



Natural Talent Case Study

Name: Aroa Sampedro-Fernandez

Age: 30

Traineeship:

Dates of traineeship: 6th April 2017- 6th April 2018

About your traineeship



Can you give an overview of your Natural Talent UK traineeship? (What organisations are you placed with/type of work you will be involved in?)

For my traineeship I will be placed at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), working in partnership with The Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) and Edinburgh Living Landscape (ELL) as part of the Edinburgh's shoreline project. As part of my traineeship, I will be studying lichens, bryophytes and seaweeds, all of them known to be bio indicators and an important key for environmental changes and habitat conservation. Often overlooked and under-appreciated, they create unique habitats along our coasts.

After the Second World War, Edinburgh's coast became a place for discharging sewage, a place for small and heavy industry. That is why public awareness is an important part of this process as well. Engaging with local communities, schools and volunteers, we want to reunite people with the natural and historical heritage of the Edinburgh's shoreline.

Why did you apply for a Natural Talent traineeship?

I have always been interested in environment and conservation. I graduated with a BA in Forest management in 2012 and an MSc in Research for the Conservation of Forest Ecosystems in 2014, and since then I have been getting experience through a scholarship at Oregon State University, working in the Fire Ecology Department, and volunteer jobs in Ireland and Scotland. I see the Natural Talent traineeships as an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to gain the experience and knowledge necessary for a future career in conservation.

What kind of employment were you in before undertaking a Natural Talent traineeship?

Before starting this traineeship, I was working as a store assistant and I was also a volunteer for TCV Stirling and Transition Stirling (tool library).

What voluntary experience had you done prior to your traineeship?

I have worked as a volunteer since I finished University. I first volunteered with Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) in Kenmare (Ireland), where I undertook jobs such as gardening, sheep farming and forest management.

After that, I moved to Scotland and I volunteered in a private estate in Fife, working in the nursery, in forest and garden management, and helping the gamekeeper during the pheasant hunt season. I also volunteered for the Forestry Commission for over a year as a Ranger, at The Lodge Visitor Centre (Queen Elizabeth Forest Park), supporting the visitor experience, helping out with events, assisting in the wildlife area, and doing some management and conservation jobs around the visitor centre.



During the last year, I volunteered for The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) in Stirling. Working with and helping to lead a group of volunteers to undertake practical conservation tasks, in areas like wetland management, woodland management, non-native and native invasive species control and environmental construction projects. At the same time, I volunteered for Transition Stirling in their tool library, looking to reduce out CO₂ footprint.

What are you most looking forward to during your traineeship?

What I am most looking for are the exiting opportunities that this traineeship offers to get new skills and develop the existing ones, working with experts from the RBGE and SAMS, actively contributing to conservation. I am very excited because this traineeship means for me an excellent opportunity to get experience in environmental conservation, working with less common species, that may be in risk because of human activities and Climate Change. Also, it is an excellent opportunity to engage with communities and make them aware of the beautiful coast Edinburgh has, its biodiversity and its leisure opportunities.

What skills do you anticipate this traineeship will give you?

I believe this traineeship will help me to get some practical and academic skills, experience in species identification, field surveying and habitat management. I also hope to increase my data analysis skills, report writing and microscope use. I would love to learn more about engaging the public and volunteers and develop the communication skills necessary to connect people with shoreline biodiversity and history.

How do you feel your traineeship benefits the conservation sector in the United Kingdom?

Edinburgh's shoreline is a characterise part of the Forth Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its environmental and geological importance. Also, and for its seabirds, the Firth of Forth Special Protection Area (SPA) covers it. Nevertheless, more research and more trained people are needed to study lichen, seaweed and bryophyte habitats in this area and to develop an expertise on their habitat conservation and management. I feel that the results and knowledge gained through this traineeship will undoubtedly help the future conservation of the Edinburgh coast.

What career path do you see yourself pursuing and how will this experience help you?

I care about environment and its conservation, and I'm really curious about how to adapt our habitats to changes in climate conditions. That is why I believe this traineeship is going to give me the right skills and experience to develop a career in an ecological consultancy or a science organization, delivering science for a healthy and sustainable environment, through research, education and public engagement. I have also been thinking about doing a PhD for a while, waiting for the right opportunity.