The **Messerli Research Institute** at the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna (Vetmeduni) is launching an Interdisciplinary Postdoc Program together with its partner universities, the University of Vienna and the Medical University in Vienna.

The partner universities are looking for

2 University Assistants (Post-Doc)

for the Interdisciplinary Postdoc Program of the Messerli Research Institute of Human-Animal Interactions

Grade:	B1 Post-Doc
Level of employment:	40 hours weekly
Length of employment:	3 years, given a positive evaluation 2 years extension possible
Deadline for applications:	26.07.2026
Reference number:	2026/0047

Goal of the Interdisciplinary Postdoc Program (IDPP)

The advertised two positions aim to integrate and further expand the current foci of the Messerli Research Institute (MRI) and its partner universities. For this aim, the call has identified 8 research topics and their mentors (see below) that address problems associated with human-animal interactions (HAIs). These topics need to be addressed as complex and dynamic phenomena integrating the perspectives of both animals and humans to generate in-depth understanding through interdisciplinary research.

Hence, the partner universities call for project proposals developed by the candidates that address one of the 8 interdisciplinary topics. The partner universities aim for proposals that integrate information, data, techniques, tools, methods, concepts, and/or theories from the mentors' disciplines. The projects have to go beyond specialized knowledge and advance comprehensive understanding of problems in HAIs, thereby contributing to their solutions that are beyond the scope of single disciplines. Candidates can apply for more than one topic.

For each research topic, two or three MRI mentors, affiliated to the Vetmeduni, the Medical University of Vienna or the University of Vienna, have teamed up and offer their expertise to support the candidates in the development of such interdisciplinary research projects. The projects are initiated and will be led by the successful postdoctoral researchers of this call.

As such, the successful candidates are not only expected to conduct excellent research, but also to increase the international visibility of the interdisciplinary profile of both the postdoctoral researchers and the MRI.

Place of work

The position will be embedded within a dynamic research environment anchored at either of the partner universities depending on the topic the candidate will be working on.

The **Vetmeduni** is a centre of excellence for teaching and research in veterinary medicine. The modern campus accommodates teaching and research facilities as well as the only veterinary teaching and research hospital in Austria. It is the workplace of around 2,300 students and 1,400 staff. Vetmeduni distinguishes itself by striving for excellence in its teaching and research activities as well as in its service units and through its continuous dialogue with society.

The **Medical University of Vienna** is one of the most established medical training and research institutions in Europe. With more than 8,000 students, it is today the largest medical training facility in the German-speaking area. Together, 30 university departments and two clinical institutes as well as 13 basic science centres and numerous highly specialized laboratories make the Medical University of Vienna one of the most important cutting-edge research institutions in biomedicine.

The **University of Vienna** is consistently ranked within the top 100 universities worldwide, and since its foundation in 1365, it has been home to scholars driven by genuine curiosity. We foster interdisciplinarity and critical thinking to address the major questions of our time, combining academic rigour with societal responsibility. A compact overview of the profile, structure and organisation of the University of Vienna can be found here: https://www.univie.ac.at/en/about-us.

Context

In frame of its newly established IDPP, the MRI invites postdoctoral researchers with an integrative mind-set and interest in an interdisciplinary research career in order to supports excellent, innovative and problem-oriented postdoctoral research projects that address the challenges as well as benefits of human-animal interactions (HAI) by studying the human and animal perspectives of these interactions.

The MRI was established in 2010 with the support of the Messerli Foundation. The institute was launched at the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, the Medical University of Vienna and the University of Vienna. It aims to generate scientifically grounded insights into the reciprocal influence of humans and animals. Research at the institute focuses on the scientific study of the coexistence of humans and animals and aims to develop convincing criteria and strategies for ethically acceptable treatment of animals. The institute is characterized by a broad interdisciplinary approach – encompassing biology, medicine, veterinary medicine, philosophy, psychology, immunology, genetics as well as ethics and law.

