



Natural Talent Case Study

Name: Holly Dillon

Age: 24

Traineeship: Arachnids (Spiders, harvestmen and pseudoscorpions)

Dates of traineeship: 15th January 2018 to 15th January 2019

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?)

I am placed with the Field Studies Council (FSC) in their head office at Preston Montford, near Shrewsbury. This traineeship will allow me to acquire the skills to survey, collect and identify various arachnid groups to species level as well as improving these skills for a range of other invertebrate groups. I will be assisting with the FSC's BioLinks project which aims to increase the volume and quality of biological recording in the area for invertebrates by increasing the knowledge and understanding of fieldwork and identification skills with volunteers, local communities and student groups. In addition, I will be helping the FSC's Communication and Publication teams by helping to develop content, reviewing and refreshing literature and putting together new ID charts/keys.

Why did you apply for a Natural Talent traineeship?

Many invertebrate species are understudied in the UK and the number of specialists that can identify arachnids are dwindling. I have spent the past two years studying for my MSc in Wildlife Conservation, so I was aware of and keen to fill this knowledge gap. During my studies I spent most of my time studying invertebrate (soil decomposer) species and their importance to ecosystem function. I'm therefore extremely passionate about promoting the importance of and conserving all of the small, less-charismatic species which we couldn't live without. I was searching for a career in conservation which would allow me to utilise this passion whilst allowing me to further develop my survey, collection and identification skills, so this traineeship working with TCV and the FSC was exactly what I was looking for. I know by this point you all probably think I'm more than a bit strange for choosing to study spiders, but they really are fascinating!

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

I graduated with a BSc in Conservation Biology in 2015, I spent most of my University holidays volunteering with my local Wildlife Trust (Radnorshire) helping out with practical conservation tasks, various ecological surveys and helping to run their visitor centre. After graduating, I spent a season volunteering for the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales as a Conservation Assistant on Skomer Island, then I spent a few months travelling. Upon my return, Radnorshire Wildlife Trust welcomed me back so I worked as a voluntary seasonal assistant with them until I started my MSc in Wildlife Conservation in January 2016, finishing in December 2017. Throughout my studies and volunteering days I've been relying on various waitressing/hospitality jobs too, so it's so nice to finally be able to dedicate my time to conservation!



What voluntary experience had you done prior to your traineeship?

Lots! As mentioned, I spent a lot of time with Radnorshire Wildlife Trust whenever I was back at home in Mid Wales for the holidays. I generally spent 2 days a week running their visitor centre, promoting their work, helping with various engagement activities and then 2 days a week assisting the reserve manager with any practical work that needed doing (mainly bracken bashing) and carrying out surveys. Most of my time on Skomer Island focussed on surveying and monitoring the seabird and seal populations. My other duties included going out with the weekly volunteer groups to help with practical work (even more bracken bashing, I'm pretty good at that now!), giving wildlife talks twice a week to people visiting the reserve there and helping organise engagement activities for children during the summer holidays. As well as this, I pretty much got involved with anything and everything I could whilst I was studying in Bristol for my BSc and MSc, so I went out on various volunteer days with the Wildlife Trusts in the South West region, Natural England and a few different ecological consultancies.

What are you most looking forward to during your traineeship?

Pretty much everything! I'm really looking forward to working with TCV and the FSC as it's going to be a great way to meet and work with various experts and likeminded people. This traineeship will allow me to develop specialised identification and survey skills and provide me with opportunities to undertake additional training, which will help me to pursue my passion for conservation and it will help to address some of the knowledge and skills gaps within the conservation sector. Right now, I can't wait for the weather to get a bit better so I can get out into the field to start surveying!

What skills do you anticipate this traineeship will give you?

This traineeship will massively improve my identification skills for arachnids and various other terrestrial invertebrates as I will be working directly with specialists in the field. I hope to become confident with my survey and microscopy skills, allowing me to identify specimens to a species level in the field and in the lab. I am also keen to gain experience in collecting, mounting, and labelling specimens to create taxonomic collections. This will also be a great opportunity to gain an understanding of how a conservation organisation works, how to successfully deliver conservation projects, how to engage people with less-charismatic species, and how to organise and plan events. On top of this I will be developing my report-writing, data handling, data analysis and project design skills.

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

Many invertebrate species are understudied, they're far less charismatic than the nice furry species everyone tends to think of whenever you say the word "wildlife". I'm not sure if you could find any less charismatic/less loved species than those belonging to the arachnids really so, unsurprisingly, there aren't very many arachnid specialists out there. Granted, there's only about 20 or so harvestmen species and around 30 species of pseudoscorpions in the UK but when you consider that there's around 650 spider species out there too, that means there's a lot of species being under-recorded. This traineeship will try to address this issue and start to improve biological recording for these frequently overlooked species. I also feel like this traineeship will make the study of arachnids more accessible, by promoting their importance to people of all ages and by developing different ways to survey them. In addition, these traineeships will provide me, and the others, with the exact skills needed to go on and pursue a career in the conservation sector so we can continue to make a difference.



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

My plan is to pursue a career as a Conservation Officer/Project Officer/Project Manager, or something along those lines, working for a conservation charity. This appeals to me because I love getting my teeth into a project, I love the whole science side of things like researching, planning, carrying out fieldwork and analysing data but I also want to be involved with community engagement too, to promote the importance of wildlife conservation. These sort of roles generally involve a bit of both, so that's why it's so appealing to me. Although I'm not interested in a career in academia, I'm still tempted by the idea of doing a PhD at some point. I'm hoping that I'll figure out whether this is a good idea during this traineeship!