



Natural Talent Case Study

Name; Susan Miller

Age; 28

Traineeship; Non-Native Invasive Marine Species

Dates of traineeship; 19/01/2015 – 18/01/2016

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 Heriot Watt University in Edinburgh my traineeship will involve learning from and working with many organisations including the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and Orkney Island Council in order to gain skills and experience in Non-native Invasive Marine Species. Marine Invasive Species have always been present in our waters. They have a huge impact on our ecology, economy and even our health. Understanding their biology and ability to spread and colonise is needed in order to understand how to limit, prevent and /or eradicate problematic species. Public awareness is an important part of this process and engaging with local communities, groups and volunteers will be an important part of my traineeship. I will improve on my taxonomic and sampling skills with the support of University staff at Edinburgh and the university campus situated on Orkney. I will be involved in research and sampling on the Orkney Islands where the presence of invasive species and their methods of dispersal are apparent. The traineeship will provide me with the opportunity to support local research, teach me new skills and be an important stepping stone towards a career into the exciting world of Marine Ecology.

Why did you apply for a Natural Talent traineeship?

My first job opportunity in Conservation came to me in 2012 where I worked with Orkney Island Council's Environmental Unit (OIC) and in 2013 I volunteered at Sherkin Island Marine Station in Ireland. These experiences were not only invaluable to me in terms of building skills and gaining experience but they allowed me to realise that I loved marine conservation work and motivated me to follow my dream of making a career for myself in such a competitive and sought after sector. The Natural Talent Traineeships are a rare opportunity that overshadows similar programs in terms of the support, training and opportunities they provide. Applying for The Natural Talent Traineeship was such an exciting moment for me because I knew if I was successful I would not only have the opportunity to contribute to an important conservation issue in the UK but I would gain the skills, knowledge and



experiences to contribute further once the traineeship was complete. Working with a network of organisations, experts, like-minded people and communities is what makes the Natural talent Traineeships so valuable. I even enjoyed my interview! Being successful is an absolute dream come true and I can't wait to get started!

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

For the last year I have been working as a waitress in a local hotel, a park assistant for Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park and a Sales Assistant for Dixons Carphone.

What voluntary experience had you done prior to your traineeship?

Prior to my traineeship I have had volunteer experience in various conservation areas. My first was working in Malta with Birdlife Malta in 2009. I surveyed birds, assisted in the education of local people and worked with a team of volunteers to prevent poaching and illegal shooting during the migration season. I then joined the charity Plantlife in 2010 and carried out plant surveys in my local area. After returning from Orkney in 2013 I volunteered with Sherkin Island Marine Station in Ireland where I trained and worked as a Rocky shore biologist. This was a great post as my work on Orkney concentrated on Sandy Shore Ecology with limited rocky shore work. From then until now I have been a Sustrans Wildlife Champion. This volunteer post requires me to undertake monthly training on everything from identification of various groups to map reading in exchange for submitting a monthly survey on a stretch of the National Cycle Network assigned to me. This allowed me to continue to use my identification and survey skills and increase my experiences within the conservation sector while working out-with it.

What are you most looking forward to during your traineeship?

I am especially looking forward to networking with different people. This is a part of the traineeship that will be so important to me and will allow me to communicate my work and the importance of it to a wider audience. I am also looking forward to working in Orkney again, it is a beautiful place to live and work. It has become a place that I absolutely love, from the waters, the people and even the weather. I love microscope work, statistic work and getting my wellies wet on the shoreline and I cannot wait to dive in and get started.

What skills do you anticipate this traineeship will give you?

I believe this traineeship will help me build on the skills I already have and teach me new ones. I am keen to broaden my taxonomic skills and microscope work as this can be the trickiest part of any research project. I am also keen to learn more about engaging the public and expanding on my communication skills. I know the project will teach me how to collect, analyse, interoperate and present data through fieldwork, statistics and report writing skills.



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

Invasive Non-native marine species are not as well understood or studied in comparison to other areas of ecology and conservation. In terms of public knowledge it is particularly lacking. This results in changes in our marine habitat that are going un-noticed or under recorded. This traineeship will give me the skills, knowledge and experience in an area that is less well known and through my work I will get the chance to increase public awareness. By the end of the traineeship I hope to have increased the opportunities people have to become involved in caring for their local marine ecology. In return an increased amount of surveying, data collection and resources will help us better understand the full effect of Invasive species on our shorelines.

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

I have been fascinated by plankton, shoreline ecology and invasive species and my dream is to continue to work in this area. The Natural Traineeship is a fantastic opportunity for me to assess what path I wish to follow. Since graduating in 2009 I have wanted to complete a PhD but I am also a great people's person and would also enjoy a role with a large element of community involvement. The training I will receive and the opportunities that will be opened up to me will help steer me towards the career path that is right for me.