

1 **Abstract:** Despite advances in sampling and scoring strategies, Monte Carlo modeling methods
2 still struggle to accurately predict *de novo* the structures of large proteins, membrane proteins, or
3 proteins of complex topologies. Previous approaches have addressed these shortcomings by
4 leveraging sparse distance data gathered using site-directed spin labeling and electron
5 paramagnetic resonance spectroscopy (SDSL-EPR) to improve protein structure prediction and
6 refinement outcomes. However, existing computational implementations must choose between
7 coarse-grained models of the spin label that lower the resolution and explicit models that lead to
8 resource-intensive simulations. Existing methods are further limited by their reliance on distance
9 distributions, which are calculated from a primary refocused echo decay signal and may contain
10 artifacts introduced during this processing step. Here, we addressed these challenges by developing
11 RosettaDEER, a scoring method within the Rosetta software suite capable of simulating distance
12 distributions and echo decay traces between spin labels fast enough to fold proteins *de novo*. We
13 demonstrate that the accuracy of resulting distance distributions match or exceed those generated
14 by more computationally intensive methods. Moreover, decay traces generated from these
15 distributions recapitulate intermolecular background coupling parameters, allowing RosettaDEER
16 to discriminate between poorly-folded and native-like models even when the time window of EPR
17 data collection is truncated, rendering them unsuitable for accurate transformation into distance
18 distributions. Finally, we demonstrate that one decay trace per nine residues is sufficient to predict
19 the folds of Bax and the C-terminus of ExoU, two soluble proteins with surface-exposed
20 amphipathic structural features that prevent the Rosetta energy function from correctly identifying
21 native-like models in the absence of experimental data. These benchmarking results confirm that
22 RosettaDEER can effectively leverage sparse experimental data for a wide array of modeling
23 applications built into the Rosetta software suite.

1 **Introduction:** Structural biology increasingly relies on integrated methods to model the structure
2 and dynamics of proteins and protein assemblies^{1,2}. Multiple complementary experimental
3 methodologies, when integrated with computation, can describe the structure and dynamics of
4 proteins that elude structure determination from a single technique, such as integral membrane
5 proteins, conformationally flexible proteins, and those that fall outside the size limitations of
6 solution-state nuclear magnetic resonance and cryo-electron microscopy. Computational
7 approaches are used to integrate experimental data from multiple approaches and build physically-
8 realistic models also in regions with sparse experimental data. One promising experimental
9 approach to feed into integrated structural biology combines site-directed spin labeling and
10 electron paramagnetic resonance spectroscopy (SDSL-EPR). Previous studies have employed
11 SDSL-EPR and computation in tandem to predict protein structures *de novo*³⁻¹⁰, model
12 conformational changes¹¹⁻¹⁴, and dock rigid-bodies¹⁵⁻¹⁷.

13 Existing modeling methods largely focus on data gathered using four-pulse double electron-
14 electron resonance spectroscopy¹⁸ (DEER, also called PELDOR), which can report on distances
15 of up to 60 to 80 Å between stable unpaired electrons conjugated to the protein backbone by
16 SDSL^{19,20}. However, incorporation of these distances as interatomic restraints is confounded by
17 the conformational freedom of the most commonly used probe, the methanethiosulfonate spin label
18 (MTSSL). The central challenge is to convert interspin distance information of a mutant protein
19 into backbone restraints for the wild-type²¹⁻²³. The need to incorporate two spin labels into the
20 protein sequence per restraint results in sparse structural coverage of the experimental data that
21 can introduce ambiguities into computational modeling⁶. Only a few experimental restraints are
22 generally available to describe the protein's conformational details.

1 These sparse datasets have nonetheless been leveraged for protein structure prediction and
2 refinement by a range of computational modeling approaches that represent the spin labels either
3 implicitly or explicitly. Implicit models such as the motion-on-a-cone (CONE)³ model use
4 knowledge-based potentials to translate inter-spin distance values into backbone restraints,
5 typically between C_β atoms. Introducing these restraints led to measurable improvements in *de*
6 *nov*o structure prediction benchmarks by programs employing Monte Carlo sampling strategies^{3,5–}
7 ^{7,23,24}, gradient minimization^{4,10}, and molecular dynamics²⁵. However, because these potentials
8 account for neither the residues' surrounding environment nor their relative orientations, they tend
9 to be relatively imprecise²⁶. Explicit methods, by contrast, model spin labels as either individual
10 side chains^{14,27–30}, ensembles of side chains^{15,31–33}, or ensembles of dummy atoms³⁴. The added
11 detail improves accuracy of modeling but makes implementations too computationally intensive
12 for *de novo* protein structure prediction and limits the utility of these methods to validating
13 experimental distance distributions³⁵ and modeling small-scale conformational changes^{11,12,14}.

