



Call for Applications

Short-term Scientific Missions 2019-20

Working Group 3 (**Collections** Arena)

13 August 2019

Deadline for applications
23:59 CEST, Monday 30 September 2019

The European Raptor Biomonitoring Facility (ERBFacility) COST Action CA16224, Working Group 3 (Collections Arena), hereby announces this Call for Applications for **short-term scientific missions (STSMs)**. This call relates to **up to four (4) STSMs** available for **Grant Period 3** (1 May 2019 to 30 April 2020).

1. Context

ERBFacility is a pan-European network that seeks to reduce costs imposed by contaminants on human and wildlife health, by using raptors (birds of prey and owls) as sentinels on environmental contamination. ERBFacility seeks to improve effectiveness evaluation, risk assessment and early warning in relation to regulation of priority substances, plant protection products, biocides, veterinary products and heavy metals, with a focus on persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic (PBT) compounds. ERBFacility involves linked research coordination and capacity building in three arenas: (1) analysis (academics, laboratories, regulatory agencies); (2) collections (natural history museums, environmental specimen banks and other collections providing samples for analysis); (3) field (gathering samples and relevant contextual data). For more information see the [Action description and MoU](#) available on the COST website and see the [ERBFacility website](#).

2. Purpose of this call

*The purpose of this call is to contribute to ERBFacility **Objective R2: To develop a framework for a distributed European Raptor Specimen Bank (ERSpeB) for contaminant monitoring**.

3. Scientific priorities, number of STSMs, preferred timing

Applications under this call should relate to the **four scientific priorities** of the ERBFacility **Working Group 3 (Collections Arena)** for Grant Period 3, as outlined here.

One STSM will be made available in relation to each of these four priorities (**total 4 STSMs**).

TITLE: Resource constraints to development of the ERSpeB

Reference WG3/GP3/STSM1

The development of a distributed European Raptor Specimen Bank (ERSpeB) requires an understanding of the **resource constraints** of participating collections, and the identification of ways to development the ERSpeB that is consistent with these constraints.

Applications for this STSM should focus on assessing the resource constraints of collections in relation to the gathering, processing, storage and recording of raptor specimens/samples, and identify ways to develop the ERSpeB that acknowledge and/or address these constraints. Particular attention should be paid to (a) personnel and financial constraints; (b) freezer capacity constraints.

Issues to be considered in relation to (a) include: the extent to which resource demands placed on collections participating in ERSpeB can be limited by providing clarify on priority matrices and volumes to retain/store; opportunities to re-direct samples to collections with greater resources; and opportunities to leverage additional resources for the gathering, processing and recording of raptor specimens/samples. As regards (b), consideration should be given to opportunities to improve management of freezer capacity, fund additional freezer capacity, and/or re-direct samples to collections with greater freezer capacities.

This STSM will ideally start by **15 October 2019** and end no later than **30 November 2019**. The length of this mission is expected to be between **21-35 days** but shorter or longer missions will be considered.

Suitable candidates for this STSM are likely to have previous experience, in a research collection context, in relation to the gathering, processing and storage of raptor specimens/samples.

TITLE: Standards and Protocols for Raptor Sample Collections

Reference WG3/GP3/STSM2

The development of a distributed European Raptor Specimen Bank (ERSpeB) requires the adoption of **comparable standards and protocols** for the gathering, processing and storage of samples by participating collections, to ensure that the quality of raptor samples used for contaminant monitoring is comparable. At present, collections tend to develop and implement their own standards and protocols, often with other purposes in mind than contaminant monitoring. These standards and protocols may therefore not be optimal in terms of supplying raptor samples for contaminant monitoring.

Applications for this STSM should focus on reviewing existing standards and protocols, including those applied by environmental specimen banks (ESBs), natural history museums and research collections, with a view to proposing standard operating procedures. Consideration should be given to the development of 'gold', 'silver' and 'bronze' standards, given that it may not be possible for all collections to adopt the highest standards. This work should build on the protocol developed under EURAPMON.¹

¹ http://www.eurapmon.net/sites/default/files/pdf-s/sampling_and_contaminant_monitoring_protocol_for_raptors_eurapmon_12_2014.pdf

This STSM will ideally start by **15 October 2019** and end no later than **30 November 2019**. The length of this mission is expected to be between **21-35 days** but shorter or longer missions will be considered.

Suitable candidates for this STSM are likely to have previous experience, in a research collection context, in the development of standards and protocols for the gathering, processing and/or storage of raptor specimens/samples for contaminant monitoring purposes.

