



Natural Talent Case Study

Name: Kate Smith

Age: 34

Traineeship: Peatlands and micro-moths

Dates of traineeship: 15/01/18- 14/01/19



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?)

My placement is with Butterfly Conservation in Stirling and my traineeship will be focused around micro-moths found on peatland habitats. I will be learning techniques for identifying these species and carrying out surveys to contribute to our understanding of these often overlooked species. I will also be involved in sharing what I've learned with others to encourage them to pay more attention to these tiny insects!

Why did you apply for a Natural Talent traineeship?

Through my involvement with various environmental organisations over the last few years, I've gained experience of carrying out a variety of practical conservation tasks but I felt I needed to improve my species identification skills and gain experience of survey techniques. I'm currently working towards a University Certificate in Biological Recording and have chosen to focus mainly on modules relating to botany, so this placement will compliment this learning perfectly by giving me the opportunity to also study a fascinating group of invertebrates.

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

Immediately prior to starting the traineeship I was employed by RSPB Scotland where I spent 3 years working as an administrator with the funding development team at their Scottish HQ in Edinburgh. Prior to that I've had a fairly varied working life in a range of roles, which included 4 and a half years working for Trees for Life in the Scottish highlands. I also spent almost 3 years living abroad, working on small permaculture farms in Australia and Portugal.

What voluntary experience had you done prior to your traineeship?

I have been involved with volunteer conservation weeks for Trees for Life (TfL) since 2006, spending time in the highlands working on Caledonian Forest restoration. Initially a volunteer, I trained to be a TfL group leader in 2008 and still lead groups in the highlands when I get the chance. I also spent 9 months as a long term volunteer with the Scottish Wildlife Trust in 2013 in Dumfries and Galloway. During my time there I worked with the Conservation Manager carrying out practical conservation and maintenance on a number of sites throughout the area.

What are you most looking forward to during your traineeship?

Like many, I tend to shy away from micro-moths due to the difficulties in identification, so I'm looking forward to the opportunity to engage with this challenging taxon group. I'm also excited by the fantastic opportunities for learning new skills, through getting involved in a wide range of projects and events with both TCV and Butterfly Conservation and being able to spend time with a variety of people with knowledge to share. And of course spending time outdoors wandering over bogs looking for interesting creatures!



What skills do you anticipate this traineeship will give you?

One of the main skills will be learning to identify species of micro moths, the majority of which are new to me, along with techniques for trapping and collecting them for recording. I also hope to learn more about peatland habitats in general and improve my skills in field surveying while expanding my knowledge and understanding of conservation ecology.

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

Moths are important indicator species within their habitats, giving us a great way of measuring the health of our wild places. Micro-moths on the whole are vastly under-recorded and the life cycle of some species is not well understood. Learning more about these species, and encouraging others to pay them more attention, will help to provide vital information to support conservation in the UK.

Peat bogs are extremely important habitats, as well as being home to a wide range of wildlife species, they also store a huge amount of carbon, it's critical that we protect our bogs as degraded peatlands release CO₂ and other gasses which contribute to climate change. They also play a vital role in the storage of rainwater, by holding onto water and slowing its movement through the landscape these sites help to reduce the risk of flooding.

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

I am keen to gain more experience of field surveying and to learn more about how ecological data can be used to shape our understanding of the natural world and the best way to protect and enhance our wild places. I would love to find an ecology role working with conservation organisations to protect our natural habitats.