14 Despite their diversity, these methods largely share a common limitation in their reliance on
15 distance distributions, rather than the primary spectroscopic readout. Other computational
16 methodologies directly incorporate primary experimental data, such as two-dimensional NMR
17 spectra³⁶ and cryo-EM electron density maps³⁷ to fold and refine proteins. The feasibility of using
18 DEER dipolar coupling decay traces as modeling restraints, by contrast, has only recently been
19 explored¹⁴. Whereas processing spectroscopic decay traces into distance distributions risks the
20 introduction of artifacts, simulating a decay trace from a distance distribution is well-described
21 and mathematically straightforward²⁰.

22 Here we introduce RosettaDEER, a method in the macromolecular modeling suite Rosetta capable
23 of rapidly simulating distance distributions and DEER decay traces between spin labels as well as

1 evaluating a model's agreement with experimental data. RosettaDEER's increased computational
2 efficiency enables prediction of protein structures *de novo* with greater accuracy than the default
3 energy function or the previously reported CONE model³. Owing to Rosetta's Monte Carlo
4 sampling strategy³⁸, the experimental data can be used directly without analysis or background-
5 correction. Thus, the quality of the primary spectroscopic data can be significantly poorer than
6 what would ordinarily be required for rigorous transformation into distance distributions. This
7 method reinforces the utility of DEER in conjunction with computational modeling to accurately
8 model proteins structures.

9 **Results:**

10 Modeling nitroxide spin labels using RosettaDEER. A strategy to model proteins using DEER data
11 must reliably simulate distance distributions between spin-labeled residues. To quantify the
12 computational cost and efficiency of this task, we considered a panel of five proteins where both
13 atomic-detail structures and experimental DEER data were available (Table S1). Distance
14 distributions were simulated with each method between residue pairs that have been previously
15 studied experimentally, and the resulting error was quantified as the difference between the
16 average values of the simulated and experimental distance distributions (Figure 1A). In addition,
17 we measured the time required by each program for *in silico* spin-labeling of a single residue
18 (Figure 1B). Consistent with previous results^{8,26,32}, the average values of experimental distance
19 distributions gathered in monomeric proteins, but not the homodimer CDB3, agree more closely
20 with those of simulated distributions than their corresponding C_{β} - C_{β} distances, from which
21 restraints such as the CONE model are derived³ (Table S2). By contrast, none of the methods
22 examined here reliably reproduced the width of the experimental distributions. This is likely
23 attributable to oversampling of available conformational space of the spin label, which results from

1 the exclusive use of van der Waals repulsive energies to limit side chain configurations and, by
2 extension, electron positions for distance measurements. Finally, the data revealed how simulation
3 times both varied substantially between these methods and failed to correlate with accuracy.

4 Because these results suggested that computational complexity was not a determining factor in the
5 accuracy of simulations of distance distributions between spin labels, RosettaDEER's design
6 prioritized computational speed over accuracy (see Methods). Rather than measure distances from
7 full-atom rotamers or mobile dummy atoms, RosettaDEER instead uses a probability density
8 function to capture the likely positions that would be explored by MTSSL conformations. High-
9 occupancy electron positions are mapped on the protein structure (Figure 1C, 1D). For each
10 electron position, a clash evaluation was performed between a centroid atom representing the
11 nitroxide ring's center of mass and the protein backbone. Placing this coordinate at an idealized
12 location, consistent with spin-labeled protein structures in the Protein Databank (Figure S2, Table
13 S3), reduced the number of atoms for clash evaluation to one per rotamer, thus maximizing
14 computational efficiency. Figures 1A and 1B demonstrate that, compared to other methods,
15 RosettaDEER's simplified representation of the spin label allows the generation of distance
16 distributions three to five orders of magnitude faster than other approaches but with comparable
17 accuracy.

18 Comparison of simulated with experimental DEER decay traces. We then explored approaches to
19 simulating DEER decay traces using these distance distributions, a task complicated by the fact
20 that experimental decays have contributions from coupling between unpaired electrons both within
21 and between macromolecules²⁰ (Figures 2A-C). Model-free analytical methods such as Tikhonov
22 regularization rely on appropriate time collection windows to isolate, and thus correct for, the
23 intermolecular signal. Our approach instead borrows from Gaussian-based modeling approaches

1 that fit the data directly by treating the intermolecular contribution as an exponential function
2 consisting of a slope (k , the background decay) and a y-intercept (λ , the modulation depth; see
3 Methods)³⁹. We tested this strategy on our benchmark set and found that both parameters agreed
4 with experimentally determined values (Figures 2D, 2E), with r^2 values of 0.92 and 0.95 for k and
5 λ , respectively. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the outliers in this respect tended to be the decay traces
6 with the fewest oscillations (Table S4, Figure S3). This functionality enables RosettaDEER to
7 directly evaluate structural models while avoiding the shortcomings associated with
8 transformation to distance distribution.

