



# WAMP & WAMF

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## INTRODUCTION

West Africa is Africa's most ecologically diverse areas with many ecoregions and its coastal forests (Guinean Forest of West Africa) that are globally recognized as a biodiversity hotspot. Yet small mammal research in West Africa remains descriptive, with gaps in ecological and evolutionary knowledge that impede conservation, further limited by in-country capacity and little to no funding for scientists and conservationists.

As a result, West Africa is the next frontier in Africa for biodiversity science and capacity building for small mammals especially neglected groups like bats, rodents, and pangolins etc. The region-wide research limitation coupled with the transboundary nature of the biodiversity crisis impacts our ability to protect small mammals in the future, raising the urgency for regional collaboration.

The West Africa Mammal Partnership (WAMP) and Fellowship (WAMF) programs were set up to bridge these gaps through multiple pathways that together bend the curve for biodiversity loss in the regions, thereby safeguarding a future for small mammals in West Africa. The program is firmly committed to the principle of generating and relying on conservation evidence to drive effective intervention efforts. The Mammal Partnership is a multi-regional and international collaboration between institutions and universities.

Our ethos is grounded in dedicating time to design, fund raise, execute, and ultimately publish original research that advances knowledge in integrative biology, focused on mammal evolution, ecology, and conservation. Regional partners collaborate with each other and international scientists to design and fund-raise for collaborative transboundary projects. The transboundary projects were deliberated upon in a recently conducted meeting, and fundraising is currently ongoing to support their implementation. International scientists are committed to providing conceptual guidance that complements the expertise of in-country supervisors.

The Mammal Fellowship is organized by a Partnership, which is poised to strengthen the capacity of post-graduate students through intensive training on field skills, needs-based mentorship, and networking, thereby raising the next generation of scientists and conservationists to secure the future of biodiversity in their home countries. This fellowship will drive multi-disciplinary, regional collaborative research for the conservation of small-sized, often neglected mammals in the region. It is currently funded through

generous donations from the Otterfonds Foundation, Future for Nature, and private donors.



In addition, regional in-country partners recruit and collaboratively supervise fellows under existing projects. Support for fellows is through a collaboration between local and international partners (WAMP). Thus, fellows receive support from both in-country and international mentors. In addition to mentorship, the program provides training on hands-on field techniques, refresher on specialized topics in ecology, and skills such as GIS, statistics, and molecular techniques. Furthermore, fellows receive a mini-grant and access to equipment.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 2019, the inaugural Nigerian Mammal Fellowship took root in Nigeria, spearheaded by SMACON's vision to cultivate local expertise in conservation and research. This pioneering edition exclusively welcomed Nigerian students, fostering a foundation of capacity building and collaboration. This first edition was well received and oversubscribed, including a significant number of calls for inclusion from students across the region. Recognizing the value and opportunity for regional impact, SMACON expanded the geography of the program for the next iteration in 2022 (long-paused caused by COVID). The West Africa Mammal Fellowship was born.

The evolution of the fellowship into a regional initiative catalyzed the formation of strategic institutional partnerships. It was clear that long-term regional capacity required a consortium of regional partners, each committed to the common goal of biodiversity conservation in the region. Moreso, the growing imperative to address biodiversity

challenges at a broader scale required collaborations that transcended national borders and united diverse perspectives and insights across the region.

This collaborative approach not only amplified the scope of the fellowship but also launched a robust network of cross-border alliances that included academics, conservationists and policy makers. The partnership, born from the shared concern for West Africa's ecological wealth, epitomizes a collective endeavor to devise innovative solutions, address biodiversity threats, and propel sustainable conservation practices across the diverse landscapes of the region.

In this third iteration, the partners and international collaborators are poised to deploy a more thorough mentorship program alongside launching a transboundary program for the first time.



## *FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS*

- **WAMF**

Q~ **What's WAMF (West African Mammal Fellowship) about?**

This program aims to strengthen the capacity of small mammal research and conservation skills of West African postgraduate students achievable through the two stages: **(1)** A classroom & field course **(2)** Mentorship program.

