



Natural Talent Case Study – Colliery Spoil Habitats

Name; Liam Thomas Olds
Age; 22
Traineeship; Colliery Spoil Habitats
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?)

Colliery spoil tips are an iconic feature in the landscape of the South Wales valleys, an industrial and cultural legacy from the once vast coal mining industry. Following the expansive closure of collieries towards the end of the twentieth century, many have remained abandoned ever since. Subsequent low-level disturbance has enabled habitats and species to re-colonise these previously barren industrial landscapes. Often overlooked and under-appreciated as biologically interesting places, many colliery spoil tips now support habitats and wildlife of considerable local biodiversity value. This traineeship focuses on the diversity of invertebrates and lower plants to be found in these sites, how they can be sampled and identified. Based in the Department of Natural Sciences at The National Museum (Cardiff), I will undertake field work at various locations across South Wales. Through the support of museum staff, I will receive specialist training in taxonomy, fieldwork and research. This traineeship also links with an existing OPAL Community Scientist post to engage with community groups in the South Wales valleys to begin to appreciate these areas as worthy of the landscape they occupy. Furthermore, I will also be hosted by Bristol University where I will assist in related fieldwork and research.

Why did you apply for a Natural Talent traineeship?

All my life I have shown interest and enthusiasm for nature. I have long expressed a desire to work in the conservation sector and have been actively pursuing an entry-level position in this sector since graduating from university in July 2013. Unfortunately, due to the highly competitive nature of the current UK job market, I have struggled to secure such a position upon which to build a career. What attracted me to the Natural Talent traineeships were the impressive training opportunities on offer. I see the Natural Talent traineeships as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to gain the skills, experience and knowledge necessary for a career in conservation. I am confident this traineeship will greatly enhance my prospects of securing my dream career in conservation.

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

Prior to undertaking this Natural Talent traineeship, I was working as a 'Retail Sales Assistant' for Berghaus Ltd.



What voluntary experience had you done prior to your traineeship?

Over the past several years, I have undertaken a wealth of volunteering with various conservation organisations. Most notable includes over two years volunteering at my local country park - Bryngarw Country Park – for whom I am still currently volunteering. Working in a small team, I help undertake habitat management and estate maintenance tasks within the park. In addition, I have also completed a residential volunteer placement with the RSPB. For six months I lived and worked at RSPB Ynyshir, delivering habitat management, estate maintenance and biological survey work in accordance with the reserves management plan. Furthermore, I have been an active member of the South Wales Mammal Group since October 2013, during which I have helped undertake numerous mammal surveys across the region.

What are you most looking forward to during your traineeship?

I am particularly looking forward to learning more about colliery spoil habitats and the wildlife they support. I have been exploring colliery spoil sites on a regular basis since an early age and as such, these sites have had a huge influence on my life and mean the world to me. I am extremely excited to learn more about my favourite wild places and sharing my enthusiasm with others.

What skills do you anticipate this traineeship will give you?

I am confident this traineeship will provide me with a whole host of different skills that will greatly enhance my employment prospects including: species identification, taxonomy, field surveying, microscope use, data analysis, report writing, habitat management, teamwork, communication, and people engagement skills.

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

Colliery spoil habitats, like many brownfield sites, are greatly overlooked and under-appreciated as biologically interesting places. As such, they suffer much neglect despite often supporting wildlife of considerable local biodiversity value. This traineeship will help me to develop an expertise in these habitats, habitats which are a common feature throughout south Wales and other UK regions including the Midlands. I will be able to share this greater understanding of colliery spoil habitats with others to ensure these wild places receive the recognition and protection they deserve. I strongly believe expertise in these habitats is in great shortage and that the conservation sector will benefit greatly from the addition of further experts in this area.

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

Although I possess an interest in all wildlife, I am particularly interested in insects and their conservation. Working with, and receiving training from, leading entomological experts at The National Museum will place me in a great position to pursue my dream career in entomology. Training in areas such as invertebrate species identification, taxonomy, research, and ecological surveying will greatly enhance my employment prospects following the completion of this traineeship.