9 Enrichment of native-like models using experimental decay traces. The extent to which the added
10 capability of directly simulating decay traces could improve the identification of correct protein
11 structural models was evaluated using misfolded and misdocked structural models. We generated
12 one to two thousand incorrectly folded models for each of the proteins mentioned above. In
13 addition, we generated one thousand misdocked models of the homodimer CDB3 (Figure 3). The
14 root mean square deviation over secondary structures normalized to a 100 residue protein
15 (RMSD100SSE⁴⁰) ranged from near-native models (0.5 Å C_α RMSD100SSE) to incorrectly folded
16 (>15 Å C_α RMSD100SSE). To assess enrichment of high-quality models, we calculated the
17 logarithm of the number of models in the top ten percentile by agreement with DEER data that
18 also fell in the top ten percentile by RMSD100SSE as previously described⁷ (see Methods). This
19 resulted in a metric ranging from -1 (no high-quality models in the top 10%) to 1 (only high-quality
20 models in top 10%), with a value of 0 indicating no enrichment. This scoring scheme was repeated
21 for the native Rosetta energy function⁴¹ and the CONE model (Figure S4). To examine the
22 synergistic effect of using both the energy function and either RosettaDEER or the CONE model,

1 the combined Z-scores were compared for each model and plotted to highlight the level of
2 enrichment (Figure S4).

3 For the monomeric proteins considered here, decay traces simulated from native-like models more
4 closely corresponded to experimental data than those from incorrectly folded models. In all cases
5 examined, RosettaDEER identified correctly folded models as well as correctly-docked CDB3
6 models more effectively than the CONE model and the Rosetta energy function on its own. In
7 contrast, misfolded models of CDB3 were not identifiable using either RosettaDEER or the CONE
8 model with the experimental data available. In fact, the use of the experimental data alongside the
9 Rosetta energy function impeded the latter's identification of native-like models. This may reflect
10 the fact that the experimental data gathered in CDB3 is limited to interdimeric distance restraints,
11 which reflect the relative position of a residue from the center of symmetry, rather than structural
12 features within the protein fold.

13 Because a robust simulation of the intermolecular background is dependent on the time window
14 of experimental DEER trace collection, we examined the influence of the decay duration on the
15 enrichment of correctly-folded protein structural models (Figure S4). Model-free analytical
16 approaches require approximately 0.8 oscillations and 1.6 oscillations to accurately identify the
17 average and standard deviation of a distance distribution, respectively²⁰. Therefore, we artificially
18 truncated the experimental data and measured enrichment as a function of oscillations (see
19 Methods, Figure S4). Strikingly, with RosettaDEER highly truncated decay traces (<0.5
20 oscillations) could still identify correctly folded models of Bax, ExoU, Rhodopsin, and Mhp1,
21 albeit to a reduced degree. In these cases, as well as for misdocked CDB3 models, enrichment
22 increases with duration up to approximately one oscillation and largely plateau thereafter (Figure
23 S4).

1 De novo folding of Bax and ExoU. To further illustrate RosettaDEER's capability to identify
2 native-like models, we folded Bax and ExoU *de novo*. Few of the ten thousand structural models
3 generated using Rosetta without experimental restraints resembled the native fold. Moreover,
4 native-like models did not correspond to their respective global energy minima as judged by the
5 Rosetta energy function. (Figure 4A). Therefore, we supplemented this *de novo* fold prediction
6 protocol with one experimental restraint per nine residues using either the CONE model or
7 RosettaDEER (Figure S5). Whereas using the CONE model to transform the distances into
8 restraints led to a measurable improvement in the number of correctly folded structural models
9 ($<7.5 \text{ \AA } C_{\alpha} \text{ RMSD}_{100\text{SSE}}$) of Bax, no such improvement was observed when folding ExoU. By
10 contrast, using these restraints with RosettaDEER substantially increased the number of correctly
11 folded models of both proteins (Figure 4A).

12 Although agreement between models and experimental structures loosely correlated with both
13 RosettaDEER score and Rosetta score for both proteins, an abundance of incorrectly-folded
14 models obscured this trend (Figure 4B; RosettaDEER and Rosetta scores were jointly considered
15 by adding the Z-scores of each). As a result, the Rosetta energy function, RosettaDEER, and the
16 CONE model all failed to isolate and identify native-like models for either Bax or ExoU from
17 score values alone. The ten best-scoring models by these metrics were generally incorrectly folded
18 ($5\text{-}10 \text{ \AA } C_{\alpha} \text{ RMSD}_{100\text{SSE}}$) and buried amphipathic features found on the surface of the native
19 model.

20 This shortcoming was addressed by clustering all models with a radius of $7.5 \text{ \AA } C_{\alpha} \text{ RMSD}_{100}$
21 using Durandal⁴² and evaluating the size of each cluster and their average agreement with both the
22 experimental DEER data and the Rosetta energy function. Correctly-folded protein models have
23 previously been identified near the center of large clusters⁴³, suggesting an additional venue to

1 identifying correctly folded models. To test this hypothesis, we computed the Z-scores of both the
2 average Rosetta energy score and RosettaDEER score for models within each cluster and ranked
3 the clusters by their combined Z-scores. The cluster with the lowest average combined Z-score for
4 both proteins also had the lowest average RMSD100SSE (Figure 4B). In both cases, the cluster
5 center was substantial closer than its average (data not shown). Finally, selecting for the top five
6 clusters with the lowest combined Z-scores eliminated 85.3% of Bax models and 61.3% of ExoU
7 models while maintaining the majority of correctly folded models.