Responsibilities

- Developing and realizing a problem-oriented, interdisciplinary and innovative research project that addresses one of the 8 topics described below, in collaboration with the respective mentors
- Publishing in peer-reviewed journals and other outlets relevant to the field
- Supervising and training of undergraduate students
- Actively contributing to the interdisciplinary and interuniversity activities of the MRI
- Actively contributing to the strategic goals of the MRI and the university of their employment regarding research, teaching and knowledge dissemination
- Participating in the organizational meetings, events and reporting activities of the MRI

For topic-specific requirements, desired qualifications and skills, see Research topics 1 to 8

Required education, qualifications and experience

- Completed studies and Doctorate/PhD in a field relevant for the research topic addressed by the applicant
- Outstanding publication track record in line with the career level
- Research or working experience with interdisciplinary projects
- Experience in supervising undergraduate and graduate students
- Experience with national and international research collaborations
- Good English level (B2)

Additional desired qualifications and skills

- Documented interest in developing an interdisciplinary research career
- Formal education in inter- and transdisciplinary research methods
- Experience in working in interdisciplinary research contexts
- Experience in engaging with non-academics and stakeholders involved in human-animal interactions
- Experience in science communication, e.g. academic outreach activities and public events
- Integrative mindset and genuine interest in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research
- Strong interpersonal and communication skills, being an enthusiastic and committed team player
- Experience in university teaching
- Good German level (B2)

What we offer

- A fellowship for 3 years, with a possible extension for another 2 years, positive evaluation given
- A stimulating peer group with 4 to 8 colleagues working in similar positions
- An excellent interdisciplinary research environment integrating expertise and facilities from 3 universities
- Top universities
- Stable employer
- Attractive campus
- Personal and professional training and development opportunities
- Health care
- Diversity and family-friendly university culture
- Children's day-care and holiday care options
- Numerous attractive fringe benefits
- Employee events

Minimum salary

The minimum salary for university staff is regulated by the Collective Bargaining Agreement for University Staff and at the B1 level amounts to EUR 5,014.30 gross based on a fulltime employment (40 hours/week).

Applications

Please submit your application in English, noting the **reference number 2026/0047**, by e-mail to idpp@vetmeduni.ac.at. Please do not forget to include the reference number or we will be unable to relate your application to the correct vacancy announcement.

Application documents in English language must include:

1. Letter of application (3 pages max.) with a brief description of
   - How the field of the applicant's PhD is relevant for the research topic to be

addressed. If the applicant addresses more than one topic, this relevance has to be described for each topic separately and explicitly.
- The applicant's career plan and the expected contribution of participating in the MRI IDPP to it.
- Description of the applicant's research network and its added value to the MRI.

2. Curriculum vitae (3 pages max.) including
   - Name and contact details of the person and relevant websites.
   - Academic education and list of academic milestones and relevant positions held to date (with a brief explanation of any career gaps, if applicable).
   - Main areas of research, short statement of the most important research results achieved to date and information on selected research esteem factors (e.g. publication quality, impact, invited talks) and recognition of excellence.
   - Experience in interdisciplinary research contexts.
   - Overview of academic teaching and supervised theses.
   - Overview of knowledge transfer including services and provision of expertise beyond the scientific community and other significant impact.
3. List of external funds acquired (topic, funding agency, budget, duration, role in the project) and currently submitted or unsuccessful grant applications.
4. List of publications
5. List of invited talks
6. Research project proposal addressing one of the 8 topics described below (max. 4 pages excl. title, abstract and references). Applicants may address multiple topics. In this case, multiple project proposals need to be submitted, each addressing a specific research topic separately. Each proposal needs to be structured according to the following template:
   - **Number and short title of the topic** you apply for (see list below):
   - **Title of the project you propose:**
   - **Abstract**: Please provide a concise abstract of the proposed project. (2000 characters)
   - **Introduction, background, and state of the art:** Provide a broad introduction to the topic. What challenges in human-animal interaction are the background of your research proposal? What is the specific issue/phenomenon related to this topic that you want to address with your research?
   - **Research questions, objectives, and/or hypotheses:** Clearly describe the research questions, the objectives and/or hypotheses to be addressed in the project.
   - **Interdisciplinarity and research areas/disciplines involved**: What are the involved disciplines and how does the interdisciplinary approach support achieving the outlined research goals? Sketch the limitations of each of these individual disciplines in addressing the research question/objectives/hypotheses and describe the added value of your interdisciplinary collaboration with the mentors.
   - **Methodology**: Provide key details regarding the methodological approaches and explain the complementarity of the methods used. How will theories and methods from the different fields be combined, and how will integration and synthesis be achieved?
   - **Scientific impact and contributions**: Outline the project's anticipated contribution to the field of human-animal interaction research. How will your research contribute to addressing/solving the problem you identified at the beginning?
7. Names and contact information of three references
8. Further documents to prove the required education, qualifications and experience described as necessary in the vacancy announcement

Research topics and mentors

In order to host research projects that can be best supported by expertise currently available at the MRI,

this call offers the applicants with the following 8 research topics. Applicants can address one or more topics with their application, by submitting a clearly separated research project proposal for each and clearly identifying the topic they wish to address by their research proposal.

