



First call for applications

Short-term Scientific Missions

Update 3 SEPTEMBER 2018

Revised deadlines for applications

WG3, first priority mission (review of raptor collections): CLOSED

All other missions: Monday 17 September 2018

The European Raptor Biomonitoring Facility (ERBFacility) COST Action CA16224 hereby announces a first call for applications for **short-term scientific missions (STSMs)**. This call relates to up to 8 STSMs available for Grant Period 2 (ending 30 April 2019).

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](#) (coming soon).

2. Purpose of this call

The purpose of this call is to contribute to the three scientific objectives of ERBFacility, namely:

- **Objective R1: To assess current capacities for pan-European raptor biomonitoring and develop a framework for a European Raptor Biomonitoring Scheme (ERBioMS).** The assessment will focus on current capabilities to detect temporal and spatial trends in contaminant exposure (and, where feasible, effects), focussing on 4-6 selected contaminants, and on identifying key areas of weakness (in the absence of coordination). Building on the insights delivered by this assessment, and on very recent research (Espin et al 2016), ERBFacility will develop an ERBioMS framework capable of delivering pan-European surveillance and monitoring of key pollutants under EU chemicals law and relevant global and regional conventions. The framework will identify, in relation to each regulation/convention, candidate raptor

species and sample matrices. Development of read-across methods between species is likely to be necessary because the ranges of individual raptor species may not be pan-European and so monitoring would require measurements in complementary species.

- **Objective R2: To develop a framework for a distributed European Raptor Specimen Bank (ERSpeB) for contaminant monitoring.** Existing raptor specimen collections in NHMs and ESBs have only in a very few cases been made with contaminant monitoring in mind; those collections which are designed to meet contaminant monitoring needs are national in scale (e.g. UK Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme [Walker et al. 2008]). There is therefore a need to develop an ERSpeB framework to link and expand existing collections and, where appropriate, propose new regional collections, to meet ERBioMS needs.
- **Objective R3: To develop a framework, standards and protocols for a European Raptor Sampling Programme (ERSamP).** The ERSamP framework will provide for collection of the right raptor samples from the right locations at the right times. Standards and protocols will ensure harmonised sampling methods (not least, to minimise impacts on raptors) and harmonised recording of relevant field data (to support interpretation of contaminant exposure data in terms of effects on raptors at individual and population levels).

3. Scientific priorities, number of STSMs, preferred timing

Applications under this first call should address the **scientific priorities** of the ERBFacility Working Groups and take account of the preferred timing of these STSMs, as outlined below.

STSMs relating to Objective R1 (Working Groups 1 and 2: Analysis Arena)

There are two current scientific priorities for these Working Groups.

The first priority is to assess existing capacity to detect pan-European spatial and temporal trends in the exposure of raptors to contaminants. This assessment is expected to involve literature review and meta-analysis of associated data, and will identify any weaknesses of current monitoring to detect such trends at pan-European scale. Up to two STSMs will be awarded for this priority. These two STSMs will ideally start in August or September 2018. The length of each mission is expected to be at least 90 days, although applications for longer or shorter duration will be considered. It is expected that the two missions will focus on different contaminants. Applicants may wish to select compounds from groups such as organochlorine, polybrominated or polyfluorinated compounds, toxic metals such as lead, plant protection products, biocides such as anticoagulant rodenticides, or veterinary products.

The second priority is the identification of candidate raptor species and sample matrices that are suitable for pan-European monitoring and which will be relevant to the kinds of substances regulated for under the different EU regulations/conventions. This will involve assessment of how species taxonomy, ecology, traits and physiology interact such that read-across between species can be conducted (because the ranges of individual raptor species may not be pan-European). It also requires consideration of the practicalities of what types of sample can be collected. One STSM will be awarded for this priority. This STSM will ideally start by November 2018. It is expected to last at least 90 days, although applications for longer or shorter duration will be considered.

STSMs relating to Objective R2 (Working Group 3: Collections Arena)

There are two current scientific priorities for these Working Groups.

The first priority is to assess the extent of existing raptor collection in Europe including the content of these collections, ongoing collection activity, available facilities for collection/storage, current provision for research access to collections and samples

exchange, and current constraints to ongoing collection, storage, research access and sample exchange, as well as any existing related contaminant data. One STSM will be awarded for this priority. This STSM will ideally start in September 2018. The length of this mission is expected to be between 45-60 days although applications for shorter or longer duration will be considered. **[THE APPLICATION DEADLINE FOR THIS PRIORITY IS NOW CLOSED]**

The second priority is to develop a framework for a distributed European Raptor Specimen Bank (ERSpeB) for contaminant monitoring. This framework will include consideration of: (a) collecting priorities (in relation to needs emerging from the frameworks being developed by WGs1&2); (b) potential for collections to accept new specimens from the field arena; (c) sources for new specimens (in relation to WG4 field arena); (d) storage needs; (e) potential to establish new (regional) collections; (f) enhanced provision for research access to collections; (g) measures to resolve constraints to collection, transport, storage of samples. One STSM will be awarded for this priority. This STSM will ideally start in January 2019. The length of this mission is expected to be between 45-60 days although applications for shorter or longer duration will be considered.

