Ph.D. opportunity in evolutionary ecology and ecotoxicology of rainforest frogs

Position details: The candidate will be supervised by Assoc. Prof. Bibiana Rojas at the Konrad Lorenz Institute of Ethology, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Austria, and co-supervised by one or more of the following project collaborators: Dr. Jérémy Lemaire (Department of Behavioral & Cognitive Biology, University of Vienna); Asst. Prof. Valeria Marasco (Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna); Dr. Andrius Pašukonis (Institute of Biosciences, Vilnius University and Konrad Lorenz Institute of Ethology, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna), depending on the focus of the PhD project. The position is fully funded by the Austrian Science Fund and includes a gross monthly salary of EUR 3,714.80 for full-time employment, adjusted *pro rata* to 30 hours per week, and research + travel expenses for **3 years.** Position starting in April 2026.

Application requirements and procedures: MSc. degree in biological sciences and related field or an equivalent degree. Full proficiency in written and spoken English, statistical computing skills, strong interest in, and experience with, field research and animal behaviour. Physical and mental preparedness for intensive fieldwork and basic living conditions of tropical field research. Additional qualifications in the following areas will be also highly valued: experience in ecotoxicology and/or ecophysiology, landscape ecology, animal movement and behavioural analyses; scientific publishing and conference presentations, advanced computational skills, good knowledge of experimental design, experience in/with wet-lab work, tropical fieldwork, and/or animal husbandry. Ability to communicate in French is desirable. The application should be sent to bibiana.rojas@vetmeduni.ac.at no later than February 17th and should include a CV (no photo), the contact details of two referees who can provide recommendation letters (no letters needed at the initial stage), and a motivation letter written by the applicant stating their research interests and experiences. Interviews will be held online during the last week of February or first week of March.

Project summary: Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining (ASGM) is a tangible threat for Neotropical forests not only because of the associated small-scale deforestation but also because it is one of the main sources of mercury (Hg), an environmental contaminant of global concern due to its toxicity to wildlife. Despite its proven negative effects, studies on Hg contamination in the tropics lag behind those in temperate zones and have mostly focused on birds and fishes, which are associated to large bodies of water. Our recent findings, however, have revealed that high Hg concentrations can be found in phytotelmata, the ephemeral bodies of water contained in vegetation that multiple frog species use as breeding sites. The main aim of the project is to investigate the impact of Hg contamination on the life history, larval health and behaviour of an Amazonian poison frog species endemic of the Guiana Shield, an area with high occurrence of ASGM activities. For this, the candidate will design and carry out field-based behavioural assays as well as experiments under laboratory conditions that fall within the general framework of the project. The project involves, among others, several months of intensive fieldwork in French Guiana, rigorous ecotoxicological experiments in captivity, movement tracking and molecular work.

Main research fields: behavioural and evolutionary ecology, ecotoxicology, movement ecology, ecophysiology.