

Towards gender equal opportunities in taxonomy !

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The Gender Action Plan

The Gender Action Plan (GAP) has created instruments within EDIT to provide financial support, such as fellowships for women scientists and work-life balance grants to researchers in their early career, so that both the excellent female and male taxonomists can boost their career. During the last year, another instrument has been developed to supplement the help provided to early career researchers through an inter-institutional mentoring scheme. These instruments are build on GAP's objectives to: 1) raise gender awareness among EDIT participants; 2) work towards achieving gender balance in all activities; 3) promote women in science and 4) consider family-friendly policies

What is the Work-Life Balance action ?

The action is based notably on a survey performed on the EDIT partners' family friendly policies. It provides a financial support to scientists (male or female) with babies or toddlers up to three years old for their travel to missions abroad. The WLB supports services for nursery care at the meeting or training places of the project and helps with the researchers' timetables to make research conferences, training sessions and workshops more family friendly.

The grant is from 50€/day to 75€/day and up to 300€ for the whole grant. Ten Work-Life Balance grants were attributed, one in 2008 to a woman, six in 2009 to four women and two men and two in 2010 to one woman and one man.

Below are some excerpts from the grantees' reports on the way the EDIT WLB grant helped them take care of their child(ren) while they were abroad:

"Our main concern was to be able to maintain the weekly routine and meet the various commitments of our children. For that purpose we have hired for our youngest son from Monday to Wednesday additional time on Thursday with the childminder where he normally stays.

We have hired a person to guide my daugh-

ter to and from her music class and her art class on Tuesday, and my son to and from his football training and his extra homework class on Monday."

"During my participation to the EDIT meeting in Berlin my wife also had obligations as a result of her work. Therefore, none of us were present during the days of the meeting. We overcame this by hiring somebody to stay in our house (except for school hours). We could manage this with the travel grant of EDIT, which would take care of a large part of the costs. Without the grant I would not have participated in the Berlin meeting and that would have negatively influenced the outcome of the meeting and the resulting work."

"The EDIT WLB offered me the possibility to attend the EDIT General meeting that took place in Faro (Dec. 2009) without altering the daily week routine of my children in the absence of their mother. Through the grant I could arrange that the oldest son was taken to and picked up from school, participate in his swimming lessons, and be with someone until his father arrived from work. For my youngest (eight months) I could arrange travel costs for somebody to look after him during the day."

Fellowships for Women Scientists

EDIT's Gender Action Plan supports outstanding women working in taxonomy or related fields and promotes them in their early career through grants enabling them to perform their research in another EDIT institution for a limited period of time. Fourteen early career scientists benefited from this grant.

Below are some excerpts from the grantees' reports on their research visit to show the importance of funding of their research.

Raquel López-Antoñanzas, Systematics and phylogeny of the Rhizomyid rodents:

"Finding grants for taxonomic projects is extremely difficult. EDIT fellowships for women scientists have offered me the opportunity to work on the rhizomyine collections of the MNHN. This has been of vital importance in the project I am developing, which deals with the phylogeny of the extinct and extant members



of the subfamily. [...] My project includes the systematic survey of a subfamily of rodents that are known in the fossil record since early Miocene time. They live now in Asia and Africa. My project is comprehensive: both the extinct and extant species are taken into account. Without the EDIT fellowship, I am not sure how I would have performed this project in its entirety."

Sancia van der Meij, taxonomy of corall gall crabs (Cryptocrinidae), symbionts of stony corals.



"My time at SI was very fruitful, not at least because of the very helpful staff of MSC. The data that I collected will allow me to finish a manuscript on gall crabs associated with Fungiidae corals and prepare for my PhD-project. I am grateful to EDIT for granting me a Women in Science Fellowship."

The EDIT Mentoring programme

A survey performed in 2009 on the representation of the female scientists among the EDIT partners showed that twenty three percent of the decision-maker scientists among the thirteen respondents are females.

This figure encouraged the development of the mentoring programme which was chosen as a solution for this gender gap because it is a direct and interpersonal way to: 1) guarantee the transmission of the expertise and excellence in taxonomy from senior researchers to researchers in early career; 2) encourage women (but also men, with priority given to women) that are doctoral students and post-docs in taxonomy in their career through advices, in terms of work-life balance and career, from the full professors already well installed in the scientific community and 3) foster the advantages that the network provides to females in early career in terms of mobility and of trans-disciplinary exchanges.

The EDIT Mentoring pairs

Six scientists (women) in early career have benefited from the programme in 2010. Some of the mentees' expectations :

- "I hope that this program could help me to establish a network of scientific people, and provide me with a broader panoramic of how to continue within the scientific world, either in my current discipline or in something new."
- "Having experience of various aspects of botany and conservation [...] during my MSc and

PhD studies, but lacking in confidence in my skills, I feel that the EDIT GAP Mentoring Programme will help me develop my potential as a female scientist in this field. I am particularly interested in the advice of another female scientist, at a more advanced stage in their career, about career development opportunities, relevant networks I could join, and advice on managing ones work-life balance."

- "The mentoring programme appeals to me, as I would like to gain further insight into different career options available. I also hope to benefit from the personal expertise and experience of researchers already established in the scientific community with regards to making career decisions."

The mentoring pairs are encouraged to meet at least twice a year. Financial support is given to the mentee for the travel and meetings organization.

The programme was implemented among EDIT partners in 2010 with a wish for it to be continued after the end of the project.

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