Countryside Jobs Service
Focus on Wildlife and Animal Work

In association with the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS)

30 November 2015

Connecting people with nature. Safeguarding species from extinction.

Established in 1909 by Edinburgh lawyer Thomas Gillespie, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland has been working to safeguard species from extinction and connect people to nature for over 100 years. RZSS is a leading conservation NGO, dedicated to researching and protecting endangered species around the world. In Scotland, the Society operates RZSS Edinburgh Zoo and RZSS Highland Wildlife Park, learning from our amazing animal collections, providing safe environments, and translating this knowledge back into global conservation and education programmes to inspire people of all ages to care about nature. Since its inception, RZSS has placed a great emphasis on the conservation of biodiversity and the contribution that scientific research must make in that process.

Roisin Campbell-Palmer – Conservation Projects Manager

Roisin has always had an interest in working with animals, undertaking her degree in Zoology at Glasgow University, and then completing her MSc in Applied Animal Behaviour and Welfare at the University of Edinburgh. From her school days and through university she volunteered for a number of animal charities, and was employed as an animal keeper at Edinburgh Zoo where she began work in the bird and reptile section. After several years’ experience of being a zoo keeper and successfully completing the ANC in Management of Zoo Animals, she took a senior keeper position in the newly established Living Links Primate Research facility, based at RZSS Edinburgh Zoo.

Research and conservation are her real passion and when she was offered an opportunity to work more closely with Telemark University College to undertake research on wild beavers in Norway she took it willingly. This led to her involvement in the Scottish Beaver Trial and undertaking her PhD at Telemark University College, investigating the health and welfare of beavers used in conservation projects, on which she has produced several publications.

As part of her responsibilities as the Conservation Projects Manager for RZSS, she acts as the Field Operations Manager for the Scottish Beaver Trial. This role involves the daily management of the field work programme and management of field officers, monitoring of the animals involved, public and stakeholder engagement, presentation of scientific findings, supervising student placements and volunteers, delivery of the monitoring programme and upholding licence conditions. Another important part of this job is to undertake research to increase our knowledge about processes involved in any potential reintroductions from the sourcing and selection of wild individuals, to their captive management, release process and subsequent ecological impact and welfare of released individuals.

The Scottish Beaver Trial is one of our key native species conservation projects. RZSS, along with the Scottish Wildlife Trust, made a successful application to the Scottish Government for the scientific trial reintroduction of beavers to Knapdale Forest, Mid-Argyll in 2008. The Eurasian beaver (Castor fiber) is a native mammal that became extinct from Scotland, largely through hunting pressure, almost 400 years ago. Its reintroduction has been proposed and debated over at least the last 30 years. Any reintroduction process involves a number of disciplines including
Beavers are unique mammals that often capture people’s imagination. They play a key role in wetland ecology and species biodiversity, providing vital ecosystem services including habitat creation, water management and quality improvement, and reducing sediment erosion. At the same time, their activities can present real challenges for land and wildlife managers.

One of the most political, interesting and controversial issues in the beaver reintroduction to Britain story has been the appearance of unlicensed beavers in the countryside, especially within the River Tay and Earn catchments in Perthshire, and on the River Otter in Devon. There is growing evidence of beavers at a number of sites throughout Britain that have not been part of an official release process. The largest of these population are known as the “Tayside beavers” and there has been much media interest in these animals. Following a successful public campaign against their removal, the Scottish Government agreed to “tolerate” their presence until they have processed the findings of the Scottish Beaver Trial and made a decision on the future of all beavers in Scotland. RZSS have been actively involved undertaking health screening work and genetic testing to provide further information on these animals. We have also been working with landowners and various stakeholders in an advisory manner to develop practical mitigation, enabling people to live alongside this species again.

The scientific monitoring aspect of the Scottish Beaver Trial has now been completed, with findings available on the Scottish Natural Heritage website http://www.snh.gov.uk/. Further information on the Scottish Beaver Trial, including the final report, can be found at our website http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk/, while further details on the conservation projects undertaken by RZSS can be found on http://www.rzss.org.uk/conservation-programmes with further details on careers working with animals http://www.edinburghzoo.org.uk/faq-working-with-animals/

The preservation of wildcats (Felis silvestris) in Scotland is another major conservation project for RZSS. We are at a critical point for the species which is under massive pressure particularly from hybridisation with feral domestic cats. Roisin manages the RZSS aspects of the Scottish Wildcat Action project, including the securing of a conservation breeding programme, which aims to screen and trap wildcats to increase the genetic diversity and purity of the current captive population for later release into the wild. Every aspect of the breeding and release process is crucial to ensure cats competent for survival in the wild are put back into areas where the hybridisation risk has been managed. The daily work associated with this project is varied, including the management of field staff, data collection and analysis, working with communication staff to promote the plight of the Scottish wildcat, developing management strategies with the genetics team, and working with the animal department to build suitable enclosures and husbandry programmes. This project also involves working with a wide range of organisations and stakeholders, all committed to saving the Scottish wildcat.

Project website: http://www.scottishwildcataction.org/
Scottish Wildcat Conservation Action Plan: http://c-js.co.uk/1N49b7H

Colin Oulton – Animal Team Leader

With a lifelong interest in the natural world, Colin studied at the University of Aberdeen, gaining a BSc in Zoology in 1995. Inspired by an advert for Arabian oryx reintroduction field staff, he set about gaining practical experience with animals and returned to Edinburgh to volunteer at the Zoo. Colin studied a group of free-ranging marmosets and collaborated with the keepering staff to make environmental enrichment devices for the animals. An opening on the hoofstock section led to him working with a variety of ungulates for the next three and a half years before a role on a primate-based section came up. After a period on birds and reptiles, he was promoted to Head Keeper of the Bird Section following a departmental reorganisation in 2004.

