



Natural Talent Case Study

Name: Sue Loughran

Age: 51

Traineeship: Lower plants and invertebrates of heaths and mires

Dates of traineeship: April 2016-April 2017

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 the Field Studies Council (FSC), and I am based in the Biodiversity office, FSC Head Office, Shropshire. I will be working with local projects (eg. Moors and Mosses, Boglife) in which I will be assisting with survey and ID work of fens, bogs and heathland. Additionally, I will be linking with/ developing community engagement projects with Birmingham TCV. Initially I will be studying and developing my ID skills across a range of taxa within the target areas, and then starting to develop expertise in particular areas of specialism.

Why did you apply for a Natural Talent traineeship?

Since completing my MSc in Conservation and Land Management in 2014, I have gained a lot of useful experience in delivering practical conservation activities for local communities. However, my identification skills remained under-developed, and so I was extremely keen to find an opportunity to address this with some professional guidance. Botany courses are no longer provided at graduate level, and so I felt that this was a perfect opportunity to take advantage of the many learning opportunities available.

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

I had a very fulfilling career in the NHS as a clinician and team leader for a Children's Occupational Therapy service for many years. However, following my decision to retrain in Conservation, I have been employed as a Natural Networks trainee for TCV (January 2016-March 2017). This role focussed primarily on practical conservation skills and community engagement, in which I led Green Gym sessions, organised one-off wildlife public events and set up a Friends of the Park group.

What voluntary experience had you done prior to your traineeship?

I have been a residential and day volunteer for the RSPB, the National Trust, the Snowdonia Society, Bardsey Bird and Field Observatory and the North Wales Wildlife Trust. This has involved me in a variety of activities, such as coppicing, footpath restoration, maritime heath monitoring, and nest monitoring.



I am a Trustee for the Bardsey Island Trust, and have been treasurer for a local Riding for the Disabled school group (in which I was also a volunteer for holidays). I was the Bobath regional rep for Northern England and North Wales (specialist therapeutic intervention for children and young people with cerebral palsy) in which I organised practical workshops for children and their families throughout the region.

What are you most looking forward to during your traineeship?

Taking absolutely every opportunity available to me to learn to be a better naturalist! Developing a specialist skills set. Working with field experts. Learning about a whole new geographic area. Making new friends and contacts.

What skills do you anticipate this traineeship will give you?

An excellent grounding in species taxonomy and identification. Confidence to set up, collect and record data accurately. Collation of data from national surveys (eg. The Cuckoo survey). The ability to contribute substantially to heath and moorland projects in the local area. The ability to share my knowledge with a range of learners, through FSC / TCV projects.

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

Lower plants and invertebrates are amongst the less charismatic species, and thus do not attract as much interest, despite being key to habitat ecology. By gaining greater expertise in these areas, I aim to be able to add to the body of knowledge about these species in bogs and mires. These habitats have only relatively recently come to full public attention, and are recognised for their rarity. There are many examples of attempts to restore their ecological status, in order to reverse damage/ prevent their erosion before they are lost completely. There is increasing awareness amongst A level Geography students, who cover some elements of carbon sequestration in their course work.

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

I envisage that this experience will be invaluable in supplementing the set of skills which I can now offer in the conservation sector. I would love to work as a countryside ranger, and would like to be able to continue developing areas of expertise throughout my career. I may take this knowledge forward into ecological survey work, or maybe into the field of teaching....I feel as though this year will probably open my eyes to a whole new world of conservation, and I'm just going to give it my best shot, hang on tight and enjoy the ride!