



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

The award for Research Project of the Year goes to an international collaboration that has hugely increased understanding of how nuclear radiation affects animal life. It used a groundbreaking technique to provide new evidence about what happens to the diversity and abundance of large and medium-sized mammals after radiation exposure.

It is now 30 years since the Chernobyl disaster and the exclusion zone around the accident site is still heavily contaminated. Despite this, a researcher from the University of Salford, working with academics from the UK's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and Ukraine's Chornobyl Center, has used the area as a laboratory to study the continuing effect of the disaster on wildlife.

Salford's Mike Wood set up more than 250 motion-activated camera positions and bioacoustic recorders to track animals over a year. The cameras provided more than 45,000 images that allowed the researchers to answer fundamental questions about the relationship between radiation exposure and biodiversity.

The scientists found a thriving community of large and medium-sized species. This challenges existing academic work, which had suggested that mammals have declined in the area. Their findings have also contributed to high-level debate about the potential creation of a Chernobyl nature reserve and garnered a huge amount of press coverage.

The judges said that the collaboration with Ukrainian colleagues was impressive in the way that it used "groundbreaking radiological methods to explore the impact of nuclear radiation on wildlife in the Chernobyl area".