8 Each cluster at this stage represented a broad population of models that satisfied the DEER
9 restraints and were considered energetically favorable by the Rosetta energy function. We
10 hypothesized that refining models in the absence of restraints would reveal the native fold by
11 allowing false positives to be structurally optimized away from conformations consistent with the
12 data. For this purpose, models from the top five clusters were recombined using a recently
13 published refinement protocol⁴⁴. During each of five iterations, a subset of twenty input models
14 were hybridized in the absence of DEER restraints into 240 models using RosettaCM⁴⁵. The
15 models generated this way were then clustered and analyzed as previously described. Consistent
16 with our prediction, the most native-like cluster retained its agreement with the DEER data,
17 whereas the others refined toward conformations inconsistent with the experimental data. After
18 further Cartesian minimization⁴⁶, the best-scoring model from these clusters had near-native folds
19 ($<3.5 \text{ \AA } C_{\alpha}$ RMSD100SSE; Figure 5).

20 **Discussion:** RosettaDEER predicts and refines protein structures by integrating DEER
21 spectroscopy data and Rosetta computational modeling. The novel aspects of this method are a
22 simplified representation of MTSSL and a strategy to rapidly simulate DEER decay traces for
23 comparison to uncorrected experimental traces. The robustness of the method was demonstrated

1 by benchmarking every step on five sparse datasets. Despite the simplified spin label
2 representation, the distance distributions simulated by RosettaDEER are comparable to those
3 generated using more computationally complex rotamer library approaches. Moreover, despite the
4 imperfect fit to the experimental distance distributions and the decay traces, the combined
5 approach efficiently identifies conformations that simultaneously satisfy the data and the Rosetta
6 energy function.

7 Our *de novo* folding benchmark with the small soluble proteins ExoU and Bax highlights
8 the success of this strategy. Both proteins possess surface-exposed amphipathic substructures that
9 insert into the membrane. Bax transitions from a soluble monomer into a membrane-bound
10 oligomer using its C-terminal helix⁴⁷, whereas ExoU is hypothesized to move into the membrane
11 using a flexible loop between its two C-terminal helices⁴⁸. Consistent with previous results^{8,9}, the
12 Rosetta energy function favored models that packed these substructures in the protein core, leading
13 to incorrectly folded models and lack of correlation of the Rosetta score with model accuracy. As
14 a result, orthogonal experimental data that define the structure are critical to *de novo* folding. Our
15 benchmark suggests that even a small number of experimental DEER measurements is sufficient
16 to achieve fold-level accuracy. Moreover, our model analysis suggests that even low-quality data
17 can discriminate correctly-folded from incorrectly-folded models more effectively than the C_β-
18 based CONE model.

19 The strategy of RosettaDEER to predict the structures of these two proteins (Figure S6)
20 leverages the experimental data by folding and optimizing protein structures with and without
21 restraints, respectively. The first step leads to a substantial reduction in the search space and a
22 concomitant increase in models that satisfy the restraints, although not all of these models are
23 correctly folded. After clustering the models to remove those that correspond to narrow energy

1 minima, the second step, optimization without restraints, allows clusters with incorrectly folded
2 models to adopt alternative folds. This is an effective filtering procedure that restores the
3 experimental data's ability to identify native-like models. Although the most correct models of
4 Bax and ExoU at this stage were not the best-scoring, they were the most consistent with the
5 experimental data. This protocol therefore minimizes both the generation of incorrectly-folded
6 structures that overfit that data and the conformational search space inherent to the protein folding
7 problem.

8 Despite its success illustrated here, the current implementation of RosettaDEER's assumes
9 that a single conformation describes the data. For example, the distance distributions of Mhp1, the
10 most conformationally flexible protein examined in this dataset, were generally more poorly
11 simulated using available methods than those collected in other proteins. Experimental
12 applications of the DEER technique often focus on monitoring ensembles of protein conformations
13 and require computational methods that interpret this data with the capability to generate multiple
14 models and examine their consistency with sparse experimental data. This is the next step of the
15 development of RosettaDEER. Further, a Rosetta *de novo* folding protocol for membrane-
16 associated proteins that includes a model membrane would be desirable for proteins such as Bax
17 and ExoU.

18 **Methods:**

19 Assembly of diverse experimental datasets. RosettaDEER was implemented in the Rosetta
20 software suite³⁸ (Figure S6), trained on distance data gathered in T4 Lysozyme obtained from the
21 laboratory of Hassane S. Mchaourab, and tested and cross-validated using both raw spectroscopic
22 and analyzed distance data gathered in five laboratories. Data for the ExoU C-terminus, Bax, and
23 Mhp1 were obtained from and analyzed by the laboratories of Jimmy Feix, Enrica Bordignon, and

1 Hassane S. Mchaourab, respectively; previously unpublished ExoU double-cysteine mutants were
2 purified, spin labeled, and measured as previously described⁹. Raw data for CDB3 and bovine
3 rhodopsin were obtained from the laboratories of Albert Beth and Wayne Hubbell, respectively,
4 and were analyzed using DEERAnalysis2016⁴⁹. The last 200ns and 500ns were removed from
5 experimental decay traces shorter and longer than 1.5 us, respectively.

