



### **Natural Talent Case Study**

**Name: Kirsty Grant**

**Age: 26**

**Traineeship: Buglife Scotland, Stirling**

**Dates of traineeship: April 2017 – April 2018**

### **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'm placed with Buglife Scotland in their Stirling Office, working on the Marvellous Mud Snails project. I'll be involved in lots of citizen science and outreach events, assisting the project officer in surveying and assessing the current population of Pond Mud Snails in Scotland. A big part of the project will be to get local schools involved, running introduction workshops for invertebrates through activities such as pond dipping and eventually having captive breeding programmes running in the schools who are happy to be involved. They will learn all about and look after a certain population of snails until they're ready to be released. There's lots of training opportunities along the way and a real chance for me to improve my identification, surveying and microscope skills.

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

I was searching for a career in conservation which could offer me the support and opportunities needed to fill the gaps in my knowledge and career path to this point. The partnership of TCV and my organisation Buglife seemed to work perfectly together in this traineeship, which could benefit me in terms of growing professionally and by giving something back to nature. The pond mud snail project focuses not only on a species which is very much over-looked but brings the chance for younger generations and volunteers of all ages to get to know more about invertebrates and freshwater habitats in general, and make a real contribution through citizen science to UK conservation. The chance to support both the scientific side and public outreach was one of the main reasons I applied to the traineeship.

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

I was working for ZSL at London Zoo until October and then moved home to Scotland, working at the Small Animal Hospital in Glasgow until the traineeship began, but my journey to the conservation sector wasn't smoothly planned out. Initially out of high school, I took my BA in English, Journalism and Creative Writing in Glasgow before moving to London to study Performing Arts bringing a hobby to the forefront and decided to go down the route of a performing career, while working as a dancer I ended up landing a job as Presenter at London Zoo and quickly this became more important than anything else. I studied A LOT in my own time, everything from zoology to animal behaviour and welfare, started volunteering for conservation organisations



and as a keeper at the zoo, plus took courses with Edinburgh University before deciding to apply for my MSc in Wildlife Biology and Conservation which I'm currently studying via distance learning at Edinburgh Napier. Other employment along the way was varied to say the least: dance teacher, ping pong games host, receptionist, theatre usher, marking officer and the list goes on and on.

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

Lots! I was volunteering with the RSPB in Glasgow on their 'Giving Nature a Home' outreach programme where I would be visiting primary schools teaching children about different habitats and going outdoors to spot nature in the school grounds and think of ways we could 'give nature a home', as part of this I also assisted with the Big Schools Birdwatch. I volunteered for various local groups in habitat management and went to as many training courses, on things like Bird ID, Bumblebees, Dragonflies, Bats and more. These led to even more voluntary opportunities and introduced me to many influential charities and worthwhile causes.

Living in London I volunteered for The Wildlife Trusts assisting with weekend open days introducing families and young people to nature and took part in their 30 Days Wild initiative. A key organisation for me was Biodiversity Gatwick where I volunteered with their on-site ecologist helping with many surveys of the species living in the area around Gatwick Airport including hazel dormice and different bumblebee, butterfly and dragonfly species.

I was lucky enough to experience a different element to wildlife, taking a placement for one month at the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol learning about natural history production and assisting on shoots plus helping with research. This continued in Glasgow with Scottish production company Maramedia seeing the process of natural history production on things like BBC's Hotel Armadillo and generating new ideas for the upcoming year.

I also used my volunteer time to write a couple of wildlife blogs for London based *Wild Capital* on a range of inner city wildlife such as urban foxes and native bats. So a huge mix really, but without the time spent volunteering I wouldn't be in such a fortunate position today.

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

Meeting various experts and likeminded people across the different partner organisations and getting out into the field for surveying and wildlife recording. I am very much looking forward to seeing the pond mud snail project develop and hopefully discovering new information and maybe even populations along the way! I enjoy working with young people, helping them learn about nature and the environment so the schools element of my traineeship and the opportunity to engage with others and share my passion and knowledge is something I'm also looking forward to.

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

A massive increase in my identification skills for freshwater species and invertebrates in general, as well as surveying and sampling techniques and good field knowledge. I hope my time in the traineeship will give me a grounding on how to recruit volunteers, run volunteer conservation groups, organise and plan events and give me an insight into how a successful conservation organisation implements large projects and campaigns from



start to end. I hope to develop existing skills in public engagement and look forward to improving on my ability to deliver events and share knowledge of wildlife effectively.

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

I feel my traineeship is beneficial as by developing my own skills and having the opportunity to arrange and attend events and school visits I can share essential identification skills, and hopefully boost the profile of invertebrates across Scotland. It's key for our young people to understand the importance of all types of invertebrates including the pond mud snail and hopefully I can inspire a passion, care and desire to 'know more' which is certainly seen in most mammals and bird species.

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

I'm very keen to follow the path to a Project Officer or Conservation Officer role somewhere across Scotland. It is possible that I may wish to specialise at some point in a particular species or group and by focusing closely on invertebrates in this instance, I'm given the chance to see if this is something I'm keen on pursuing. This experience allows me to work directly with current Buglife officers and managers, giving me the opportunity to attend events across the country as part of the organisation and to integrate myself within the team. I hope the skills which I pick up during this time will, by the end of the year, be directly transferrable to a role within a similar (or even the same!) organisation.