TITLE: Collection Access Policy for Raptor Samples

Reference WG3/GP3/STSM3

The development of a distributed European Raptor Specimen Bank (ERSpeB) requires that raptor samples entering the bank be reserved, as far as possible, for the purposes of contaminant monitoring, and not consumed for other purposes. However, restricting access to samples may clash with the normal access policies of collections.

Applications for this STSM should focus on reviewing collections' access policies and identifying options to restrict access to raptor samples allocated to the ERSpeB, to serve the purposes of the European Raptor Biomonitoring Facility. Consideration should be given to the extent to which restricted access may be necessary, the extent to which it might be possible, options for the development of ring-fenced collections – including at European or sub-European (regional) levels – and the criteria that might be used (e.g. analysis pertinent to ERBFacility priorities, open access publication, etc.) to decide whether or not to provide access to samples,

This STSM will ideally start by **31 October 2019** and end no later than **15 December 2019**. The length of this mission is expected to be between **21-35 days**, but shorter or longer missions will be considered.

Suitable candidates for this STSM are likely to have previous experience, in a collection context, in the development and/or management of collection access policy.

TITLE: Scoping a Database for the European Raptor Specimen Bank

Reference WG3/GP3/STSM4

The development of a distributed European Raptor Specimen Bank (ERSpeB) requires the development of a pan-European database of available raptor specimens/samples.

Applications for this STSM should focus on scoping the ERSpeB database. Consideration should be given to: which samples should be included in the database (e.g. only recent, frozen carcasses and wet tissue samples); population of the database (e.g. focus first on entering data on samples for 2-3 priority species and 2-3 priority matrices, consistent with the emerging European Raptor Biomonitoring Scheme - ERBiomS); temporal boundaries of the database (e.g. only samples collected post 2000); minimum data requirements per sample (e.g. species, location, age, sex, carcass or tissue, etc). Key questions to be considered include: (1) whether collections could data periodically to the database, or whether the database can be constructed to mine the databases of collections around Europe; (2) how to promote interoperability between the ERSpeB database and individual collections' databases (e.g. through the use of unique species identifiers); (3) the extent to which the ERSpeB database might provide a real-time picture of available samples across

Europe and the implications for tracking of samples entering collections, transfer of samples between collections, and use of samples; (4) whether the ERSpeB database can link sample data to results of any contaminant analyses of these samples (e.g. to publications, analytical datasets); (5) whether the ERSpeB database should be stand-alone, or integrated with, for example, the LIFE APEX knowledgebase (NORMAN platform) of samples, target analysis data, and NTS data; links between the ERSpeB database and IPChem.

This STSM will ideally start by **31 October 2019** and end no later than **15 December 2019**. The length of this mission is expected to be between **21-35 days**, but shorter or longer missions will be considered.

Suitable candidates for this STSM are likely to have previous experience in the development of European-scale databases bringing together biological data from institutions across Europe.

Mission holders may additionally be invited to participate in a WG3 meeting to be convened at Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden in January/February 2020 (date to be confirmed). Travel and subsistence costs for this meeting will be reimbursed separately on condition that there is no overlap with the mission dates.

4. Expected output from each STSM

Each STSM is required to produce a **mission report** (see **Reporting Template**, attached) of 2-3 pages, to be submitted to the MC Chair and to the Host Institution, within 30 days of completion of the mission.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to produce a **detailed technical report** and/or a **critical paper** for submission to a suitable peer-reviewed journal. Applications committing to such a technical report and/or peer-reviewed publication will be preferred.

5. Mission hosts

Applicants must arrange an appropriate host institution for their mission. Applicants are free to identify and contact a suitable host. Applicants may in particular wish to find a host among members of the [ERB Facility Management Committee](#) or at other natural history museums, environmental specimen banks or research collections. However, please note that the following have already indicated that they may be able to host a mission:

Potential host institute	Country	Contact name	Contact email	STSM reference
Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, Leibniz	Germany	Dr Oliver Krone	krone@izw-berlin.de	WG3/GP3/STSM1 WG3/GP3/STSM2
Danish Natural History Museum, Copenhagen	Denmark	Dr Peter Hosner	peter.hosner@snm.ku.dk	WG3/GP3/STSM2
University of Murcia, Murcia	Spain	Prof Antonio Garcia-Fernandez	ajgf@um.es	WG3/GP3/STSM2
Department of Chemistry and Industrial Chemistry, University of Genova, Genova	Italy	Dr Marco Grotti	marco.grotti@unige.it	WG3/GP3/STSM2

