



### **Natural Talent Case Study**

**Name:** Matthew Dicker

**Age:** 23

**Traineeship:** Intertidal Mudflats

**Dates of traineeship:** 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018 – 14<sup>th</sup> 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 based in both the Liverpool World Museum's Botany department and the Seaforth office of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust. In the museum I am working with Dr Geraldine Reid, who is the senior curator of Botany and at Seaforth I will be supervised by Sally Tapp, who is the marine community engagement officer for North Merseyside. I will be surveying the invertebrate communities of mudflats in Merseyside and I will be involved in public-facing events with the Lancashire Wildlife Trusts and the Merseyside branch of TCV.

**Why did you apply for a Natural Talent traineeship?**

On the whole, I don't think that people know enough about our coastline. I grew up outside Southport in Merseyside and have been walking on the beaches and mudflats there all of my life. Waders aside though, there wasn't much to see on the big and empty beach, and the shell in the sand was just a shell. That changed when I started looking into mussel patches communities for my university dissertation. Learning to identify a species was genuinely exciting and I was amazed at the variety and abundance of animals that I found. Like mussel patches, mudflats have a hidden wealth of animal life and this traineeship gives me the opportunity to let people know that. I also wanted to meet people who are involved in coastal research and to increase my own understanding of mudflat communities.

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

I completed my degree in July 2017 and spent the rest of the year working as a general assistant in a Booths supermarket in Ormskirk. In October I began working as a high school science technician and by Christmas I was an art technician and a food tech technician too. I started my Natural Talent traineeship in January.

**What voluntary experience had you done prior to your traineeship?**

I have had some previous experience volunteering with the Wildlife Trusts, particularly at the Brockholes site in Preston and I joined the Merseyside ringing group on their annual trip to Eilan Nan Ron in 2015, for a week of ringing Storm Petrels. I spent a couple of years in high school and college volunteering at a hospice in their creative therapy department and I spent two months in 2016 at a manatee and primate rehabilitation centre in Belize, where I was part of the manatee care team.



**What are you most looking forward to during your traineeship?**

I am really excited to conduct a full survey of the invertebrate life in local mudflats. As part of this I am hoping to take out volunteers from the Lancashire Wildlife Trust in a monthly "Sediment Shoresearch". I am looking forward to this in particular as I will be able to learn alongside other people and also share the knowledge that I have accumulated *in situ*.

**What skills do you anticipate this traineeship will give you?**

I am confident that this traineeship will allow me to gain a proficiency in taxonomic identification; polychaete identification in particular. I would also like to become a better public speaker and group leader, I am sure that the outreach aspect of this traineeship will be really useful for me in that respect.

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

Mudflats are a criminally underappreciated habitat. On the surface they can look barren and empty and that means they've been built on and squeezed together with little in the way of public opposition. But mudflats are highly productive areas, they provide feeding and resting areas for important and charismatic populations of migrant and wintering birds, and serve as essential nursery areas for flatfish. My traineeship aims to increase our knowledge and appreciation of mudflats in my local area, by doing that, I hope that we are more able to protect them in the future.

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

I am not entirely sure yet. I would like to pursue a career in research and this traineeship allows me to work with active researchers, to see for myself whether I can commit to that line of work. However, I also have the opportunity to work alongside TCV and the Wildlife Trusts in practical conservation projects and public outreach. This traineeship lets me explore both routes and that is what is really great about it.