On a daily basis, his role is split between the hands-on tasks of a zookeeper and that of managing the section staff, stock and aviaries, assisted by two Senior Keepers. In conjunction with senior Living Collections staff, Team Leaders contribute to the daily running of the department and longer term
development of the animal collection: bringing their expertise to bear on topics such as species choice, enclosure suitability, animal management and staff skills.

RZSS Edinburgh Zoo is a member of BIAZA (British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums) and Colin has been Chair (or co-Chair) of the BIAZA Bird Working Group since 2009. He is also a regular attendee and contributor at EAZA (European Association of Zoos and Aquaria) Taxon Advisory Group meetings and holds the European Studbook for thick-billed parrots.

In terms of how zoos can contribute to in situ conservation, Colin points to RZSS’s involvement in the Socorro Dove Project. The Socorro dove (Zenaida graysoni) is a small dark brown dove from an island 600 km west of the coast of Mexico. Though not the most “showy” bird in Edinburgh’s collection, he finds the story of its extinction in the wild, its accidental salvation and the hope for its future, fascinating.

First described in 1865 by American ornithologist Andrew Jackson Grayson, it was considered common across Socorro from expedition reports in the 1920s. Very little was written about the dove and the vast majority of knowledge has been gained from specimens studied in avairies.

Last recorded on Socorro in 1972, the species is classed as Extinct in the Wild by the IUCN. Several factors were thought to be involved: over-hunting following the establishment of a Mexican naval base in 1957, predation by feral cats introduced by families of navy personnel, and over-grazing by sheep introduced a century before. The understorey vegetation and especially the fruiting trees that the doves probably depended upon is severely degraded over large areas of the island.

In 1988 scientists visited Socorro and subsequently launched an initiative to restore the damaged ecosystem and reintroduce the Socorro dove. Dr Luis Baptista was at the forefront of this effort, establishing the Island Endemics Foundation and the Socorro Dove Project. By remarkable good fortune, doves had been sent to US and European aviculturalists in the 1920s and so a captive population existed, though many of the US birds had been deliberately hybridised with mourning doves (Zenaida macroura) and were thus unsuitable for reintroduction purposes.

Therefore birds in zoos and private aviaries in Europe form the basis of the captive population, managed as a European Endangered species Programme (EEP) and co-ordinated by Dr Stefan Stadler of Frankfurt Zoo since its inception. There have been 24 participants in 9 European countries, with a further six collections currently awaiting birds. Due to the efforts of the EEP partners and colleagues in US and Mexico, there also now exists a “non-hybrid” population in several North American collections that work in close co-operation with the EEP.

RZSS first became involved in February 2005 and Edinburgh Zoo has since bred 16 youngsters to four different pairs. Carefully managed introductions are used to establish pairings as males can be notoriously aggressive in their pursuit of females.

With the Mexican authorities’ restrictive legislation concerning avian influenza being potentially “imported” from Europe, birds were sent to the US so that any further transfer to Mexico might be more straightforward. Following pre-export screening at Edinburgh in October 2008, 12 birds underwent a quarantine period before moving to Rio Grande Biological Park, New Mexico. These birds, or their descendants, will form the basis of the population for any reintroduction attempts on Socorro. They also act as a reserve population, helping to relieve some of the holding-space pressure in European zoos.

This population has increased to around 50 individuals in five North American collections bringing the global
population to around 130 birds. Perhaps the most significant transfer was six birds to Africam Safari Zoo’s breeding station at Valsequillo, Mexico in 2013. They were the first Socorro doves on Mexican soil for 4 decades, a major milestone for the international partners of the Socorro Dove Project. To top this, in the spring of 2014, Africam Safari reported a successful breeding from one of their pairs.

On Socorro Island, a variety of organisations continue to prepare the island for the return of the doves. The Mexican Navy has provided logistic support and constructed aviaries where birds would be held prior to any release programme. The Socorro Dove Project partners continue to engage and work with the Mexican authorities and though there is still a long way to go, Colin believes the likelihood of Socorro doves returning to the wild is considerably higher than it has ever been.

Edinburgh Zoo website link: http://c-js.co.uk/1X95oRk
Footage of the doves at Africam Safari in Mexico can be seen at: http://youtu.be/r1TH9d_zd1U
Further information on the Socorro dove can be found at http://c-js.co.uk/1PK1x9c

BIAZA is a conservation, education and scientific wildlife charity representing the best zoos and aquariums across the UK and Ireland. Our website provides useful resources, including animal care and management information and job opportunities.
www.biaza.org.uk   Tel: 020 7449 6599   Email: admin@biaza.org.uk

Working and volunteering in amphibian research
Dr Chris Gleed-Owen, Chair of the British Herpetological Society
(CGO Ecology Ltd, 33 St Catherine’s Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH6 4AE)

Why amphibian research?
Amphibian research is a globally-important endeavour, and in an age of increased awareness about conservation issues and crises, amphibians are right up there in the headlines. For several decades now a ‘Global Amphibian Decline’ has been recognised, with multiple contributing factors, but for many species a common result – crashing populations, and even extinction.

