

Scientists Want Funding to Send More Gerbils Into Space

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russian and U.S. researchers have urged their governments to continue funding studies that involve sending unmanned satellites with animals into space.

Missions like the cooperative Russian-U.S. Bion-M project, which took place in spring, are a must for preparing longer spaceflights by humans, the researchers said in a statement on the mission's Russian blog posted Saturday.

Experiments with critters onboard the International Space Station offer scientists a unique opportunity to increase the depth and breadth of their study, unhampered by rules that would apply to those that are staged with a crew.

"Russian and American researchers strongly recommend a continuation of experiments on animals onboard automatic satellites," the statement said.

Bion-M1 carried various plants, eight Mongolian gerbils, 45 mice and 15 geckos, slugs and snails into space when it launched in April.

Most of the creatures failed to survive the flight due to technical faults in the spacecraft. The flight proved fatal for all the Mongolian gerbils, 39 out of 45 mice, and a cichlid fish.

The scientists, however, deemed the mission successful because it provided them with the first data describing the impact of zero gravity on blood vessels in the brain, the spinal cord and inner ear, as well as on gene expression. Russian scientists shared several mice from Bion-M with their American colleagues at NASA.

"Knowledge gained in the use of animals reveals the fundamental mechanisms of adaptation to spaceflight," NASA said on its website. "Such knowledge provides insight for potential long-duration human spaceflight risk mitigation strategies and potential new approaches for Earth-bound biomedical problems."

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