Topic 1: Companion Dogs in Urban Life: Bridging Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cohabitation;
Mentors: Zsófia Virányi (Animal Behaviour, Comparative Psychology; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3963-8426) & Judith Benz-Schwarzburg (Animal Ethics, Philosophy; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1523-2181)

Urban life is characterized not only by human-centered institutions and infrastructures but also by the constant presence of animals. Companion dogs, in specific, are accepted central figures of city life, primarily for their recognized positive effects on their owners and human families. They, however, do not only share homes, but accompany people in public areas, and shape everyday interactions between citizens. The ubiquity of dogs is obvious, yet the ways they are represented and treated primarily reflect human interests, positioning them as entities to be managed and regulated rather than as full members of society. Recognizing dogs as independent participants in social life with their own interests and with direct effects on other members of the community calls for attending to their perspectives and needs and for studying the interactions between dogs and strangers. Therefore, this research topic calls to address the challenge of understanding dog-human cohabitation in urban environments in a way that goes beyond regulation and conflict management and shaping it into the direction of a shared community attentive to the needs and moral status of all members. To address this problem, we need to explore how dogs are represented and valued in domestic and public settings, what kinds of moral status are ascribed to them, and to what extent such ascriptions might be either ethically problematic or bare potential to create just and hopeful interspecies communities. At the same time, behavioural and psychological research needs to investigate how humans and dogs actually interact with and perceive one another, how they adjust their behavior in shared environments, and how these interactions might feed back into ethical reflection. As such, this topic aims to bring ethical and philosophical perspectives into dialogue with empirical research, creating space to examine cohabitation from different angles. This dialogue can open up new understandings of how humans and dogs both do, and should, live together, while also generating practical implications for education, policy-making, and urban design.

Topic-specific, required qualifications and experience, in addition to requirements listed above:

- Experience with debates on human-animal cohabitation and the ethical theories and concepts underlying these debates.
- First-hand experience with dogs.
- Interest to explore and integrate different methodologies ranging from conceptual philosophical investigation to surveys and behavioral observations.

Topic 2: Aren't all animals equal? Cross-cultural conceptualizations of dogs and their categorizations in human-animal interactions;
Mentors: Herwig Grimm (Philosophy and Ethics of Human-Animal Relationships; https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Herwig-Grimm) & Zsófia Virányi (Behavioural Biology, Cognitive Ethology; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3963-8426)

Human-animal interactions (HAI) are complex and dynamic, especially in the context of dogs, whose roles vary widely across cultures and societies. Dogs are classified into categories such as companion animals, stray or feral dogs, or working dogs. These classifications are not merely descriptive but normative, shaping policies, companion animal as well as wildlife management strategies, and human practices, including how dogs are treated, cared for, or controlled.
Currently, categorizations used in policymaking and stray dog management often conflict with public

perception and lack sufficient scientific grounding, resulting in inefficiencies and social tensions. For example, stray and feral dogs are conceptualized differently by local communities, policymakers, scientists, and animal welfare organizations. These differences can lead to conflicting approaches to management and misunderstandings between stakeholders.
This project aims to investigate how dogs are conceptualized and categorized across different cultural, scientific, and political contexts, with a particular focus on stray and feral dogs. We will explore how these categorizations emerge, their underlying assumptions, and their impact on decision-making. By integrating perspectives from genetics, behavioral ecology, psychology, social sciences, epidemiology, law, and political philosophy, we aim to reflect categorization systems and develop them further on a scientifically informed basis.
Our approach includes (1) comparative cross-cultural studies of lay perceptions and public policy, (2) genetic and behavioural analyses (e.g. movement tracking) to identify biological or ecological patterns relevant to categorization, (3) legal and ethical analyses to clarify the moral and legal status of dogs across regions, and (4) case studies with an initial focus on stray dog populations in the Balkans, where conflicts between categorization systems are especially pronounced.
The ultimate goal is to create a framework that supports evidence-based policymaking and reduces conflicts in dog management, supporting responsible dog ownership as defined by the World Organization for Aimal Health (WOAH). By clarifying and harmonizing categorizations, this project seeks to improve animal welfare, enhance public health and wildlife protection strategies, and promote more constructive human-dog relationships.