We're all familiar with frogs and toads (the Anura, or tailless amphibians), and with newts (part of the salamander family of Caudata, tailless amphibians). These make up most of the world’s amphibian species, but there are others - the Gymnophiona or ‘caecilians’, a Tropical group of subterranean, limbless, snake-like amphibians - about which we know very little.

So why get involved in amphibian research?
Amphibians are sensitive animals, with soft porous skins, lifecycles that typically require water and land, and often very specific habitat requirements. They are recognised indicators of ecosystem health, and bellwethers of climate change, habitat loss and deterioration, novel pathogens, and invasive alien species.

How to get involved
Most opportunities to get involved in amphibian research as a career are via higher education and academia. However, increasingly, students and gap-year travellers are volunteering (and indeed paying to work!) on amphibian research and conservation projects around the world. And even in the UK, there are many opportunities for volunteering to improve your skills.

Netting amphibians for chytrid swabbing (Jonathan McGowan)

There are no dedicated courses in herpetology (study of amphibians and reptiles) in the UK, but many Universities have herpetologists on their staff: Bangor, Brighton, Exeter (Falmouth campus), Exeter, Kent, Lincoln, Liverpool John Moores, Manchester Metropolitan, Manchester, Open, Plymouth, Queen's Belfast, and Salford Manchester. For more information, the British Herpetological Society (BHS) produces an advice sheet entitled Studying herpetology in the UK, which can be downloaded at its website www.thebhs.org.

Once you’ve studied a degree course, if you’re still keen on amphibian research as a career, you can proceed to a higher degree (masters or doctorate). If the amphibian bug has truly bitten you, then you can
search for academic research positions or ‘postdocs’ (few and far between), or take the more common route into academic: through a lecturership in a biological or conservation science subject.

If you don’t have the time or inclination for an amphibian-focused career change, there are also opportunities for getting involved in amphibian research and conservation work on a voluntary basis.

The place to start is the Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the UK (ARGUK, www.arguk.org), a national network of volunteer groups, where you can find your local group (usually county-based), or information on national projects that you can contribute to locally.

There is also the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC, www.arc-trust.org) which coordinates national conservation and research projects, and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL, www.zsl.org) which runs national and international projects.

Some recent projects

Chytrid sampling across the UK
A major contributory factor in Global Amphibian Declines is a fungus called ‘chytrid’, which affects amphibians’ skin. It has reached the UK, but its extent and effects are not fully understood. In 2011, ZSL partnered with ARGUK, ARC and the BHS to take skin swabs from thousands of frogs, toads and newts across the UK. Swabbing kits were sent to local volunteers, who selected a breeding pond where they could catch at least 30 amphibians with ease. Each one was swabbed on the belly and beneath the legs, and the labelled swabs sent back to ZSL.

Around 400 volunteers swabbed 6,000 amphibians at 200 ponds, and it was a great example of partnership working. Biosecurity was an essential part of the project, and all surveyors fastidiously cleaned and disinfected boots, nets and kit beforehand and afterwards. Worryingly, chytrid was identified across the UK, but thankfully no mortalities were implicated.

NARRS amphibian surveys
This is a project that anyone can get involved with, anywhere in the country. All you need is a few hours to spare for training and surveys. The National Amphibian and Reptile Recording Scheme (www.narrs.org.uk) coordinated by ARC invites you to carry out springtime amphibian surveys in a randomly-selected pond within reach of your home. Training is provided at a series of workshops, and the scheme has been running since 2007.

Several hundred volunteers have surveyed over 500 ponds across the UK, creating a unique snapshot of how well amphibians are doing here at present. Surveys are repeated on a six-year cycle, to identify any trends or patterns.

ToadSize
This ARC-run project was an off-shoot of the grass-roots network of ‘Toads on Roads’ patrollers. Volunteers go out on damp March evenings, bucket in hand, helping toads across roads to their breeding ponds. In order to study whether road mortality was having an effect on toad size, volunteers were asked to measure the toads they rescued.

Overseas opportunities
The possibilities are almost endless when you start looking at amphibian work abroad, especially in the Subtropics and Tropics. Amphibian diversity is much greater in warmer climes, and many countries have pressing conservation challenges and interesting research avenues. Outside the US, Europe and the West in general, however, the career options tend to be less financially rewarding, so few take it as a long-term
career path. People actually pay quite a lot of money to volunteer with Tropical amphibians, so finding a way of getting paid to do it as a profession is difficult.

Don’t expect an expensive tropical trip to be a gateway to a UK career in conservation or research either. It can enhance your CV for UK work to a degree, but only if the skills gained are directly relevant to species here. A few volunteering sessions in the UK, surveying amphibians, are a much better bet for improving your chances in the UK job market.

As many people will attest, a couple of months surveying frogs in a tropical forest will be rewarding, but relatively expensive. If you do decide to take such a trip, you should understand what you expect to achieve from it. Treat it as a life experience, and perhaps a tester to see if it’s a subject you want to explore further.

There are many options out there, but I’ve heard great things about research expeditions organised by Rowland Griffin. Currently he is organising an expedition to Laguna del Tigre National Park in Guatemala, from 5-18th December 2015, to study the effects of El Niño on amphibian populations. Cost: £995 plus your flights. See www.explorewithindigo.com for info.