6 Generation of DEER distance distributions. Distance distributions were obtained from a variety of
7 methods on Bax (PDB: 1F16 model 8), ExoU (PDB: 3TU3), CDB3 (PDB: 1HYN chains R/S),
8 Rhodopsin (PDB: 1GZM chain A), and Mhp1 (PDB: 2JLN) using MMM³¹, MDDS³⁴,
9 MtsslWizard³², Pronox³³, and TagDock¹⁶. MMM2017 was run locally on both cryogenic mode
10 (175 K) and ambient mode (298 K) using default settings. MDDS was run using the CHARMM-
11 GUI web server⁵⁰ on default settings. MtsslWizard was run locally from Pymol 1.7.2.1 using tight
12 fitting unless no rotamers could be placed, in which case loose fitting was used (because Mhp1
13 residue 324 could not be labeled using loose fitting, distances between it were omitted). Pronox
14 was run from the USC web server using a bias of 0.9 and a van der Waals radius scaling factor of
15 0.75, the latter of which was reduced to 0.4 if rotamers could not be placed. TagDock was run
16 locally with SCWRL4 and a bump radius of 0.85. Measurements using the CONE model were
17 determined by adding 1.79 Å to the C_β-C_β distance.

18 RosettaDEER design. The Rosetta MTSSL rotamer library²⁹ served as the basis for the coarse-
19 grained rotameric ensemble used in this study. Each rotamer's nitroxide bond midpoint was
20 transformed into a common coordinate frame defined by the C_α atom at the origin, the backbone
21 nitrogen along the Z-axis, and the backbone carbonyl carbon in the X-Y plane. Centroid atoms
22 with a van der Waals radius of 2.2 Å representing the nitroxide ring center of mass were placed at
23 87.5% of the distance between each electron and an idealized C_β coordinate. Electrons whose

1 respective centroids clashed with backbone atoms and other side chains were eliminated and
2 downweighted, respectively. Inter-electron distances were transformed into Gaussian distributions
3 with bin sizes and standard deviations of 0.5 Å and amplitudes equal to the product of the
4 respective electron weights. All distributions generated this way were added to generate a
5 simulated distance distribution for comparison to experimental values and simulation of DEER
6 decay traces.

7 Coordinate positions and weights were optimized using a training set of forty-nine experimental
8 distance distributions between 37 residues in T4 Lysozyme³⁴. Coordinates were clustered into
9 between two and 53 coordinates using K-means clustering and superimposed over spin-labeled
10 residues. During each of half a million iterations, the weight of an electron was randomly modified
11 and either accepted or rejected using a Monte Carlo Metropolis criterion based on the resulting
12 distributions' improved agreement with experimental distributions. One thousand repeats were
13 performed for each cluster size. The electron set that led to the greatest agreement with
14 experimental distributions contained 17 coordinates, four of which were downweighted to zero.
15 This set was introduced as the default for RosettaDEER and used for subsequent experiments.

16 Simulation of DEER dipolar coupling decay traces. The intramolecular form factor ($V_{intra}(t)$) was
17 generated from each 0.5 Å bin of a distance distribution between 15 Å and 100 Å:

18
$$V_{intra}(t) = \int_0^{\frac{\pi}{2}} \sin\theta * \cos\left(\frac{(1 - 3\cos^2\theta)}{r^3} * \frac{2\pi\mu_B^2 g_A g_B}{4\pi\hbar} * t\right) d\theta$$

19 where t is the time point of a trace in μs , r is the bin distance in nm, μ_B is the Bohr magneton, g_X
20 is the G-factor of electron X, and θ is the angle between the interelectron vector and the bulk
21 magnetic field. The intermolecular background consists of the modulation depth (λ) and an

1 intermolecular coupling parameter (k). These parameters were determined using linear regression
2 by incrementing λ with step size 0.01 and linearizing the remainder of the signal:

$$\ln\left(\frac{Exp(t)}{1 - \lambda(1 - V_{intra}(t))}\right) = kt$$

4 where $Exp(t)$ represents the experimental data at time point t provided by the user.

5 Model generation and evaluation. Diverse sets of models were generated with RosettaCM⁴⁵ using
6 either full-length or truncated native models as inputs. Additional low-quality models were
7 generated using *de novo* protein folding. Bax, ExoU, and CDB3 were scored using the ref2015
8 energy function⁴¹, and Rhodopsin and Mhp1 were scored using RosettaMembrane⁵¹. The
9 transmembrane regions for Rhodopsin and Mhp1 were predicted using OCTOPUS⁵². Oscillation
10 frequencies of decay traces for distributions with an average distance r_{avg} were calculated as $\frac{r_{avg}}{5.2 \times 10^4}$
11 μs ⁵³. Decay traces with fewer than three oscillations were not used to evaluate enrichment as a
12 function of decay trace duration.