STSMs relating to Objective R3 (Working Group 4: Field Arena)

Working Group 4 aims to: (a) facilitate improved sample collection across Europe for the target species, sample types and geographical areas agreed as of priority for contaminant monitoring; (b) improve collection of contextual information on the individuals and populations from which these samples are derived; and (c) build capacity to collect more samples by motivating field observers to engage with the collections and analytical arenas, and providing them with the guidance and motivation they need.

The current scientific priorities of this Working Group are to:

1. assess the existing and potential capacity of fieldworkers/groups that currently handle raptors (e.g. ringers) to collect suitable samples for contaminant analysis;
2. assess any constraints that may hamper the collection and sharing of raptor samples (including dead birds); and
3. assess current sampling practice and develop best practice guidance (appropriate to, e.g. differing species, sample types, geographical regions) for collecting raptor samples and relevant contextual (field) data for contaminant monitoring purposes.

Up to three STSMs will be awarded to address these priorities (it is hoped that each STSM will address one of the three priorities listed above). These STSMs will ideally start in August or September 2018. The length of each mission is expected to be between 91 and 180 days. However, applications for missions of 90 days or less will be considered.

4. Expected output from each STSM

Each mission is required to produce a scientific 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 critical paper for submission to a suitable peer-reviewed journal.

5. Mission host

Applicants must arrange an appropriate host institution for their mission (which must be in a different country from the one in which they are currently working). Applicants are free to identify and contact a suitable host and may wish to look for such hosts among members of the ERB Facility Management Committee. However, please note that the following have already indicated that they may be able to host a mission:

Missions relating to the Analysis Arena (WGs 1 & 2)

- UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Lancaster, UK: Professor Richard Shore, email: rfs@ceh.ac.uk
- University of Murcia, Department of Socio-sanitary Sciences, Murcia, Spain: Professor Antonio Garcia-Fernandez, email: ajgf@um.es
- Dr Rafael Mateo, Instituto de Investigación en Recursos Cinegéticos, University of Castilla-La Mancha-CSIC, Ciudad Real, Spain, email: rafael.mateo@uclm.es
- Dr. Oliver Krone, Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research; Dept. Wildl. Dis., Berlin. email: krone@izw-berlin.de
- Dr Igor Eulaers, Department of Bioscience, Aarhus University, Denmark. email: ie@bios.au.dk

Missions relating to the Collections Arena (WG3)

- Dr Rene Dekker & Dr Paola Movalli, Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden, Netherlands, email: rene.dekker@naturalis.nl, paola.movalli@naturalis.nl

Missions relating to the Field Arena (WG4)

- Dr Chris Wernham, BTO Scotland, Stirling, UK, email: chris.wernham@bto.org
- Dr Rui Lourenço, University of Évora, Portugal, email: lourenco@uerova.pt
- Dr Al Vrezec, National Institute of Biology, Ljubljana, Slovenia, email: al.vrezec@nib.si

Other suitable hosts for all STSMs may be found among members of the [ERB Facility Management Committee](#).

6. Eligibility

STSMs are exchange visits aimed at supporting individual mobility, strengthening existing networks, 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. The institutions/ organisations where applicants pursue their main strand of research are considered as Home Institutions. 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 in a Home Institution	To perform a STSM in a Host Institution
Located in a Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member	In another Participating COST Full Member / COST Cooperating Member
	In a Participating COST Partner Member
	In an Approved NNC Institution
	In an Approved IPC Institution
	In EU Commission, Bodies, Offices and Agencies
	In an Approved European RTD Organisation
	In an Approved International Organisation
Located in an Approved NNC institution	In a Participating COST Full / COST Cooperating Member
Located in an Approved European RTD Organisation	In a Participating COST Full / COST Cooperating Member

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 ERBFacility Grant Period (GP2) ends on 30 April 2019.

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:

- **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 (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.

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

- **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)
- **Letter of support from you 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)
- **Short CV of applicant** outlining qualifications and research track record.
- **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 Action Chair or Vice Chair, the STSM Coordinator, the respective Working Group Leader. 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 output (including any planned publication) in relation to the scientific priorities of the relevant Working Group. (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.

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 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 2 500 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 3 500 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 to the Action Chair, to the STSM Coordinator and to a senior researcher affiliated to the Host Institution. 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 a senior researcher affiliated to the Host Institution (see **Letter of Acceptance Template**, attached).

10. Deadlines for applications

The deadline for applications for the WG3 first priority mission (review of raptor collections) is midnight CET (Brussels time) on [Monday 20 August 2018 \(NOW CLOSED\)](#).

The deadline for applications for all other missions is midnight CET (Brussels time) on [Monday 17 September 2018](#).

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 priorities of the Working Groups (Section 3, above)**, please contact the relevant Working Group (WG) Leads:

- WG1: Professor Richard Shore, rfs@ceh.ac.uk
- WG2: Professor Antonio Garcia-Fernandez, ajgf@um.es
- WG3: Dr Paola Movalli, paola.movalli@naturalis.nl
- WG4: Dr Chris Wernham, chris.wernham@bto.org

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