Opportunities in the UK?
If an overseas trip is just a pipe-dream, and amphibian work in the UK is a more realistic proposal, then what options are available currently? Well it’s the autumn now, and most amphibians are hibernating already. Survey and research projects generally won’t restart until March, so you’ve got a bit of time to make contacts and do some reading. John Wilkinson’s new Amphibian Survey and Monitoring Handbook (Pelagic Publishing) should be a good start.

There are also habitat management volunteering opportunities throughout the winter, and these are a great way of learning from others, and making new contacts.

Try finding your local amphibian and reptile group via ARGUK (www.arguk.org) to see what projects they have on and get on their email list. Contact ARC (www.arc-trust.org) and ask to be allocated a NARRS survey pond next spring. You can also join them for winter habitat management tasks.

Also keep your eye out for other new projects. For example, there is a lot of talk about a new threat to newts in Europe; a worrying new amphibian pathogen called Batrachochytrium salamandrivorus, or Bsal for short. Researchers are keeping an eye on it, and it may well become the next big volunteer-based amphibian research project to get involved with in the UK.

Lastly, if you’re currently a student, why not consider an amphibian-related dissertation project? The BHS (www.thebhs.org) offers student grants to assist with fieldwork and laboratory costs.

Greenway Ecological Ltd. is an ecological landscaping practice providing a range of ecology, landscape and arboriculture services to private and commercial clients throughout Norfolk, Suffolk, East Anglia and the UK. Our business is founded on core ecological values of protecting and enhancing wildlife. Through this we deliver a fully integrated ecological landscaping and arboricultural solution.

Our team includes habitat creation and restoration specialists who undertake wildlife pond creation, wildflower meadow creation and bird nest box and bat house installation. Our ecological mitigation projects involve a range of the UK’s protected species and include works such as newt, reptile, badger and otter fencing and creation of newt and reptile habitats.

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An unpredictable nature: working with wildlife
by Laura Benfield, Head of Animal Care at Secret World Wildlife Rescue

Secret World Wildlife Rescue is tucked away in the village of East Huntspill in Somerset. You wouldn’t know it from the outside but our site covers around fifteen acres and we help over 5,000 animals every year. Our mission is to rescue sick, injured and orphaned wildlife, and to rehabilitate and release animals back into the wild wherever possible. We also reach out to schools and the wider public to inspire learning and love for our wonderful native fauna.

A busy team
I joined Secret World as Head of Animal Care in March 2015, and like many of my team I was a volunteer before that. I’ve recently completed my Foundation Degree in Conservation and Countryside Management which has been really helpful to complement the practical skills and experience I learn on the job. For example, my studies showed me how wildlife is affected by land use changes which can restrict access to food and habitat and bring animals into contact with traffic on our roads – sadly the cause of many of the rescues we deal with.

I manage a team of 21 including animal carers, reception staff, our vet nurse and our volunteer manager who in turn oversees hundreds of dedicated volunteers – who not only help care for the animals but work in our busy reception team, help with maintenance, fundraising and administration, and form a network of response drivers across the south west who rescue animals and bring them in for assessment and care.
In the past twelve months we’ve helped over 100 badgers, 90 foxes, 100 owls, 115 bats and almost 600 hedgehogs, as well as more unusual patients like peregrine falcons, otters and weasels. We’re very busy in the summer months – this year we had over 1,000 animals through the door in the space of just one month, including one day we won’t forget where 83 animals came through the doors in just 24 hours! It’s challenging – we work long hours, often rearing orphans at home as well as providing our 24 hour service, but we work as a team to make sure each animal gets assessed, and to make decisions about what to do next.

We don’t have a vet on site, but our vet nurse and animal care team work day to day under the guidance of our local vets, who also pay us a visit once or twice a week to diagnose, assess and treat any critical cases.

**Badger cubs**

We’re particularly well known for our work in rehabilitating orphaned badger cubs. This year we rescued three newborn cubs in early February who had been brought in to their owners’ homes by dogs. Two of these were successfully reared, rehabilitated and have recently been released back into the wild, eight months older and a lot bigger and stronger!

**Hands-off approach**

When an orphan is being hand-reared, a close relationship with its carer is important. As soon as an animal has been weaned, we need to reduce contact with humans as much as possible. If an animal grows up being too familiar with humans, we won’t be able to release it. We promote this message to the public too. We have a responsibility to discourage people from becoming too familiar with wild animals, and from trying to keep fox cubs and other wildlife as pets (it does happen unfortunately).

**Release time**

We release animals back to where they were rescued wherever possible but with orphans, like fox and badger cubs, we need to find new release sites so they can establish their own territories. This involves working with landowners to assess and set up release sites, and monitor them. Often we will do a ‘soft release’ where the animals are supported with food and shelter as they make the transition to the wild.

**Difficult decisions**

If an animal does not have a chance of making it back to full health, we will make the difficult decision to euthanase – like the recent case of a swan who had swallowed a fishing line and hook, and its injuries were just too severe to treat. This is emotionally challenging for the staff and volunteers involved, as well as for members of the public who have brought animals to us, but an important part of what we do is to help animals who would have experienced prolonged suffering. Apart from a few resident animals, we don’t keep animals in captivity if they can’t be rehabilitated and released back to the wild. We aspire to the ‘five freedoms’ set out by the RSPCA.

**Learning**

The thousands of animals we rescue every year are a drop in the ocean compared to the millions in the UK who can benefit if people love and understand the wildlife we share our land with. So, our learning programme is a core part of our mission. Our new Heritage Lottery-funded learning centre opens in 2016 which will enable us to welcome more schools and other groups on site to be inspired by our countryside heritage and the rich wildlife that depends on it.
Wildlife is unpredictable, so our own continuous learning is important too. We’re lucky to have the experience and expertise to deal with what comes, but our resources are constantly under pressure.

