



## Sabbatical at Smithsonian's Barro Colorado Island Research Station: Call for Applications

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) is pleased to announce a unique opportunity for scientists to take a sabbatical at the world-renowned [Barro Colorado Island](#) (BCI) research station in Panama. Dedicated in 1923, BCI is a protected lowland tropical forest located in the Panama Canal and managed by STRI. Covering approximately 15 square kilometers, BCI is a living laboratory for scientists studying tropical ecology and biodiversity with nearly 100 years of climate data, five decades of environmental monitoring, and the first long-term, large-scale tropical forest monitoring plot. The Island hosts over 1,400 species of vascular plants, 335 bird species, 110 mammal species, 35 species of amphibians, and 71 species of reptiles.

This is an opportunity for researchers to immerse themselves in one of the most intensively studied tropical forests on Earth while engaging in informal mentorship and knowledge-sharing with BCI residents and the broader STRI community, which includes interns, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and mid-career and senior scientists.

The **goals of this program** are to foster collaborative relationships with STRI scientists and external researchers and enhance mentorship of early career researchers on BCI.

### **About the Sabbatical:**

**Duration:** 6 to 12 months

**Start Date:** Variable in 2026

**Location:** Barro Colorado Island Research Station, Panama

**Eligibility:** Preference will be given to scientists from any discipline related to tropical ecology, soil science, animal behavior, paleontology, anthropology, or related fields. Applicants must be from academic or research institutions (professorial ranks or equivalent thereof). International researchers are eligible to apply. Couples and families are welcome. However, having children on BCI involves logistical challenges and additional costs that are not covered by STRI (see the FAQ).

**STRI Support:** Room and board will be provided, and most STRI associated fees will be waived. We cannot offer research or travel funds. However, the successful applicant could partner with a STRI Staff Scientist to advertise an internship through the [STRI General Internship Program](#) and co-mentor applicants for the [STRI Short-Term Fellowship](#).

**Logistics:** [BCI](#) is located in the middle of Lake Gatun, a 30-minute boat trip from the small town of Gamboa. The station has a full suite of labs, ambient spaces, more than 40 km of unpaved trails, and a century of environmental data. STRI runs boats to and from the island [multiple times each day](#), as well as a bus service to connect residents to Panama City. The incumbent will be provided with a small, stand-alone two-bedroom house with air-conditioning, high-speed internet, a kitchen, and laundry facilities. In addition, all meals will be provided by the BCI dining hall. The incumbent may request a small multi-purpose space suitable as a lab and office for the duration of their time on BCI. Learn more about BCI logistics [here](#).



### **Program Highlights:**

**Immersion:** Barro Colorado Island field station offers a unique opportunity to start new research or continue existing tropical studies. It is also an exceptional location for scholarship, providing an opportunity to work while living on a pristine tropical forest island devoted entirely to science.

**Networking and Collaboration:** Be part of a vibrant community of researchers, exchanging ideas and fostering collaborations that can lead to new, impactful research initiatives. The larger STRI community includes 25 resident staff scientists, approximately 20 resident post-doctoral fellows, and more than 1,000 scientific visitors who conduct research at STRI facilities each year. BCI itself ranges from 10 to 60 residents at any given time, houses up to 82 researchers, and typically supports 120 different research programs in any given year.

**Informal Mentorship and Collaboration:** Engage with early-career scientists through informal conversations, over meals, and in the field. Share your experiences, knowledge, and insights gained over the course of your career, provide guidance to those new to the field, and connect with tropical researchers from around the world. The island also hosts a [weekly seminar series](#) and supports a wide range of scientific and public visitors through our internships, fellowships, visiting university courses, school tours, and tourist visits.

**Commitments:** Applicants must commit to living on the island full-time during the sabbatical and engaging actively with the research community on and off the island. To facilitate introductions to the full STRI community, BCI Sabbatical recipients will give a STRI-wide seminar (in-person and webcast) near the beginning of their stay. They will also be expected to lead at least one professional development workshop for fellows focused on topics such as R coding, statistical analysis, scientific writing, or CV preparation; serve as an ad-hoc reviewer for fellowship applications; attend STRI-wide events and seminars, especially BCI seminars, and engage in scientific discussions with guests, researchers, and staff on BCI.

**Visas:** There are various visa options, which depend on nationality and length of stay. If a visa is required, the STRI External Affairs Office will assist you in processing your application.

### **How to Apply:**

Interested applicants should submit the following:

- A current CV
- A brief (1-2 page) statement of interest that outlines your experience, sabbatical goals, plans for contributing to the BCI and STRI community, and proposed sabbatical start and end dates.
- Contact information for two references

**Deadline for Applications:** December 1, 2025, or until filled

Please direct any inquiries to Dr. Joe Wright ([wrightj@si.edu](mailto:wrightj@si.edu)) and submit your application materials to Adriana Bilgray ([STRIFellows@si.edu](mailto:STRIFellows@si.edu)), with the subject line “BCI Sabbatical”. We look forward to welcoming scientists who are passionate about both advancing their own work and supporting the development of emerging scientists in the field.