

**BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION**  
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# SMALL ORNITHOLOGICAL RESEARCH GRANTS

Please read these guidelines carefully. They contain important information relating to your application for funding and not following these guidelines may jeopardise your application.

Application is by email only. Please email your completed application form to [grants@bou.org.uk](mailto:grants@bou.org.uk) by **31 October 2025**.

Applications are for awards made in March 2026 for projects which begin after 01 April 2026 and are entirely or largely complete by 31 March 2027. Applications for projects taking place outside this period will not be considered.

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## BOU GRANTS COMMITTEE GUIDANCE

*The BOU Grants Committee is responsible for assessing applications and selecting which projects receive funding. The Committee has provided the following guidance, to aid applicants when putting together a proposal.*

When evaluating a proposal, as well as knowing what the project will do, it needs to be clear why the study is important and how it will be achieved.

**Why:** The need for the study should be clearly set out in the context of existing work – typically you would identify the knowledge gaps the study is aiming to fill. It is worth thinking about how your project could be relevant beyond your specific study species and area, e.g. the results might test an existing hypothesis of broader relevance to the field. Framing your work in this way will also help maximise wider interest in your results.

**What:** It is often helpful to briefly summarise what your project will do before going into the detailed methods. Stronger applications tend to explicitly include research questions and/or hypotheses, which you can then refer to in the methods.

**How:** It needs to be clear how you will achieve what you say you will do. Be specific, e.g. give sample sizes if possible and justify them (e.g. based on previous studies, power analysis, expected complexity of models). We want to know that you have thought out all the steps that are needed to achieve your project. If your project has multiple different elements (e.g. fieldwork, lab work) it can be helpful to use subheadings to divide these different elements. Make sure you say what you will do with the data you collect (e.g. proposed analysis, publication plans). Make sure your budget and timetable are clearly aligned with your methods and that methods match objectives/hypotheses.

**Logical flow:** The best proposals have a clear logical flow between the why, what and the how, for example using previous work to develop one or more research questions or hypotheses, and then clearly showing how your proposed work will answer each question/test each hypothesis. There needs to be alignment between these sections – for example, your study methods should allow you to address the knowledge gap set out in your justification.

You may find that diagrams or figures are useful – these could include a diagram to explain your study design, or some existing data that help justify why your study is important.

**Summary:** Why is the project needed, what will the project do, and what will the impact be. Potential framing sentences: Overarching problem/ research challenge. More specific description of knowledge gap. What the study will do to address this. What is the impact of this new knowledge.

## APPLICATION GUIDELINES

When completing your application, please note the following carefully:

### 1. What we fund

We will fund scientific studies with clear aims and objectives (ideally with clearly stated hypotheses) where the methods are clearly explained, robust and appropriate to answering the questions asked within the application.

Applications may be on any aspect of ornithology but the BOU will look especially favourably on areas where there are particular difficulties in funding research from national or local sources.

All applications are expected to fulfil the following requirements:

- You must be a BOU member
  - Exception – those from, and still residing/working/studying in, a [low- or middle-income country](#) can apply without being a BOU member
    - Note, those from a low- or middle-income country studying or working at an institute based in a country not on [this list](#) must be a BOU member
- Applications are from individuals only, not from organisations
- The applicant must be the principal investigator for the study
- The research must be of high scientific quality
- The research must be interesting, innovative or a potentially high impact piece of work
- The project must be feasible in terms of resources and time allocated
- The applicant must be competent to undertake the research
- The project must have a clearly justified budget
- The project must be a stand-alone research project, where the amount being sought is a substantial percentage of the total project budget (see item 3 below)
- We often fund small projects outright or where the BOU contribution is a high percentage contribution to overall costs
- We rarely fund projects where the BOU contribution is only a small percentage of a very large budget, (e.g. requests for £2,000 towards a larger project costing £40,000)

We do not fund:

- Applications from non-BOU members (see exception above)
- Applications from organisations
- Species inventories, i.e. site-based surveys for the purpose of documenting species' occurrence
- Studies of the abundance of a species at a particular site where there is no wider scientific aim
- Distribution surveys which do not address wider ecological questions

- Descriptive studies
- Baseline studies or the setting up of long-term monitoring schemes
- Conservation implementation, education, outreach or awareness raising
- The salary or course fees of the applicant (see item 5 below)
- Attendance at conferences or meetings
- Publication fees
- Projects already commenced by 31 March following the application deadline.

## 2. Who can apply?

We welcome applications from both amateurs and professionals.

You must be a BOU member

- Exception – those from, and still residing/working/studying in, a [low- or middle-income country](#) can apply without being a BOU member
- Note, those from a low- or middle-income country studying or working at an institute based in a country not on [this list](#) must be a BOU member

Applications are solely from individuals who are principally responsible for undertaking the work outlined in the application. We do not accept applications from organisations.