Topic 3: Wild Companions: Cognition, Welfare, and Ethics of Keeping Non-Domesticated Parrots as Pets;
Mentors: Alice Auersperg (Cognitive Biology; https://www.vetmeduni.ac.at/cognition/goffin-lab) & Stefanie Riemer (Companion Animal Management; https://www.vetmeduni.ac.at/cleverdoglab/team)

The private keeping of cognitively demanding but non-domesticated animals raises major welfare and ethical concerns. Parrots, unlike domesticated pets such as dogs or cats, have undergone no systematic domestication and retain wild-type morphology, cognition, and behavioural repertoires despite being among the most cognitively sophisticated birds. Comparative cognition research shows that parrots rival higher primates in innovation, planning, problem solving, and tool use, supported by primate-like neuron counts and cortical-like brain connectivity. Yet they are widely kept as pets, often in environments that fail to meet their most basic social and ecological needs, with documented links to stereotypies, behavioural disorders, and compromised welfare.
This project will use the Goffin's cockatoo (*Cacatua goffiniana*) as a model species to examine how wild, enriched captive, and companion settings shape behaviour, cognition, welfare, and ethical perceptions. Access to free-ranging populations in Singapore, an enriched large aviary population in Austria, and privately kept pet parrots enables direct comparisons across settings. Possible methods include behavioural observations, cognitive testing, welfare assessments, and a comparative questionnaire surveying parrot owners, behavioural researchers, and conservationists to capture divergent views on the social and ecological needs of large parrots.
By integrating cognitive biology, welfare science, and empirical ethics, the project will provide empirical evidence on how environmental complexity affects behavioural diversity, cognition, and welfare, while laying the groundwork for informing ethical debates and policy guidelines on the keeping of cognitively demanding non-domesticated animals. While the Goffin's cockatoo serves as the primary model species due to its established cognitive research background and access to wild, companion, and captive populations, the project aims to generate conceptual and methodological insights applicable across large parrot species facing similar welfare and ethical challenges.

Additional, topic-specific, required qualifications and experience:

- Experience with animal behavioural testing, animal cognition experiments, or welfare assessment methods.

Additional, topic-specific, desired qualifications and experience:

- Familiarity with survey design and statistical analysis of experimental and questionnaire data.
- Experience working across multiple populations or settings.

Topic 4: Normative Agency in Social Animals: Investigating Reactions to Norm Disruption in Goffin's Cockatoos (*Cacatua goffiniana*) from a Cognitive and Philosophical Perspective;
Mentors: Judith Benz-Schwarzburg (Animal Ethics; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1523-2181) & Alice Auersperg (Comparative Cognition; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7405-9791)

Recent research increasingly suggests that some animals maintain specific normative practices regulating several kinds of (social) interactions, and that some may even be able to act based on moral emotions. Research on the proximate mechanisms such as the cognitive processes underlying their "naïve normativity" reveals how animals navigate social relationships and allows insights into their capacities and needs as complex beings. Studying the complexity of social systems and therein the natural origins of animals' normative sensitivity, in turn, contributes to a better understanding of the evolutionary causes of agents who hold expectations and follow goals in the social realm. Moreover, if animals are indeed such agents, their socio-normative expectations, goals and needs deserve ethical attention. Especially captive animals, be it in zoos, research labs, or human-managed "natural" habitats, often live under conditions, routines, and rules that are almost entirely imposed on them by humans. These may not only conflict with their welfare but also interfere with their normative sensitivity, most importantly with their expectations regarding fair treatment, trusting relationships, and attachment. However, little is known about how they perceive and respond to *disruptions of social norms* and what their recognition and maybe opposition to such disruptions means for their moral standing and ethical treatment.
So far, standard paradigms to assess reactions to norm disruption in animals on inequity aversion or intentional withholding yield mixed results across species and contexts. This makes it unclear, when and how animals interpret norm violations as meaningful. We need more research by help of *further developed paradigms* which span over *different contexts* (involving lab and field research to provide for ecological validity), which include *so-far neglected species like birds*, which move from food competition to *other social modalities*, and which involve *philosophical conceptualization*. In specific, new benchmark tests need to be creatively developed, in an ethical way.
In this research topic, we suggest turning the focus on Goffin's Cockatoos (*Cacatua goffiniana*) as an avian model to, firstly, investigate how parrots detect, interpret, and respond to disruptions of social norms; to discuss what this reveals about their cognitive capacities and their normative agency and autonomy; and finally, to assess what the implications for their welfare and their moral status are.

