



# COMNAP Antarctic Fellowship 2023 Recipient Announced

Released NZT Wednesday 25 October, 12:00hrs; for public/wide distribution.

The annual Antarctic Fellowship, awarded by the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP), is an investment in the professional development of talented early career researchers. The fellowship scheme, established in 2011, enables early-career persons to work with a project team from another country, opening up new opportunities and often creating partnerships that last for many years and over many Antarctic field seasons. By supporting their professional development with a host institute, the fellowship also strengthens international capacity and cooperation. COMNAP is pleased to support an early career Antarctic person in 2023.

The COMNAP Antarctic Fellow 2023 is Rafael Gonzalez-Serrano, a postdoctoral researcher at the Centro de Biología Molecular Severo Ochoa (CBMSO), Madrid, Spain. This award will support Rafael's project entitled "Viral metagenomics of extant and ancient viruses from Antarctic soils". Rafael will use the fellowship to undertake collaborative research with colleagues from the University of Waikato, New Zealand.

Professor Antonio Quesada, COMNAP Chair, said, "We, as COMNAP, are delighted to provide on-going support to early career researchers as part of our Antarctic Fellowship scheme. This exciting project is a prime example of international cooperation as, not only it will equip Rafael with valuable skills and knowledge, but these skills can also be transferred back to the home institute and country."

Rafael's project will enhance the understanding of viral communities in Antarctica by extracting and sequencing viral DNA/RNA; the sample processing performed during this exchange will allow the first comprehensive palaeoecological study using metagenomics to search for ancient viruses in Antarctica.

Rafael will be hosted at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, by Professor Craig Cary. Craig said, "I am delighted to host Rafael in my laboratory. He is an astonishing early career researcher who I think has huge potential to contribute to some of the pressing issues the Antarctic continent is facing. We know very little about viruses in terrestrial Antarctica let alone the potential for release of preserved viruses under current climate change predictions. This study will provide that critical preliminary data to propose a more extensive survey."

The International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) and the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) will announce their Antarctic Fellowship 2023 recipients in the week commencing 6 November 2023.

## Background information

For more information, visit the COMNAP website at: <https://www.comnap.aq/comnap-antarctic-fellowships>

### The Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP)

[www.comnap.aq](http://www.comnap.aq)

Contact: Andrea Colombo - Engagement, Information and Project Manager

[andrea.colombo@comnap.aq](mailto:andrea.colombo@comnap.aq)

+64 3 369 0626

COMNAP brings together the National Antarctic Programmes of 33 Antarctic Treaty countries. Formed in 1988, the purpose of COMNAP is to develop and promote best practice in managing the support of scientific research in Antarctica. It does this by: Serving as a forum to develop practices that improve effectiveness of activities in an environmentally responsible manner; Facilitating and promoting international partnerships; Providing opportunities and systems for information exchange; and Providing the Antarctic Treaty System with objective and practical, technical and non-political advice drawn from the National Antarctic Programmes' pool of expertise.