I love the variety of this work. We never know what’s going to come in next! Orphan-rearing is also a highlight of the job. A baby hedgehog I hand-reared this year was recently released back into the wild – helping to give an orphan like this a second chance is exceptionally rewarding.

Find out more about Secret World Wildlife Rescue: www.secretworld.org 01278 783 250
facebook.com/secretworldwildlife
@SWWR

Folly Wildlife Rescue is a registered charity dedicated to the care and rehabilitation of injured, orphaned, sick and distressed wild animals. Working primarily in West Kent and East Sussex, every year, it admits in the region of 3500 casualties. See our website www.follywildliferescue.org.uk for more details.

The Wildlife Ark Trust funded the development of an effective vaccine candidate to protect the red squirrels against the horrendous squirrelpox virus. An appeal has now been launched to raise £189,000 to modify the vaccine. To learn more go to www.wildlifearktrust.com

Cuan Wildlife Rescue is a wildlife rescue centre based in Shropshire. We regularly admit over 2,000 sick, injured or orphaned wild animals and birds each year with the ultimate aim of releasing them back into the wild. Stretton Road, Much Wenlock, Shropshire, TF13 6DD 01952 728070 www.cuanwildliferescue.org.uk

South Essex Wildlife Hospital based in Orsett, Essex cares for all sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. Please see our website for information and application form southessexwildlife.org.uk or call 01375 893893 if you are interested in volunteering for our charity.

Wildlife information bureau (01892 824111), wildlife hospital specialising in foxes (01892 731565) and humane, non-lethal fox deterrence service (01892 826222). Established 1991 and a registered charity since 1995, we operate primarily in South East although our connections and contacts are nationwide. Email fox@foxproject.org.uk or look on www.foxproject.org.uk to find out more.

An interview with PC Gareth Jones, Beat Manager for the Ripon Rural Area

Gareth estimates that 10–15% of his week is spent dealing with wildlife incidents and paperwork in relation to wildlife crime. There are no full time officers engaged in wildlife crime.

How did you become a Wildlife Crime Officer?
My family have farmed in the Yorkshire Dales for 3 generations but there wasn’t enough work for me I worked for other people and subsequently went abroad to work. When I came back to the UK I decided on a career change and joined the police. After about 20 years of being a bobby I was asked if I’d like to take on the role of Harrogate & District Wildlife Crime Officer. You have to be a certain type of person that’s committed to animal welfare, wildlife and conservation and are willing to do work voluntarily outside normal hours.

Are WCO’s always recruited from the police force?
North Yorkshire Police, to supplement the ever reducing number of officers, has a volunteer department and are always looking for people to volunteer for various aspects of policing. Within the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) there are analyst posts for civilian staff.

Do you have to undertake regular CPD to keep up with changing legislation?
The legislation hasn’t altered that much recently although there was a court appeal that’s going to change the way we deal with badger cases. A terrier man from the Middleton Hunt at Malton was filmed blocking up a badger set prior to a day’s hunting and that is against the law. He was convicted of that offence and fined. He appealed the case and the appeal was successful on 15 October, the judge said that a badger expert must examine the set on the day of the disturbance. Our expert didn’t examine it until 3 days later. It’s all to do with proving whether a sett’s in use or not and it’s only an offence if the badger sett is currently in use. It’s a very complicated piece of legislation but it’s going to make it difficult for us to investigate badger cases because we’ll have to get an expert to the scene on the same day. We have training days a couple of times a year where we will have presentations from external organisations. We work closely with the investigations branch of the RSPB and the RSPCA. We have a police liaison officer at the League Against Cruel Sports and regularly work with the Bat Conservation Trust, Badger Trust, Natural England and other agencies.
Is the wildlife side of your work not seen as important as general police work?

For an incident to be a crime it needs a home office classification and wildlife offences don’t have that which means that wildlife crimes are summary only offences and are not recorded under the police crime statistics because they are not a crime.

Some crimes against other animals such as farm animals and pets can be classed as crimes because the animals are owned by somebody and to destroy or damage property is an act of criminal damage. For example a man was prosecuted for killing a mute swan whilst on a pheasant shoot; he heard a bird flying behind him spun round and fired both barrels. The prosecution under criminal damage legislation succeeded because a mute swan is property of the crown. A similar case a few years earlier involving a different species of swan which isn’t the property of the crown didn’t proceed.

Zak Goldsmith carried out a review in to wildlife legislation in the last parliament recommending that wildlife crimes become crimes and that all the existing wildlife legislation is updated so that it is current, some of the old poaching legislation goes back to the 1820’s. It is frustrating that it’s not seen as a priority as one of the recommendations was to bring in vicarious liability currently available in Scotland. If a gamekeeper commits an offence against wildlife the owner of the estate is equally liable and will be prosecuted for the same offence, their single farm payments are also reduced. There was an estate in Dumfries & Galloway where a raptor was killed by a gamekeeper and the estate lost a large sum of money in subsidies from the EU as a result of that one case so it is very powerful legislation. A lot of the payments that these estates get are for conservation work so if it’s proved that they are doing things contrary to the conservation of the wildlife on their estate then part of the Single Farm Payment is withdrawn. Poisoning in Scotland was virtually eradicated overnight. Apart from a case on The Black Isle where a number of Red Kites and other birds were poisoned.