Additional, topic-specific, required qualifications and experience:

- Familiarity with conceptual philosophical debates on animal normativity.
- Experience with working empirically with intelligent animals (preferably parrots).

Topic 5: How humans and animals perceive and shape each other: Neuro-cognitive, psychological and behavioural foundations of interspecies sociality;
Mentors: Magdalena Boch (Psychology, Neuroscience; www.magdalenaboch.com) & Ludwig Huber (Cognitive Sciences, Behavioural Biology; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0217-136X)

The return of wolves to historical ranges often sparks opposition, in stark contrast to the widespread affection for dogs. Understanding why wolves are feared while dogs are loved requires foundational knowledge about the neural, psychological, and behavioural bases of human-animal relationships and interactions - i.e., interspecies sociality. This research will lay the groundwork for future applied work fostering human-wolf and, more broadly, wildlife coexistence.
Despite extensive work in humans and primates, our understanding of sociality remains narrow, largely limited to within-species interactions in a single lineage. These studies show that dedicated networks support life in complex social groups and how they are shaped by social relationships. Yet we still know little about how interspecies sociality arises in the brain, reshapes its organization, and guides behaviour and perception.
The human-dog relationship offers a unique opportunity to address this gap. Dogs have co-evolved with humans for thousands of years, sharing environments and forming cooperative bonds, and they can be trained to participate in awake neuroimaging, providing access to the neural bases of interspecies sociality. Advances in post-mortem neuroimaging make it possible to extend this framework beyond dogs to wolves and other carnivorans, situating the human-dog bond within the wider diversity of carnivoran social brain evolution. Together, this enables integrative approaches that combine behaviour, cognition, and neuroimaging to link everyday social experience (ontogeny) with evolutionary convergence and divergence (phylogeny).
Within this framework, the project addresses how interspecies sociality is shaped at the intersection of individual experience and evolutionary history. It will investigate (1) how everyday interactions modify perception, behaviour, and brain organization in humans and dogs, (2) how these processes compare to wolves and other close relatives, and (3) whether social brain areas in carnivorans and primates reflect convergent adaptations to the challenges of complex social life, within and across species.
Applicants will have access to neuroimaging, psychophysiological and behavioural facilities, datasets of structural and resting-state scans from pet dogs with household and behavioural information; ex-vivo multimodal scans from > 25 domesticated and wild carnivorans; and brain samples from hand-raised wolves with behavioural and cognitive records. Please contact the mentors if further information on the facilities or datasets is needed.

Additional, topic-specific, desired qualifications and experience:

- Background in comparative cognition and neuroimaging involving non-human animals.
- Experience with studying canine or other carnivoran brains.
- Hands-on experience with behavioural testing of humans and/or animals, or with psycho-physiological methods.
- Expertise in experimental design, statistical modelling, and data analysis (Python, MATLAB, R, or equivalent).

Topic 6: Building confidence through success: Designing manageable challenges to improve animal welfare and human–animal interactions;
Mentors: Stefanie Riemer (Companion Animal Management; https://www.vetmeduni.ac.at/cleverdoglab/team) & Alice Auersperg (Cognitive Biology; https://www.vetmeduni.ac.at/cognition/goffin-lab)

Animals in human care often face enrichment or training situations that are either too easy to be engaging or too difficult to solve. Unfortunately, both under- and over-challenging tasks can reduce welfare: simple tasks provide little stimulation, while unsolvable ones cause frustration and withdrawal. Emerging findings suggest that experiences of repeated success in appropriately challenging tasks may increase confidence, promote resilience, and improve emotional well-being.
This project tackles this idea across three animal groups: domesticated companion animals (dogs), domesticated non-companion animals (e.g., horses), and non-domesticated companion animals (parrots).

