global honeybee species. Despite this richness, continued pollinator loss is predicted to cause substantial declines in farm income and severe nutrition-related health impacts, particularly among vulnerable rural populations.

This Darwin Initiative-funded project, "Upscaling Pollination to Enhance Biodiversity and Human Welfare in Nepal," hereafter referred to as the Nepal Pollination Project, builds on strong evidence that pollinator declines can be reversed at a local scale when farmers, researchers, and policymakers work together. Scaling up in both extent and ambition, the project aims to deliver a national-level regime shift in pollinator awareness, farming and beekeeping practices, research capacity, and conservation policy in Nepal. In addition, the project aims to develop a national pollination digital library and a digital museum under the Pollination Innovation Center, serving as a long-term platform for pollinator data, knowledge sharing, education, and policy support. Through this integrated approach, the project seeks to improve human health, strengthen rural economies, and conserve biodiversity across Nepal and the wider Himalayan region.

**Research Focus Areas**

We invite Master's students to conduct thesis research integral to this national project. The successful applicants will study pollination dynamics within high-value crop systems at designated **National Agriculture Modernization Programme (NAMP)** sites.

**Primary Research Focus:**

- Pollinator diversity and visitation rates in orchard/plantation systems.
- Relationships between pollination services and crop yield/quality.
- Effects of land-use and climate variability on pollinator communities.
- Evaluation of pollinator-friendly farming and beekeeping practices.

**Specific Crop and Site Allocations:**

- **Citrus:** Research to be conducted in **Syangja** NAMP sites.
- **Cardamom:** Research to be conducted in **Kaski** NAMP sites.
- **Mango:** Research to be conducted in **Sarlahi** NAMP sites.

**Research Methodology**

The Nepal Pollination Project has already developed standardized field protocols, sampling designs, and treatment methodologies. Selected students will apply these established methods to ensure consistency and comparability across sites. Technical backstopping, training, and supervision will be provided jointly by the project team and NAMP to ensure high-quality data generation and policy relevance.

**Eligibility**

- Currently enrolled in a Master's degree program in **Entomology, Horticulture, and Agroecology** at Faculty of Agriculture, Agriculture and Forestry University.
- Should have **completed the second semester** and be at the thesis research stage.
- Demonstrated strong interest in pollination ecology, agroecology, and/or biodiversity conservation.
- Willingness and ability to undertake sustained field research at the specified NAMP sites.

**Support Provided**

- **Thesis Stipend:** NPR 1,00,000 (One lakh) per student.
- **Academic Supervision:** Joint mentoring from project team and NAMP specialists
- **Technical Support:** In standardized pollination research methods and data collection.
- **Policy Impact:** Opportunity to contribute directly to national evidence-based and policy processes on pollination services.

**How to Apply**

Interested candidates must submit the following documents as a single PDF file:

1. **Curriculum Vitae (CV)**
2. **Statement of Interest** (max 500 words), outlining your motivation and relevant background.
3. **Recommendation Letter** from your current academic supervisor.

**Submission Deadline & Contact:** 15 February 2026

**Please submit applications or direct inquiries to:** kdevkota@afu.edu.np
Kedar Devkota, PhD

.....

Prof. Dr. Arjun Kumar Shrestha
Dean

DEAN