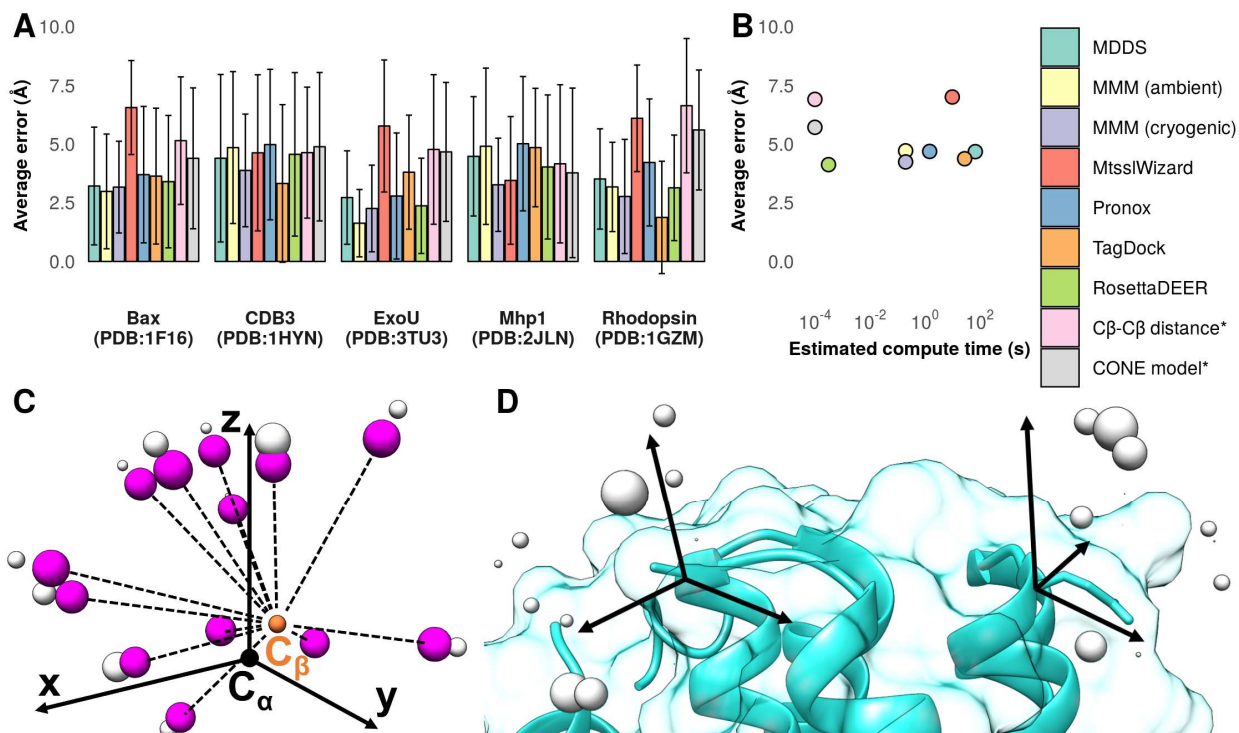
13 De novo protein structure prediction. Ten thousand models were generated using extended chain
14 AbInitio with either RosettaDEER restraints, CONE model restraints, or no restraints. This
15 protocol relies on insertion of fragments obtained from a July 2011 database; homologous protein
16 structures were excluded from these fragment libraries. The Z-scores of each model's agreement
17 with DEER data and energy function score was calculated, and all models were clustered to 7.5 Å
18 C_α RMSD100 using Durandal⁴². After eliminating sparsely populated clusters (<5% the size of the
19 largest cluster), the top ten models from each of the top five clusters by combined Z-score were
20 iteratively hybridized for five iterations as previously described⁴⁴ without RosettaDEER restraints.
21 The models generated this way were again clustered at 7.5 Å C_α RMSD100, and the best-scoring
22 model from the cluster with the best average combined Z-score was treated as the predicted model.

1 **Author Contributions:**

2 DDA, HSM, and JM conceived the study and wrote the manuscript. DDA developed and
3 implemented RosettaDEER and performed computational experiments with input from RAS.
4 MHT and JBF designed and performed DEER experiments on ExoU.

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10 discussions on designing and implementing RosettaDEER.