Potential host institute	Country	Contact name	Contact email	STSM reference
Zoological Research Museum Alexander Koenig, Bonn	Germany	Prof Til Töpfer	t.toepfer@leibniz-zfmk.de	WG3/GP3/STSM3
Naturalis Biodiversity Centre, Leiden	Netherlands	Dr Rene Dekker, Dr Paola Movalli & Dr Dimitris Koureas	rene.dekker@naturalis.nl	WG3/GP3/STSM4
Natural History Museum, Tring	UK	Dr Alex Bond	alex.bond@nhm.gov.ac.uk	STSM reference not specified. NB: only short missions considered – please contact Dr Bond for information

6. Eligibility

STSMs are exchange visits aimed at supporting individual mobility, strengthening existing networks and fostering collaboration between COST Action Participants. A STSM should specifically contribute to the scientific objectives of the COST Action, whilst at the same time allowing those partaking in the missions to learn new techniques, gain access to specific data, instruments and/or methods not available in their own institutions/organisations.

STSM applicants must be engaged in an official research programme as a PhD student or postdoctoral fellow, or may be employed by, or affiliated to, an institution or legal entity, which has within its remit a clear association with performing research. **Students holding a First or Masters Degree and not yet registered for a PhD are also eligible.** The institution/ organisation where an applicant pursues his/her main strand of research is considered the Home Institution. The Host Institution is the institution/organisation that will host the STSM grantee.

The following table shows the scenarios available to eligible STSM applicants:

Applicant's Home Institution	STSM Host Institution
	Located in another Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member
	Located in a Participating COST Partner Member
Located in a Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member	An Approved IPC Institution
	An Approved NNC Institution
	The EU Commission or a EU Body, Office or Agency
	An Approved European RTD Organisation
	An Approved International Organisation
Located in an Approved NNC Institution	Located in a Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member
Located in an Approved European RTD Organisation	Located in a Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member

The Participating COST Full Members / COST Cooperating Members are the country Parties to ERBFacility, listed [here](#). Please note that at present, there are no Approved IPC, NNC European RTD or International Organisations for ERBFacility. The only relevant scenarios are thus those highlighted in yellow in the table above. In other words, **the applicant's Home Institution must be located in one of the countries that are Party to ERBFacility, and the STSM Host Institution must be located in one of the other countries which are Party to ERBFacility** (or the European Commission, an EU Body, Office or Agency).

STSMs must have a minimum duration of 5 days and a maximum duration of 90 days. However, STSMs involving Early Career Investigators (those studying for a PhD or with up to 8 years of experience following award of PhD) may have a maximum duration of 180 days. STSMs need to be carried out in their entirety within a single Grant Period and always within the Action's lifetime. The current ERB Facility Grant Period (GP3) ends on 30 April 2020.

7. Application procedure

Applications must be submitted through www.cost.eu/stsm

In order to access the submission page, you must first be registered in eCOST (accessible at www.cost.eu).

When you go to the STSM submission page, you will need to enter a '**Motivation and Workplan Summary**' of **up to 2000 words**. We advise you to prepare this summary offline in Word, and then cut and paste your summary to the online form. The Motivation and Workplan Summary should address the following points:

- **Title and reference for the mission** (as given in Section 3, above)
- **Aim and motivation** – please explain the scientific and/or other motivation for the STSM and what scientific and/or other outcomes you aim to accomplish with the STSM.
- **Proposed contribution to the scientific objectives of the Action** – please focus here on how your STSM will contribute to the Working Group scientific priorities for the selected mission (see Section 3 above)
- **Techniques** – please detail what techniques and/or equipment you may learn to use, if applicable.
- **Planning** – please detail the steps you will take to achieve your proposed aim.
- **Expected outputs** – please specify in terms of: (a) the formal mission report, (b) a detailed technical report, (c) one or more peer-reviewed papers (and indicative target journal).

Applicants must also upload the following supporting documents, which should be prepared in advance to submitting your application online:

1. **Letter of interest from the proposed Host Institution** confirming that she/he has agreed to host you for the proposed dates, and to participate in the STSM (using the **Letter of Interest Template**, attached)
2. **Letter of support from your Home Institution** that the proposed STSM does not interfere with any obligatory duties you may have at your home institution (using the **Letter of Support Template**, attached)
3. **Short CV of applicant** outlining qualifications and research track record.
4. **Short CV of the host** outlining qualifications, research track record, international collaborations and supervisory experience.

8. Evaluation

Applications will be evaluated by a panel of three persons, which includes the STSM Coordinator, the Working Group Leader and a Working Group member. One or more of these persons will be replaced (by other Working Group members) if there is any direct conflict of interest.

Applications will first be assessed for eligibility. Non-eligible applications will be excluded from the selection stage.