Undergraduate and graduate research will be considered, but only if the research meets the following criteria –

- a) where the applicant is a PhD candidate, the project must be a stand-alone element and not the wider research programme (i.e. forming one chapter or paper, rather than contributing to the entire thesis), and the applicant must outline the other chapters of their thesis and clearly state how BOU funding will make a difference to the project;
- b) the research costs applied for are not fully supported by bench fees or fieldwork elements within a studentship or research council award.

The BOU may also consider applications from existing projects for funding exceptional requirement(s)/ opportunities which were unforeseen at the planning/start of a project, but which arise during the work.

Students should check the BOU's [Career Development Bursaries](#), which aim to support short-term research positions for young or early-career ornithologists, between a first and higher degree programme or within 6 months of completion of a higher degree. Successful proposals combine the development of skills useful for a future career in ornithology with a sound scientific research proposal.

## 3. Size of BOU grants

BOU Small Ornithological Research Grants are aimed at funding small projects in their entirety or part-funding small-to-medium sized projects. Lower priority will be given to

those projects to which the BOU's contribution represents a small proportion of the overall project costs.

The BOU has limited funds at its disposal and grants are normally awarded to a maximum of £2,000.

The BOU receives more applications than we can afford to support. Competition is strong, but this should not deter applicants with good projects. See the [BOU website](#) for reports from past BOU grant recipients.

#### **4. Species**

Research can be undertaken on any bird species. As part of your application, you are required to provide details of the key species your project aims to study.

#### **5. Project costs/budgets**

As part of the application you are required to submit a credible budget, which details the total project costs, the amount requested from the BOU, any funds already obtained, any other funds applied for or where additional funding will be obtained. Please clarify how any shortfall in the total budget costs will be met.

Please be as transparent as possible, cost your project, and the items for which funding is being sought from the BOU, as carefully as possible.

Total project costs must include all the direct costs of running the entire project and not just the total for the items for which funding is being sought from the BOU. Direct costs do not include the salary or stipend of the applicant, nor items which are not purchased specifically for the project such as a field vehicle (although hire costs and/or fuel for such a vehicle should be included). Where the cost of equipment is being sought from the BOU, please provide an itemised breakdown (and for other budget headers as necessary). The BOU needs to be able to accurately assess the size of any contribution it may wish to make to a project.

The Committee has knowledge of project costs and can often easily calculate if a project, or an individual component, for which funds are being sought, is not accurately costed. Some past applications have been jeopardised by a lack of transparency and accurate costing of the project.

#### **6. BOU Mission Statement**

Applicants should note the BOU's objectives and mission statement.

The British Ornithologists' Union will promote ornithological science across the international scientific community, support the individuals who contribute to that science, and grow understanding of that science among a wider community.

The BOU mission will be achieved by the following means:

- Publishing IBIS as a leading international journal of ornithological science.
- Organising a programme of meetings and conferences.
- Awarding grants and bursaries for ornithological research.
- Encouraging liaison between those actively engaged in ornithological research.
- Providing a representative body of the scientific community, able to provide ornithological information and advice to government and other policy makers.
- Maintaining and publishing the official list of birds recorded in Britain – The British List.

## 7. **BOU Ethical Policy**

You should note the BOU's ethical policy (dated March 2012). Whilst primarily aimed at publication in the BOU's journal, IBIS, it is equally applicable to research funded by the BOU.

The BOU requires that all authors disclose any potential sources of conflict of interest. Any interest or relationship, financial or otherwise, that might be perceived as influencing an author's objectivity is considered a potential source of conflict of interest. These must be disclosed when directly relevant or indirectly related to the work that the authors describe in their manuscript. Potential sources of conflict of interest include but are not limited to patent or stock ownership, membership of a company board of directors, membership of an advisory board or committee for a company, and consultancy for or receipt of fees from a company. The existence of a conflict of interest does not necessarily preclude publication in this journal.

The BOU is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

The BOU expects all authors of papers submitted to Ibis to act within the standards and procedures laid down by UK national or equivalent legislation in the country where the work is conducted. They must ensure they have the necessary licences and permits for the activities described in the paper. Where work is carried out in places lacking legislation or where this is not adequately administered, the work should conform to the ethical standards expected in the UK.

The BOU expects authors to have proper regard for conservation considerations and best practice in work with wild or captive animals. Attention is drawn to the 'Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Research' published regularly in the journal *Animal Behaviour* ([Animal Behaviour 2006, 21: 245-253](#)) and the specific guidance provided by ASAB/ABS for submissions to *Animal Behaviour*. In particular authors should consider the potential impacts of disturbance, trapping, and manipulations such as

marking or tagging on their study animals and provide details in the paper on how these aspects have been dealt with. Papers will not be accepted if they are based on work involving cruelty to animals or if the work may have put at risk endangered populations, species or habitats.

The BOU is not opposed in principle to the 'taking' of specimens from the wild for scientific purposes but would expect that only in exceptional circumstances is such an approach adopted. Authors are referred to the guidelines on collecting of specimens from the wild proposed by Collar ([Bird Conservation International 2000, 10: 1-15](#)).