Is there any seasonality to the crimes that you see?

Very much so yes, bird of prey persecution tends to start in the spring time when the bird nesting season and the lambing season start. Likewise with hare coursing, one of the major things that we deal with, it starts after the harvest. Badger baiting tends to start in January, the pregnant sows are much fiercer and are classed as better sport in the spring time.

What’s the most usual type of wildlife crime you have to deal with?

At this time of year its hare coursing because the fields have been harvested and until the new crops get to about a foot high hares are visible from the lanes. The brown hare population is being adversely affected by this kind of poaching because the farmers are actually shooting them to try and prevent damage to crops and field boundaries from poachers. Farmers and gamekeepers alert us to men with dogs on their land. As long as we’ve got someone who can say they have actually seen the dogs chasing a hare we can then prosecute those people and if we use the hunting act it allows us to seize anything that’s used in the offence, we can take vehicles and dogs.

What is the most exciting event you have had to deal with?

The most challenging case I had was a satellite tagged Hen Harrier called Bowland Betty who was shot in the Dales. She flew on to a grouse estate and she was found dead with a broken leg. Via a very protracted investigation which involved a number of agencies and some cutting edge forensic work we discovered she’d been shot. A cross between an electron microscope and a mass spectrometer was used to prove that there was lead within the wound which when analysed, was found to contain another compound which is used to coat bullets during the manufacturing process so the conclusion was it was lead from a bullet that had caused the wound. No one was ever prosecuted because we could never prove who was responsible.
What advances in technology & techniques have you seen?
We have a forensics fund for wildlife crime, it’s difficult to get money out of the force to deal with incidents so Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) set up a forensics fund and they will match fund money for forensic work. For example, if an offender and a dog are suspected of deer poaching then we can DNA match the dog with the bite marks on the rump of the deer. Forensics was used in a badger case near Richmond where blood was found on the shoe of an offender which was subsequently found to be from a badger. He was convicted of that offence purely because of the blood.

How can the public help you in your job?
Lobby the government to have the changes brought in to the wildlife legislation so that vicarious liability becomes a law in England and Wales, that’s probably the biggest thing that would help us. Contact your local MP and ask them to put pressure on the government to have the wildlife legislation updated.

What message would you like to give to our readers?
Carry on the good work, we in the wildlife crime unit are committed to protecting animals, plants & birds within North Yorkshire and further afield with regard to endangered species. We work in partnership with a number of agencies because we need expert knowledge for certain cases to get to court so we are always looking for new partners who can bring expertise to us. Anyone who has expertise that they feel would be useful to us please contact me as the single point of contact (SPOC) at North Yorkshire Police and I can pass your details on to officers who may need it.

Other forces should have their own SPOC
Find your local police force contact on http://www.nwcu.police.uk/find-your-local-police/
http://www.nwcu.police.uk/
http://www.northyorkshire.police.uk/wildlifecrime

19 October was the start of Wildlife Crime Awareness Week for which we started a twitter feed @NYPWCOS and Operation Badger Week which began on 26 October is an awareness week and an operation to try and combat people who are committing crimes against badgers.

Insects help solve case of badger found dead in trap
Forensic Entomology, the use of insects to aid legal investigations, is generally used to establish neglect or minimum time since death of a person, but the same principles may be applied to cases involving animals.

Forensic Entomologist Dr Amoret Whitaker is based at the University of Winchester as a Lecturer in Forensic Studies, but over the past decade has been working with the Natural History Museum, London, as a consultant in forensic investigations. In 2014, Dr Whitaker was asked by the PAW (Partners in Animal Welfare) Forensic Working Group, to get involved in an investigation concerning a badger found dead in a trap in Scotland. The SSPCA (Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) decided to investigate the case, as they suspected that a crime may have been committed. At the post-mortem of the badger, blowfly eggs and small larvae were recovered from the body and preserved as evidence. “The rate of insect development is highly dependent upon temperature, so by analysing the ambient temperatures and identifying the species of blowfly eggs and larvae recovered from the badger, it was possible to estimate the minimum time since death of a person,” explained Dr Whitaker. Although it is not illegal to set the type of trap the badger was fou

Badger Rescue deals with the welfare of badgers, also problems with badgers damaging gardens and planning applications. If I can’t deal with the problem I will put you in touch with someone near you. I can be contacted through my website badgerrescue.co.uk or by phone 07966 378366

Wildlife Crime Awareness Training
Protecting our wildlife is important to us all, learning how to recognise, record, and report wildlife crime is a key part to tackling the issues. With over 30 years experience in fighting wildlife crime, and having trained over 1100 police staff since 1997, now is the time to expand that knowledge. www.wildlifetraining.co.uk 07540 532303

The University of Winchester Centre for Animal Welfare provides a collaborative hub for academics and academic organisations interested in animal welfare issues. We offer expert consultancy services, popular presentations and media commentary on a wide range of animal welfare issues. Further information: www.winchester.ac.uk/caw

Forensic Entomology, the use of insects to aid legal investigations, is generally used to establish neglect or minimum time since death of a person, but the same principles may be applied to cases involving animals. If you have a case involving insect evidence, contact Dr Amoret Whitaker at amoret.whitaker@winchester.ac.uk
NWCU will contribute to the prevention and detection of crime by supporting UK wildlife crime enforcement. It will do this by providing a centralised capacity for intelligence collection, analysis and delivery of professional practice in relation to wildlife crime. Support Forces and Partners in criminal investigations and enhance cross-border work. Develop methods of working together between all agencies in reducing wildlife crime and enhancing conservation. Work in partnership with businesses involved with Wildlife issues to enhance public and private sector involvement in combating wildlife crime. To identify Organised Crime Groups. www.nwcu.police.uk

