MPALA | Mpala Research Centre
AFRICA'S LIVING LABORATORY

Research Internship Opportunity

MSc Student - Opuntia Research Internship

About Mpala

In the heart of Laikipia County, where golden savannah stretches to the horizon and the calls of over 550 bird species fill the air, lies Mpala, a living laboratory unlike any other. Here, scientists, students, and conservationists from around the world work side by side, tackling urgent global challenges, from protecting endangered species to understanding climate change, from studying human–wildlife coexistence to advancing public health.

At Mpala, research is not confined to books or screens, it is lived, breathed, and experienced in the wild. For those ready to immerse themselves in science at its source, Mpala is more than a workplace, it's a place where your work becomes part of the story of conservation.

About the Opportunity

A fully funded MSc field research internship opportunity is available for a highly motivated student interested in contributing to cutting-edge research on the management of **Opuntia (invasive cactus species)** and ecosystem restoration in Laikipia.

The project will provide practical six (6) months experience in ecological monitoring, restoration science, GIS and conservation research while generating knowledge to support sustainable rangeland management.

Research Focus Areas

Applications are invited from candidates with interests in one or more of the following fields: Invasive Species Ecology, Rangeland Ecology, Restoration Ecology, Conservation Biology, Wildlife Ecology, Environmental Monitoring, Biodiversity Assessment, Soil and Vegetation Dynamics, Remote Sensing and GIS, Socio-Ecological Systems and Biological Control of Invasive Species.

Eligibility Requirements

Applicants must:

- Hold a Bachelor's degree (Upper Second Class Honours or equivalent) in Environmental Science, Ecology, Conservation Biology, Wildlife Management, Soil Science, Biological Sciences, Natural Sciences, Applied Sciences or a related discipline.
- Have been admitted to a recognized MSc programme and be eligible to register for the field research component of their degree.
- Be available to commence the research project in the **last quarter of 2026.**

Desired Competencies

The ideal candidate should have:

- Experience in ecological or environmental field research.
- Knowledge of vegetation sampling, biodiversity assessments, and environmental monitoring techniques.
- Experience with GPS data collection and field survey methods.
- Working knowledge of GIS software (ArcGIS and/or QGIS).
- Basic statistical and data analysis skills.
- Excellent scientific writing, communication and problem-solving skills.
- Ability to work independently in remote field settings.

Additional advantages include: Experience with R or Python, remote sensing, drone/UAV applications, ecological modelling, wildlife or livestock monitoring, large ecological datasets and research related to invasive species or ecosystem restoration.

Key Responsibilities

The successful candidate will:

- Design and implement an MSc research project within the Opuntia Management Programme.
- Conduct field surveys on invasive plant distribution, vegetation recovery and ecosystem responses to management interventions.
- Collect, analyze and manage ecological, environmental and spatial data.
- Develop GIS maps and conduct spatial analyses.
- Contribute to project reports, scientific publications and stakeholder engagements.
- Present research findings at workshops, conferences and project meetings.
- Collaborate with researchers, conservation organizations, universities and local stakeholders.

What the Project Offers

The selected student will benefit from:

- Full funding for the MSc field research project
- Mentorship from experienced researchers and conservation scientists
- Training in ecological monitoring, GIS, restoration ecology and data analysis
- Opportunities for scientific publication and conference participation
- Exposure to multidisciplinary conservation research and professional networks

Application Requirements

Interested applicants should submit;

- Cover Letter (maximum two pages) outlining motivation and research interests
- Detailed Curriculum Vitae (CV), Academic Transcripts, Proof of MSc admission or evidence of completed MSc coursework,
- Contact details of two academic or professional referees and a brief concept note or research proposal aligned with **Opuntia management, restoration, and invasive species research**.

Send in your application to jobs@mpala.org with a single PDF document. Application Deadline **1st September 2026.**