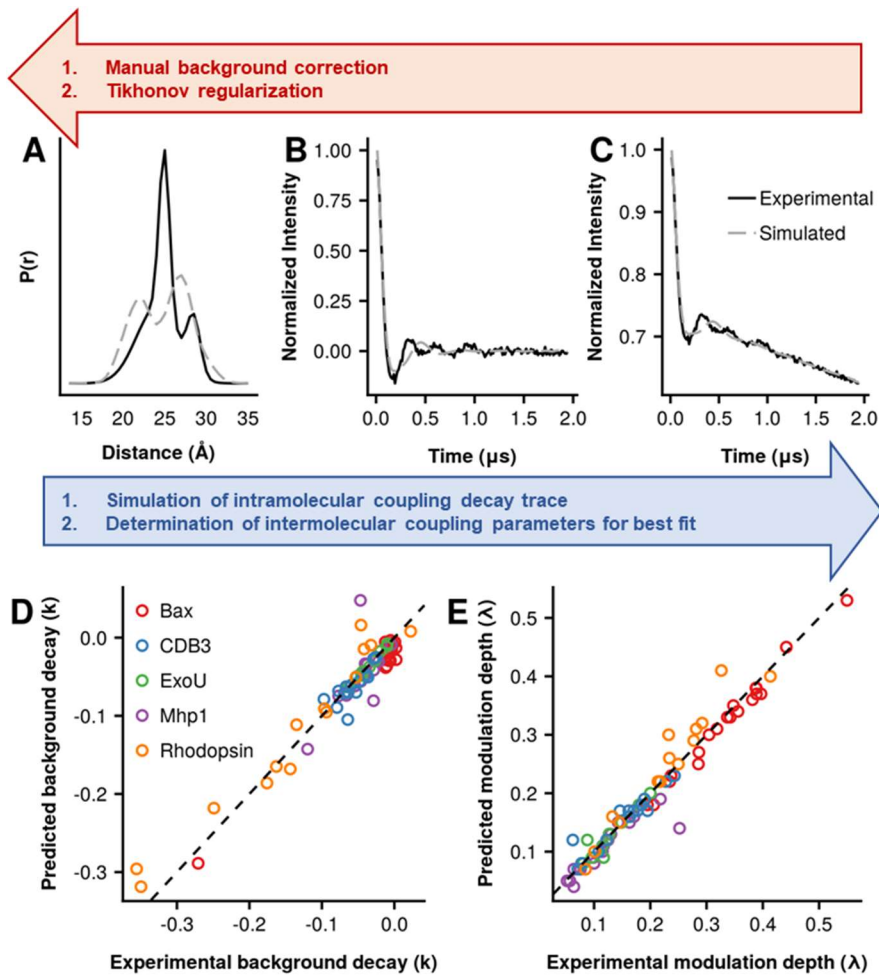


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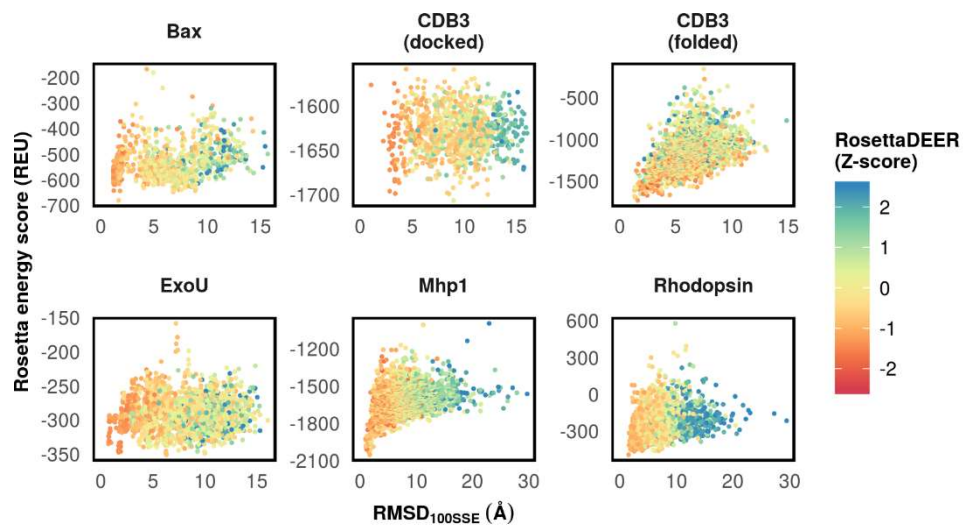
3 **Figure 1. Simulations of distance distributions between nitroxide probes using RosettaDEER.** A) Difference
 4 between average values of simulated and experimental distance distributions. Error bars reflect the standard deviation.
 5 B) Estimated average time required for in silico spin labeling of one residue (*the lower limit of quantitation exceeded
 6 the C β -C β distance compute time). C) Coarse-grained rotameric ensemble representation of MTSSL. Centers of mass,
 7 shown in purple, are used for clash evaluation, while electron coordinates, shown in grey, serve as measurement
 8 coordinates. D) Distance distributions between residues are simulated by superimposed coordinates, evaluating
 9 clashes, and measuring all resulting pairwise distances