### **Grants and bursaries**

The ethical approach required for the submission of papers to *Ibis* will also apply to proposals submitted for BOU grants or bursaries. The application should include details of any potential conflicts of interest and the procedures adopted to minimise any negative impacts on the study animals.

Your application should indicate that the work conforms to this policy.

Also, please make clear whether your work will include the collection of specimens (for which copies of any appropriate licenses are required).

## **8. Timing of applications**

Applications are for awards made in March 2026 for projects commencing after 01 April 2026 and entirely or largely complete by 31 March 2027. Applications for projects running outside this period will not be considered.

The deadline for grant applications to be awarded in 2026 is 31 October 2025.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application in March 2026 and awards are paid to successful applicants from March 2026 (we pay awards no earlier than two months prior to a project commencing).

## **9. Submitting your application**

Use the application form provided. Complete the fields requested and save as – 'BOU grant application - <insert your surname/family name here> (e.g. BOU grant application – Smith) and send by email to [grants@bou.org.uk](mailto:grants@bou.org.uk).

Your application must be accompanied by one reference (see below).

Applications are only accepted via email.

The BOU will acknowledge (by email) receipt of your application. All correspondence will be undertaken by email.

## **10. Reference**

You need a reference for your project. A good referee is someone who knows you and your work. For students this can be their project supervisor, but for all other applicants, it cannot be a project member. Your referee will be expected to send in a reference to accompany your application by the application deadline.

This must be submitted by email to the BOU Office ([grants@bou.org.uk](mailto:grants@bou.org.uk)).

Please ask your referee to include the following in the subject header of the email – 'BOU grant application – reference for <insert your full name here> <insert referee surname/family name here> (e.g. BOU grant application – reference for Jane Smith).

Referees should not be anyone actively participating in the project, but where possible should come from a partner organisation (e.g. local institute, local BirdLife partner).

On the application form you are asked to provide the name, address, telephone number and email address of a referee which we will match against the incoming reference for your project.

The BOU will not normally write to your referee requesting a reference except in exceptional circumstances. Your application will be excluded if we do not receive a reference for you before the deadline.

## **11. Consideration of your application**

Applications are assessed by members of the BOU's Grants Committee against a range of criteria. Greatest weight is given to the clarity of the project description and how robust and appropriate is the methodology in terms of both data collection and analysis, (i.e., how well an application covers the "Why, What and How" of a project - see Guidance section at the start of these guidelines). The Committee further consider whether the work is interesting, innovative, or potentially high impact, which could cover scientific discovery, conservation or capacity building. Realism of the timeline, the applicant and team's capability to deliver the project, and clear justification of the budget are also considered.

After the assessment process, the Grants Committee make their recommendations to BOU Council. Applicants are contacted in March to inform them of the outcome of their application.

## **12. Taking up an award**

If your application is successful, awards must be taken up by the end of the calendar year in which they are awarded (i.e. taken up by 31 December 2026 for awards offered in 2026).



The award will be paid direct to the applicant's bank account. No other account or third-party recipient will be accommodated.

If an award is not taken up by the deadline, and the award is still required, the recipient must email the BOU Office requesting special dispensation and explaining why the award has not been taken up and when it will be required. Failure to take up an award by the end of the calendar year in which the award is given (i.e. by 31 December 2026 for awards offered in 2026) will render the award void and it will have to be refunded.

Acceptance of an award indicates acceptance of these and any other terms detailed in the award offer from the BOU.

### **13. Reporting back to the BOU**

Acceptance of an award is acceptance of the condition to adequately report back to the BOU. As a charity, and in order to comply with charity regulations, the BOU needs to demonstrate where our funds have been spent, and that this spending complies with charity legislation. Failure to adequately report back to the BOU will render yourself, and any other person from your institute, ineligible to apply for future funding from the BOU.

In such circumstance the BOU also reserves the right to request for the award to be returned in full.

Reporting back to the BOU is done in two parts, with a preliminary report submitted to us within two months of the completion of the project and a full report (usually for publication as a blog on the BOU website) after six months.

Successful applicants will be provided with a reporting form and further guidelines on reporting back to the BOU.

### **14. Withdrawal of an award / return of an award**

If the BOU is not satisfied that the funds it has awarded have been spent as per the application for which funding was sought, or a suitable report is not submitted to us, then the BOU reserves the right to request, for the award, in part or in full, to be returned.

An award cannot be transferred to a third party. If the original recipient is unable to complete the project for which the award was made, or is unable to undertake the project in the timescale agreed (i.e. as detailed in their application) then the award must be returned in full.

### **15. Unsuccessful application**

If your application has been unsuccessful, then you will receive notification of this by email. Due to the number of applications we are unable to provide feedback as to why any application is unsuccessful. No correspondence will be entered into with regards an unsuccessful application.