

BRITISH ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT BURSARIES

The aim of these bursaries is to support short-term research positions for early-career ornithologists. Successful proposals will combine the development of skills useful for a career in ornithology with a sound scientific research proposal.

You should check the BOU's [Small Research Grants](#) scheme, which offers awards of £2,000 per project aimed at supporting small projects outright or part-funding medium-sized research programmes, in case this is a more appropriate source of funding for your project.

Terms

Bursary – the award provided for the career development programme

Bursary holder – the supervisor/sponsor of the applicant

Applicant – the person undertaking the career development programme

Specifics of the Career Development Bursary scheme are:

- Applicants must be a BOU Early Career Researcher (ECR) member.
 - Exception – those from, and still residing/working/studying in, a [low- or middle-income country \(LMIC\)](#) can apply without being a BOU member
 - Note, those from a low- or middle-income country **currently** studying or working at an institute based in a country not on [this list](#) must be a BOU member.
- Up to £4,000 will be provided to cover a period of career development lasting 4-12 weeks, during which a scientific research project will be conducted. The bursary award may include a weekly allowance for the participant and expenses.
- Up to a further £2,500 will be offered for visa and travel costs for applicants from [low- or middle-income countries](#) (LMICs) who are currently based at an institute in a [low- or middle-income country](#).
- Applicants must meet the BOU's Early Career Researcher (ECR) criteria; i.e., those who are currently students or within 5 years of their last degree (calculated from the date of graduation), discounting career breaks and/or extended periods of absence (see [BOU website](#) for more details on ECR criteria).
- Where the applicant is a student, the bursary placement should be for training or an experiential learning opportunity that offers added value to the applicant's studies. It should not be a continuation of the research project that could be achieved within their home institution, and the work should not contribute to their thesis.

- Awards will not be given to projects that form part of a degree programme, nor for follow-on funding where applicants wish to continue working with their existing supervisors or mentors. Projects of this nature are better suited for the Small Research Grants scheme.
- Awards will not be given for expeditions.
- Applicants must not be employed through other funding sources to undertake work that will be part of the career development programme.
- This award is for the applicant to undertake a programme of work that is not already funded, although the work may be linked to an existing research programme.
- The programme of work must be undertaken in a third-party institute, supervised by someone within that institute.
 - Projects cannot be undertaken within your home institute (i.e. any institute from which you have already received any degree or affiliated institute). Exceptions to this may be made if there are compelling reasons why the applicant cannot transfer to another institute for a placement (e.g., due to family or caring responsibilities). In this case, the applicant would be expected to move research groups within their home institute in order to experience a different research environment.
- Research projects should be developed with a professional research group (in a university, NGO or government agency) and be supported by a nominated supervisor from that group who will act as sponsor for the applicant. Projects can be stand-alone or can complement existing work.
- Only one application should be submitted by a supervisor in each funding round and no more than two awards will be made to the same institution each year.
- The timing of projects is flexible according to the needs of the research, but projects should be completed within a year of receipt of the award.
- Projects can focus on any aspect of ornithology and will be judged on their scientific quality (including a clearly defined objective that is achievable within the time available), their training/career development potential, their scope for thought and initiative by the applicant (i.e. not using the applicant as a research assistant), the track record of the applicant, the suitability of the nominated supervisor and the likely degree of support and contact between the supervisor and the applicant. Proposals that tie in with and add value to existing projects are encouraged, because they may offer more reliable scientific quality and opportunities for skill development. We also encourage proposals which are outside the applicant's usual research interests and/or would see the applicant moving to/working with an institute or in a research environment different to their existing/former affiliations.
- Applications are made using the form below, but should also include brief CVs as separate documents of both the supervisor and the applicant. The supervisor should submit the application and act as the point of contact with the BOU.
- Proposals must be submitted by 30 October 2026. Applications will be considered by the BOU Grants Committee and their recommendations approved by BOU Council. Decisions will be communicated to both the supervisor and applicant by the end of March 2027.

- Awards are paid out from the March following the application deadline. Payment will be made no more than two months before the project is due to take place.
- Awards are offered to the institution (university, NGO or government agency), not the supervisor or applicant, and the institution must signify its willingness to administer the award without making administrative charges. The supervisor, applicant and head of the institution must agree to the conditions of the award.
- Awards are given on the understanding that the research project complies with the safety and ethical regulations of the institution and that the institution will ensure that the requirements of the relevant regulatory authorities will be met before the project begins.
- Applications are welcomed from all countries.

Conditions of a Career Development Bursary Award

The BOU is a charity (249877 (England and Wales), SC044850 (Scotland)) and the bursary scheme provides charitable investment in human capital and research capacity, rather than funding a particular project. It covers only the bursary cost of the research carried out and does not meet the full economic cost of the research.

1. Bursaries are to be used solely for the purpose of the award as stated in the application and described in the letter of the award.
2. The bursary holder is responsible for the conduct of the applicant and the work undertaken, including abiding by the BOU's ethical policy. The institution administering the award is responsible for the applicant and for providing appropriate facilities for the career development programme, including financial management.
3. The bursary holder must ensure that all facilities, agreements about access and collaborations for the research are obtained before the career development programme commences and can be ensured for the duration of the bursary period. The bursary holder must also ensure that any ethical approvals, animal licences and other requirements from regulatory authorities are approved before the career development programme begins. Research that may be part of the programme must be conducted in an ethical manner. The application should address any ethical issues. Where necessary, research must be carried out under appropriate licences.
4. Any financial support for the project obtained from other sources must be declared.
5. The BOU should be informed immediately if the bursary holder or applicant is unable to take up the bursary.
6. The BOU reserves the right to terminate an award if the bursary holder or applicant being funded is in breach of any of the conditions of the award or is unable to pursue the career development programme funded by the bursary.
7. Bursaries are paid in advance by BACS/bank transfer payable to the host institution.

8. BOU career development bursaries are exempted from income tax under section 776 of the (UK) Income Tax (Trading and Income) Act 2005: the main purpose of the bursaries is learning, not employment, and so we understand that the bursaries produce no UK National Insurance liability.
9. The bursary holder must ensure that a final report (up to 1000 words) is submitted to the BOU. This report should include: (i) a summary paragraph, for the lay reader, describing the career development programme and its outcome; (ii) an account by the applicant of the programme and an assessment of the outcome as an article suitable as a post for the BOU blog; (iii) the applicant's comments on their experience of the bursary; (iv) copies of any publications arising from the research; (v) comments on the value of the bursary to the bursary holder's research group; (vi) a financial statement confirming that no balance remains. The BOU reserve the right to publish reports.
10. If any formal publication arises wholly or partly from the bursary, the BOU's contribution must be acknowledged appropriately. The BOU must also be acknowledged in any presentations or media coverage that draw on the career development work.
11. An award cannot be transferred to a third party. If the 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.
12. At the end of the bursary any outstanding balance over £50 should be returned to the BOU.
13. 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 an adequate report has not been submitted to us, then the BOU reserves the right to request for the award, in part or in full, to be returned.
14. The bursary holder should archive data in an appropriate manner.
15. Applicants must be an ECR member of the BOU or from and residing in a [low- or middle-income country](#).