Eligible applications will then be assessed for selection based on:

- **Pertinence and quality** of the proposed research work and expected output in relation to the selected scientific priority (as specified in Section 3 above) (maximum 5 points, threshold 3 points)
- **Suitability of the applicant:** relevance and quality of research track record (in relation to career stage) (maximum 5 points, threshold 3 points)
- **Suitability of the host:** expertise and experience in the relevant research area, experience in international collaborations, supervisory experience (maximum 5 points, threshold 3 points)

Equal weight will be given to the above three criteria.

Evaluation will also give consideration to the suitability of the proposed timetable, and the cost effectiveness of the proposed budget.

Where applications score equally, consideration will be given to COST policies on excellence and inclusiveness, specifically:

- Geographical spread (notably, missions to and/or from Inclusiveness Target Countries)
- Involvement of Early Career Investigators
- Gender balance

In order to increase the proportion of women in successful scientific careers, we particularly encourage women to apply.

For each scientific priority specified at Section 3 above, a final ranked list of the applications will be drawn up and agreed by the panel and submitted to the Action Core Group with a recommendation for award of the mission(s) to the highest ranked application(s). Final approval of award of a grant will be made by the Action Core Group (excluding any members having a direct conflict of interest).

9. Financial support

An STSM grant is a fixed financial contribution, which takes into consideration the budget request of the applicant and the outcome of the evaluation of the STSM application. STSM Grants do not necessarily cover all expenses related to undertaking a given mission. A STSM Grant is a contribution to the overall travel, accommodation and meal expenses of the Grantee.

- For shorter missions, a maximum of EUR 160 per day can be afforded for accommodation and meal expenses.
- For longer missions up to 90 days, a maximum of €2500 in total can be afforded to the successful applicant.
- For ECI missions of 91-180 days, a maximum of €3500 in total can be afforded to the successful applicant.

Payment of the Grant is subject to the scientific report being approved by the Action Chair, the STSM Coordinator and a senior researcher affiliated to the Host institution. A template for the scientific report is made available in your eCOST profile following award of mission.

The COST Association and the Grant Holder of the Action are not to be considered as being an STSM Grantee's employer. Grantees must make their own arrangements for all provisions related to personal security, health, taxation, social security and pension matters.

An STSM Grant is a fixed financial contribution, which takes into consideration the budget request of the applicant and the outcome of the evaluation of the STSM application. STSM Grants do not necessarily cover all expenses related to undertaking a given mission. A STSM Grant is a contribution to the overall travel, accommodation and meal expenses of the

Grantee.

The calculation of the financial contribution for each STSM must respect the following criteria:

- Up to a maximum of EUR 2500 in total can be afforded to each successful applicant;
- Up to a maximum of EUR 160 per day can be afforded for accommodation and meal expenses.

For ECIs, the calculation for an increased financial contribution must respect the following criteria:

- Up to a maximum of EUR 3500 in total can be afforded to ECIs for missions with a duration of between 91 and 180 calendar days;
- Up to a maximum of EUR 160 per day can be afforded for accommodation and meal expenses.

The Action Chair and/or the STSM Coordinator will consider and may approve differentiated country rates to cover accommodation and meal expenses based on the perceived cost of living in the host country.

Specific provisions have been introduced to enable researchers from ITC participating in the COST Action to request a pre-payment of 50% of their STSM Grant when they complete the first day of their STSM. In such case, the representative of the Host Institution must confirm by e-mail to the Grant Holder that the STSM applicant has officially started the mission on day 1. Only then the Grant Holder can arrange the payment of 50% of the STSM grant. The remaining 50% of the Grant is payable once the administrative requirements have been satisfied after the STSM.

The STSM Grantee has 30 calendar days from the end date of the mission to submit a scientific report. The report must be submitted to the senior researcher hosting the mission at the Host Institution and to the STSM Coordinator, with copy to the relevant Working Group Lead and the Action Chair. Payment of the Grant is subject to a STSM scientific report being approved on behalf of the Action's MC by the delegated person(s) responsible and by the senior researcher affiliated to the Host Institution (see **Letter of Acceptance Template**, attached).

10. Deadline for applications

The deadline for applications under this Call is **23:59 CEST, Monday 30 September 2019**.

Applicants will normally be notified of the outcome of their application within 2 weeks of the deadline.

11. Further information

For more information related to the scientific priority of WG3 and the focus of these missions, please contact:

- WG3 Lead, Dr Paola Movalli, paola.movalli@naturalis.nl

For more information regarding the **application process**, or any help needed with submitting your application online in eCOST, please contact the STSM Coordinator, Dr Oliver Krone, krone@izw-berlin.de