A bird in the hand: why bird ringing is still so important
By Ruth Walker, Ringing Surveys Organiser, BTO

It is 6:30 on a cold winter morning. Twenty bird ringers are lying behind a sea wall, waiting. A flock of waders walk up the beach ahead of the rising tide and settle in front of a line of nets. As day breaks, a voice over the radio counts down: ‘3, 2, 1...fire’. With adrenaline pumping, we run to the nets and carefully extract the birds before settling down to ring them. These birds are part of a 50+ year study of the waders that use the Wash Estuary on the east coast of England.

It is a common misconception that the main purpose of ringing birds is to see where migrant species spend their winters. Undoubtedly, this was the main reason the Ringing Scheme was set up over 100 years ago; it hadn’t been that long since people stopped believing that Swallows spent the winter at the bottom of ponds after all! These days we have all manner of tracking devices that can remotely follow birds throughout their migratory journeys to reveal their secrets, as has been shown so successfully by projects such as the BTO’s Cuckoo tracking project (www.bto.org/cuckoos). One bird with a tracking device can tell us a lot about that individual; where it goes, by what route, how fast it flies and so on. But what does the information from the one million birds ringed each year by the 3,000 volunteer bird ringers in Britain & Ireland tell us?

Ringing data make a major contribution to the study of population changes and to our understanding of species declines. Essentially, bird populations are determined by the number of fledglings raised and the survival of both juveniles and adults. Whilst ringers collect data on survival, volunteers for the Nest Record Scheme (a lot of whom are also ringers) collect information on productivity. The results can be analysed in combination with population trend data, such as that collected through the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey, to determine at which stage of a bird’s life cycle there might be a problem (www.bto.org/birdtrends). This enables scientists and conservationists to target appropriate mitigation measures; for example, it would be ineffective to improve breeding habitat for a species if their decline is caused by lack of food in winter.

Information on survival is generated by re-encountering ringed birds. By using colour rings or uniquely inscribed flags, birds can be re-encountered without needing to be recaptured, which enables non-ringers to contribute to ringing projects by reporting sightings (www.ring.ac); reports of dead ringed birds are extremely valuable too! And by using PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder) tags fitted to a ring (similar to CES ringers use fine mesh nets to catch birds. Sites, such as this reedbed CES in Suffolk, are actively managed to ensure the habitat remains constant year on year (Rob Robinson)
The use of colour rings, such as those on this Turnstone, can greatly increase the chances of an individual bird being seen again. They are most appropriate when used on birds that are approachable and often found in bare habitat where birders can get good views of their legs (Ruth Walker)
Following the survival of individual birds is a particular focus for ringers taking part in the Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) Scheme. On an annual basis, each participant monitors adults of a particular species during the breeding season (when birds are more likely to be site faithful). When combined nationally, survival rate trends can be produced for each species being studied. Standardising ringing effort can also increase the chances of a bird being recaught. This is where the Constant Effort Sites (CES) Scheme comes in. Ringers catch birds in the same location, for the same length of time across the same range of dates each year; as catching effort is constant, we can be confident that any changes in the number of birds caught reflect true changes in abundance. Again, when data for all sites are combined, we can produce national and regional trends for abundance, productivity and survival (juvenile and adult) for the 24 species that CES focuses on.

Ringing isn't only about survival though. Changes in species composition or abundance at a site level can alert land managers to potential problems with the habitat or inform management decisions. By ringing chicks, we are able to determine where they disperse to and by ringing at bird observatories, we can record the timing of spring and autumn migration. This can help to determine how well species can adapt to new situations, such as the effects of climate change. And it isn't just declining species that need monitoring. As we don't know which species may struggle in the future, it is crucial to collect baseline data for even the most common of species; back in the 1970s, no-one would have predicted the catastrophic decline of the (then) abundant House Sparrow, for example.

Bird welfare is always paramount so we try to minimise the amount of time a bird is in the hand, whilst at the same time maximising the amount of information we gather from each bird we handle. As well as fitting a ring, we collect biometric data such as wing length, weight, age and sex (where possible) and information on whether the bird is breeding (by looking for physiological indicators), moulting (by looking for missing or part grown feathers) or preparing for migration (by looking at the amount of fat it is carrying). For some species, such as the waders mentioned at the start, we might also measure the length of the bill and the tarsus (leg) and toe. This information can help to sex individuals in species where males and females are morphologically indistinct or allocate an individual to a particular race. It also provides general information about a bird’s physical condition; for instance, to conserve energy when food resources are low, birds can stop moulting part way through the process, resulting in feathers of noticeably different ages.

There are no formal qualifications needed to become a bird ringer, although you would be expected to be able to identify most common species. Training requires time and real commitment though; it normally takes around two years of ringing most weeks to reach the standard needed to allow you to operate mist nets by yourself. It is also not a cheap hobby. Although the Ringing Scheme is part-funded by the Government (through JNCC on behalf of the country agencies) and the BTO itself, ringers pay for all their own rings and equipment.