Subjects will experience either solvable tasks calibrated to their abilities or control tasks where success is blocked or highly facilitated. We will measure changes in boldness through novel object and novel environment tests, assess emotional state using validated cognitive bias tests, and collect physiological data such as heart rate variability, endocrine markers and changes in body surface temperature (measured by infrared thermography) before and after the intervention.
We predict that animals experiencing repeated successes in sufficiently challenging tasks will approach novel and/ or ambiguous situations more readily, display more optimistic decision-making, and show more favourable physiological profiles compared to controls. These findings will provide the first systematic framework on how task calibration shapes confidence and emotional resilience across multiple species. By integrating animal cognition, welfare science, veterinary physiology, ecology, and empirical ethics, the project will develop evidence-based guidelines for enrichment and training programs that improve animal welfare and human–animal relationships. The results will have practical implications for companion animals, working animals, and non-domesticated species kept in human care, supporting both science and animal well-being.

Additional, topic-specific, required qualifications and experience:

- Hands on experience with animals.

Additional, topic-specific, desired qualifications and experience:

- Experience with behavioural experiments, data analysis, and at least one of the following: cognitive testing, physiological sampling, enrichment or training design, or interdisciplinary human–animal interaction research.

Topic 7: Policies, Perceptions, and Practices: A Comprehensive Cross-national Study of Dog Aggression and Human Influence;
Mentors: Svenja Springer (Veterinary Ethics; https://www.vetmeduni.ac.at/ethics/team) & Zsófia Virányi (Animal Behaviour; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3963-8426)

Aggression belongs to the natural behavioral repertoire of dogs, which, given dogs' and humans' closeness in both private and public settings, can pose a significant risk. Despite or because of the prevalence of dogs, media reports often frame dog bites and attacks as a significant societal issue, relevant to public health and safety. In response, legislation tends to put special restrictions on certain breeds, even if these regulatory approaches strongly vary across countries, ranging from a mandatory use of leash and muzzle to effectively banning certain breeds. To what extent this approach assumes genetic heritability of aggression in dogs or rather an association between certain types of dogs and certain kinds of owners remains unclear.
Recent research suggests that human-driven factors, such as the dogs' socialization and training as well as human behavior in interaction with dogs, likely contribute to the prevalence of injuries caused by dogs. How to prevent some, truly aggressive, forms of dog behavior that can cause injuries has been investigated in limited private settings, for instance by The Blue Dog project. It has hardly been addressed in the public though, and current statistics also fail to differentiate between dog-caused injuries resulting from truly aggressive (agonistic) interactions and accidents happening during play, greeting and other (non-aggressive) social contexts.
It appears that current research, while offering some insights that rely on convenience sampling and narrow demographics, often lacks a comprehensive and integrative framework that could address the complexities of dog-human interactions and dog aggression management across different cultures.
To effectively address the multifaceted issue of dog "aggression" (injuries caused by dogs to humans), robust and interdisciplinary research is needed. This theme calls for ideas in order to explore critical questions surrounding regulatory approaches, societal perceptions, and the real-world factors contributing to aggression in dogs. By investigating these dynamics with cross-country reviews, surveys and observational studies, the project aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of dog aggression and

inform effective management strategies. Such research is essential for enhancing the human-animal bond and contributing to public safety, ultimately leading to informed policies and practices that benefit both dogs and their communities.

Topic 8: Teaching the animal: Comparing the potential of animal-based versus virtual education to increase knowledge about animals and foster ethical awareness;
Mentors: Judith Benz-Schwarzburg (Animal Ethics; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1523-2181), Megan Lambert (Comparative Cognition; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3618-7260) & Carlo Salzani (Philosophy; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1675-7206)

The human-animal relationship has undergone dramatic changes over the past centuries, giving rise to complex ethical issues, for example regarding animal welfare and conservation. Awareness for those issues has been steadily increasing, however, with many scholars in human-animal studies arguing in favour of profound paradigm shifts regarding how humans understand, relate to, and ultimately treat animals. In practice, a range of institutions try to work towards such paradigm shifts. For example zoos, sanctuaries, and NGOs in the field of nature and species conservation claim to provide humans not only with opportunities to encounter real animals, but also with educational input about the species and (human-induced) ethical challenges they face (e.g., climate change, habitat loss, or the downsides of intensive farming). It is an open question, however, whether living animals need to be (or should be) involved in such endeavours, especially when educational value runs the risk of being superimposed by entertainment. Many people, and specifically children, surely enjoy seeing and perhaps even touching animals. While these encounters have been shown to increase - at least in the short-term - the visitors' or participants' understanding of the animals' behaviour, needs, and challenges, they are also ethically challenging in terms of animal welfare and what they teach about the human-animal relationship. Accordingly, some institutions try to inform participants about the animals themselves and their ethical claims on us by virtual means (including video material, VR goggles, interactive workshops etc.), instead of involving live animals. Yet, the short- and long-term educational efficacy of this approach, the conditions rendering it possibly more ethical, and the extent to which both depend on the species in question are little explored.
In this research topic, we suggest comparing different educational interventions to each other that are aimed at increasing people's knowledge about animals and fostering their awareness for animal ethical questions. The candidate can include different species (like typical zoo species, farmed animals, or endemic wildlife) to account for different degrees of attention humans typically pay to different species. The impact should ideally be assessed short-term (comparing knowledge and attitudes before and immediately after the intervention) and long-term. The candidate is encouraged to develop alternative, non-animal-based interventions by virtual means (e.g. workshops on animal cognition and ethics) which they then test as part of their study.