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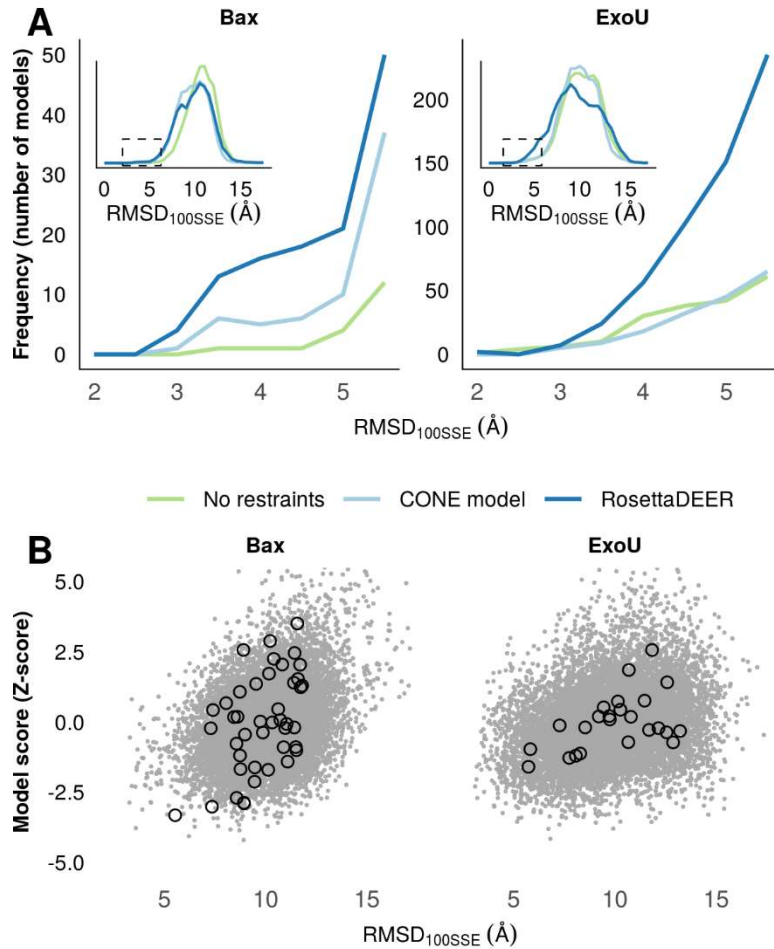
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Figure 2. RosettaDEER simulations of distance distributions and decay traces. The forward approach taken by RosettaDEER contrasts with the ill-posed inverse problem that must be addressed by Tikhonov regularization. **A)** Simulated and experimental distance distributions between T4 Lysozyme residues 93 and 123. **B)** RosettaDEER then simulates the resulting intramolecular decay trace and determines the background parameters, k and λ , which result in the generation of a trace that best fits the experimental data (**C**). **E and F)** Recovery of experimental background coupling decay parameters.



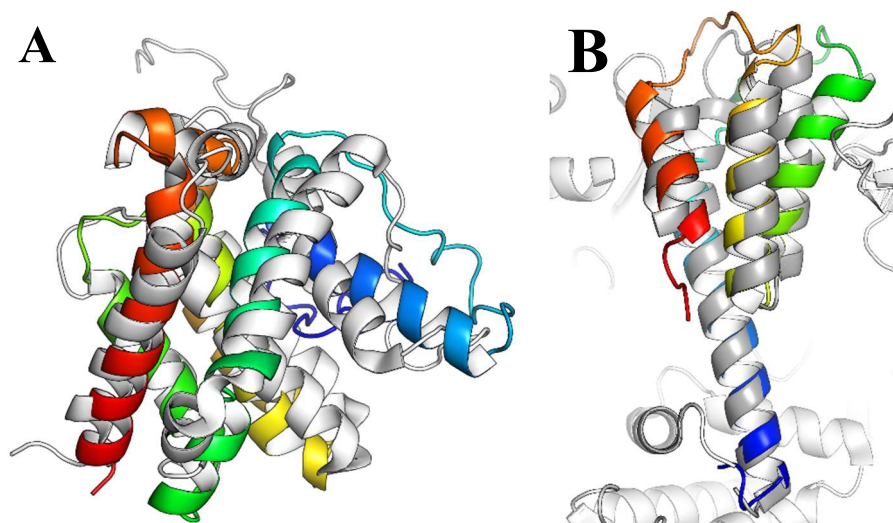
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Figure 3. Evaluation of models using DEER decay traces. Models with C α RMSD_{100SSE} ranging from 0.5 Å to 20.0-30.0 Å were scored using both the Rosetta energy function and RosettaDEER.



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Figure 4. De novo folding of Bax and ExoU using DEER decay data. A) *De novo* protein folding of native-like models using DEER decay restraints with RosettaDEER, C_{β} - C_{β} distance restraints with the CONE model, or no restraints. Inset: Spread of all models generated using these three methods. **B)** Accuracy of *de novo* folded models (gray dots) and clusters (black circles) as a function of combined DEER and Rosetta Z-score.



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Figure 5. Predicted models of A) Bax and B) ExoU at 3.2 and 2.1 Å C_{α} RMSD100SSE, respectively. Models were obtained from ten thousand *de novo* folded models, the best-scoring of which were refined into 1200 additional models. Native models shown in white.