Q ~ **Who should apply?**

Postgraduate students who are recently enrolled at West African partner institutions and keen on developing a career in small mammal research and

conservation.

**Q ~ When do I apply?**

Every two years, there is a call for applications. The current call for application will open and close in January 2024.

**Q ~ When is the next field course?**

March 9th - 24th, 2024

**Q ~ What's the nature of the classroom and field course?**

It's an all expense paid two weeks intensive course with refresher lectures on topics ranging from field ecology, conservation biology to project design and scientific communication. It will also involve field discussions and survey sessions on taxa specific trapping, survey techniques amongst others. At the end of the course, participants are expected to apply course content and research techniques to design their research project.

**Q~ What next after the field course?**

Two weeks after the course, participants are expected to submit their project designs or proposals for evaluation. Only successful participants with well-drafted designs will be accepted for mentorship and become fellows.

**Q~ What will I gain from participating in the course?**

As a fellow, you will be mentored by your institutional supervisor and an international mentor throughout your graduate program. You are also eligible for book and equipment loans, a mini-grant to commence your field survey, and, of course, the opportunity to build a network for a lifetime.

**Q - Is the mentorship program a lifetime opportunity?**

No, this fellowship will run for the duration of your postgraduate studies. It terminates after all field work and research work is completed prior to the student's graduation. Post-fellowship, further collaboration with mentors is welcomed and encouraged, but the organizers will cease additional support.

**Q~ How often do I meet with my supervisors/ mentors?**

Fellows are expected to maintain a professional relationship with their supervisors/ mentors, however please do not overload them. A minimum of a two-week turn around time is expected when fellows request support with grant proposals, data analysis, comments on thesis/manuscript drafts, and reference request. It behooves the fellow to avoid frequent reminders, but aim to remind mentors of deadlines and such.

**Q~ Are fellows allowed to interact with other mentors?**

Certainly! WAMF was established for networking. Fellows are part of the diverse network of peers, partners and mentors. Thus engaging with others outside your primary support system of mentors is highly encouraged. However, fellows are encouraged to consult with their primary mentors before making any commitments or changes to their research questions or directions.

**Q~ What is the stipulated duration to contact a mentor for assistance?**

At least 2 week notice for all enquiry unless stated otherwise by your mentor.

**Q~ What is the maximum amount of grant that I can request from this Fellowship?**

Depending on the judging panel's decisions, each Fellow is likely to be awarded between 1,000 - 1,500 USD once your application for a mini grant is approved.

**Q~ Can I apply for the mini-grant more than once throughout my Fellowship duration?**

No, the Mini-grant is awarded just once, and is typically meant to support your pilot study, except in very unique circumstances, at the discretion of the program coordinator.

**Q~ What is the maximum duration a loaned book/equipment can stay in my possession?**

Book loans can be held for a maximum of 18 months.

**Q~ Can I borrow more than one book/equipment at a time?**

Yes. As a Fellow, you are welcome to borrow more than one book/equipment at a time, depending on availability. For more information read the form about book/equipment loan.

**Q~ How do I make further enquiries?**

Please send all enquiries to [info@smacon-africa.org](mailto:info@smacon-africa.org)

## *FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS*

- **WAMP**

**Q~ What does WAMP stand for?**

West African Mammal Partnership

**Q~ What's WAMP about?**

The Mammal partnership aims to bridge the gap for neglected small-sized mammals through local/regional/international collaborations, and transformational capacity strengthening for the next generation of scientists and conservationists.

**Q~ Who are WAMP Partners?**

Partners are scientists with a PhD in their early to mid-career stages, who are eligible to supervise postgraduate students recruited into the West Africa Mammal Fellowship (WAMFell)

**Q~ Can I join WAMP?**

WAMP is exclusive to invited partners

**Q~ How do I make further enquiries?**

Please send all enquiries to [info@smacon-africa.org](mailto:info@smacon-africa.org)