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Additional, topic-specific, required qualifications and experience:

- Experience with creating educational materials in the field of human-animal studies.

The online hearings are scheduled for **September 2026 (likely in calendar weeks 38-39)**.

The University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, the Medical University of Vienna and the University of Vienna provide excellent research environment including state-of-the-art research core facilities and international PhD programs, and various platforms which bring together scientists across departments and disciplines.
All three university aim to increase the proportion of women among scientific and general

university staff, especially in management positions, and therefore explicitly invites qualified women to apply. In the case of underrepresentation of women, female applicants who are equally suitable as the best-suited male competitor will be given priority, unless reasons relating to the person of a competitor prevail.

There is no fee required for applying. Applicants have no entitlement to reimbursement of any travel or accommodation expenses they may incur as a result of the application procedure.

All three universities welcome applications from candidates with family responsibilities. The Vetmeduni and the Medical University of Vienna are proud holders of the "hochschuleundfamilie" ("University and Family") certificate. We also encourage people with disabilities and chronic illnesses to apply.

Privacy Notice pursuant to Article 13 GDPR
As part of the application and selection process for these advertised positions, the applicants' personal data will be processed by the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, the Medical University of Vienna and the University of Vienna in accordance with Article 26 GDPR.

Data controllers
University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna
Veterinaerplatz 1
1210 Vienna
rektorat@vetmeduni.ac.at
www.vetmeduni.ac.at

Data Protection Contact
Date Protection Officer of the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna
Veterinaerplatz 1
1210 Vienna
E-Mail: datenschutz@vetmeduni.ac.at

Medical University of Vienna
Date Protection Officer of the Medical University of Vienna
Legal Affairs and Compliance
Spitalgasse 23
1090 Vienna
E-Mail: datenschutz@meduniwien.ac.at

University of Vienna
Date Protection Officer of the University of Vienna
Universitaetsstrasse 7
1010 Vienna
E-Mail: dsba@univie.ac.at

Purpose of processing
The processing is carried out for the following purposes:
- to receive and process your application
- to conduct the application and selection process
- to assess your professional and personal suitability
- to communicate with applicants

- to fill the advertised vacancies

Personal data processed
The following data is processed:
- Name, title
- Contact details
- Curriculum vitae
- Cover letter
- Evidence of education and qualifications
- Certificates
- List of publications
- References
- Other documents submitted during the application process

As part of the selection process, the applicant data listed above is processed by the persons, bodies or committees of the partner universities responsible for the process.

Legal basis
Processing is carried out on the basis of:
- Art. 6(1)(b) GDPR (implementation of pre-contractual measures in connection with your application)
- Art. 6(1)(f) GDPR (legitimate interest in a proper selection process)
- Art. 26 GDPR (joint controller)

Retention period
Your personal data will be stored for the duration of the application and selection process. Beyond this, data will only be stored where statutory retention obligations apply or where this is necessary for the establishment, exercise or defence of legal claims.

Your rights
In accordance with the statutory provisions, you have the right to:
- Access
- Rectification
- Erasure
- Restriction of processing
- Data portability
- Object to processing

Right to lodge a complaint
If you believe that the processing of your personal data infringes data protection law, you may lodge a complaint with the relevant data protection officer at the partner university or with the competent supervisory authority.

Austrian Data Protection Authority
Barichgasse 40–42
1030 Vienna
dsb@dsb.gv.at
www.dsb.gv.at

Contact for further information

Mag.[a] Stephanie Arzberger, Bakk.[a]
+43 1 25077 - 1001
stephanie.arzberger@vetmeduni.ac.at
www.vetmeduni.ac.at