



Natural Talent Case Study Template

Name; Ceri Watkins

Age; 43

Traineeship; Saproxylic Insects

Dates of traineeship; 19th January 2015 – 18 January 2016

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?)

Based at the Hope Entomological Collections at Oxford University Museum of Natural History, this traineeship will build an inventory of the saproxylic (dead wood) insect fauna at the University's Wytham Woods. In order to achieve this, species and biological information held in the collections and archives will be explored using data mining techniques. Year round sampling using a variety of invertebrate survey methods in the woods will compliment the historical collections data and provide modern comparative information.

Community engagement and learning is also an important part of this traineeship. A number of tailored public events about the ecology and conservation of saproxylic insects will be planned and carried out. This will be in conjunction the Museum's Public Engagement and Community Outreach teams.

Why did you apply for a Natural Talent traineeship?

I have a great interest in insects and conservation and this prompted studying entomology at Masters level (Harper Adams University), graduating with distinction in September 2014. This knowledge is however, predominantly theoretical and the traineeship offers a fabulous opportunity to gain hands on experience and to put knowledge into practice in a purposeful and structured way whilst contributing to the understanding and conservation of a little understood and seriously threatened insect group.

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

I worked in GIS (Geographical Information Systems) within the civil service and charity sectors.

What voluntary experience had you done prior to your traineeship?

I have been an invertebrate volunteer for the RSPB for eighteen months, carrying out butterfly transects, pitfall trapping and helped with BioBlitz events. I have also helped launch the Entomology Collection at Harper Adams University and participated in a range of Citizen Science programmes



such as the Traditional Orchard Survey assessing habitat for the Noble Chafer beetle, the Big Butterfly Count and the Flying Ant Survey.

What are you most looking forward to during your traineeship?

In general, I am looking forward to the opportunity to gain specialist skills and an in-depth knowledge of an “at risk” insect group by working alongside expert entomologists and conservation organisations. Learning how to take this newly found knowledge and share it with a wider audience in a targeted way that will, hopefully, kindle a sense of wonderment and value for the natural world in others. In particular, working with one of the UK’s foremost entomological resources and undertaking the woodland sampling. Learning the techniques and the practicalities (trap placement, strengths and limitations), “taking home the catch” and being able to identify what’s there. Then, there’s always the possibility of discovering a new species!

What skills do you anticipate this traineeship will give you?

The traineeship will build on my taxonomic and microscopy skills to enable the identification of saproxylic insects (mostly beetles) to species level. Preserving samples for future use is a fundamental part of the scientific enquiry so learning how to preserve and curate insects to a Museum standard is exciting. Also, the ability to assess a variety of woodland habitats using ecological indices and to be able to suggest appropriate management practices that can enhance biodiversity in deadwood.

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

Historically the UK was a predominantly forested landmass but the woodland environment has become seriously depleted and fragmented in terms of both spatial mass and habitat quality. This habitat loss represents a massive threat to insects that depend on deadwood and there is an urgent need to better understand the ecological effect of this altered state and how to improve it in an objective way. Yet there is a massive deficit in expertise, particularly amongst lesser known insect species like saproxylics and more highly trained and knowledgeable individuals are desperately needed. This traineeship will help address this issue by giving me the skills and experience I need to add to the saproxylic insect knowledge base and disseminate that knowledge in order to engage and motivate others to become guardians for this threatened but very important group of invertebrates.

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

My career will definitely be centred on active invertebrate conservation and public engagement in the UK. In the long term, I would love to establish a small and professionally respected insect conservation centre that is based on quality grass roots research and be open to the public. In order to do that, I need to build my professional skills, expertise and reputation and this traineeship offers the foundation for doing just that.