As well as bringing real benefits to science and conservation, ringing is fun and a privilege. I have been ringing for seven years and it has taken me to some amazing places, such as remote Scottish islands to ring seabirds. It also led me to the BTO where (amongst other things) I now run the CES and RAS schemes. For more information, visit: www.bto.org/ringing
Concern for swifts (Scotland) is a project that aims to conserve swift nest sites during building works or to have new ones integrated into new buildings where appropriate. To record swift nest sites, or ask for information about renovation or demolition that threatens nest sites contact swiftscot@yahoo.co.uk.

Sea Watch Foundation works with the public to monitor whales and dolphins around the UK, using the collected data to influence environmental policy. Help us by conducting watches of your own from land or at sea. See www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk to get involved or to report your whale, dolphin or porpoise sightings.

The FSC Tom.bio project provides training and resources for people who want to record wildlife in order to protect it. Details can be found on our website www.tombio.uk. This includes an online searchable catalogue of UK wildlife identification resources called the ID Signpost. Use it here: www.tombio.uk/idsignpost

CJ Wildlife have over 25 years experience in researching and developing products to help you attract, care for and enjoy the wide variety of wildlife in your garden. We offer premium products, multi-buy saving, next day delivery and free delivery on orders over £25. For a 10% discount visit www.birdfood.co.uk/cjs15 and quote UKCJS15 at checkout.

Are you sure you want to work with birds of prey?
By Jemima Parry-Jones MBE

I am the CEO of the International Centre for Birds of Prey which is the oldest and one of the largest dedicated birds of prey centres in the world. We lead the world in the captive breeding of birds of prey, we take in upwards of 100 injured wild raptors every year, we work in the field on conservation projects, mainly on vultures at this time in India, Nepal, Bulgaria and Africa. We educate not only our visitors, but work experience students from the UK and abroad, we lecture in schools and universities and have been open to the public now for 48 years.

One of the many questions I am asked by visitors, students and all walks of life, particularly as I am walking up from our flying grounds after having finished a flying demonstration is “how do I get a job like you have”.

There are now an increasing number of zoos, hotels, specialist bird of prey centres, holiday camps and so on that are using birds of prey and sometimes other genera of birds for demonstrations and for experiences in handling and so on. Sadly a high proportion of them are poor to extremely poor with little thought or understanding for the birds in their care and often doing things that are potentially dangerous with the public.

Once visitors have seen staff giving a flying demonstration they can quickly get excited by the idea of working in such a place and (as they believe) constantly playing with living birds of prey and owls. However, the job is nothing like what it seems from the outside. When volunteers/work experience students contact us to come and work at the centre they are sent a sheet which warns them that 95% of the work is cleaning aviaries, painting the insides of aviaries, clearing paths, helping with the gardens, painting the outside of aviaries and so on. We are out in all types of weather as the birds still require looking after and the public still need to be cared for and have birds flown for them.
Most birds when kept in aviaries are not particularly active or interesting to look at, so the flying demonstrations (note we always use the word demonstration, not show or display), are really what bring the visitors in, and once here grab their attention. If done well, with an accurate, dynamic and sometimes amusing commentary (but never derogatory about the birds) they can be exciting to watch, cause audiences to gasp on occasion and leave them with an experience that they will take home and share with others. If done badly they will bore the public, give them information that is not only inaccurate but gives a bad impression of birds of prey, and worse encourage the watching public to want to have a bird of their own without any of the information or learning that goes with it.

In terms of a career ladder to climb, I usually warn people that unless they are working in a large zoo which has a career path that can be followed, there is no ladder! I also warn them that not only is the work hard and long hours, but it generally is poorly paid. During the summer months my staff technically work from 8.00am to 5.30pm, however it is common for them still to be here at 7.00pm or even later and if a bird gets lost and we are tracking it with radio telemetry we have been known to be out until 1.30am retrieving a bird. During the winter months, being a nice boss, once it is dark and all the tasks are complete and the birds safely and warmly away, I send them home early, so the winter hours tend to balance out the summer.

They work five days a week, some have to work at the weekends which are our busiest time. We try to make sure that the most experienced staff are working on the busiest days as it is bad practise to have less experienced staff when expecting the highest number of visitors.

All our flying birds are treated as staff, they have time off to moult every year which means aviary space is required for them. This also means you need more birds than the demonstrations require as you need back up. We run three demonstrations per day, flying in the summer months up to 40 birds per day, some of which are flown in groups. We are careful to rest the very small birds, such as Burrowing Owls in the winter as keeping their weight stable in cold weather is tricky, and we fly owls such as Snowy Owls only in cooler months as they do not do well in hot weather. So we balance the birds with the climate, this also means the visitors get to see different birds at different times of the year and the staff get to fly different birds throughout the year, giving them more interest.

Working with birds of prey and the public can be exhausting, repetitive and frustrating, it can also be incredibly rewarding knowing that you are changing opinions and understanding. You will never make money either working in or running a bird of prey centre, but if you love birds of prey, it is a good place to be, and you can make a difference, which in the conservation field is what is needed all over the world. Always check out several bird of prey centres before deciding which one you like – it should be very obvious once you have gone to several.

Find out more about the Centre on the website at www.icbp.org

**Indigo Expeditions runs conservation projects** for wildlife enthusiasts with a passion for the tropics. Our work currently focuses on the conservation of reptiles and amphibians in Guatemala. We support researchers to develop their tropical field biology skills, and herpetological surveying techniques, and encourage ethical and respectful animal handling methods. www.explorewithindigo.com

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So, you want to be a wildlife camera operator …

You’re not alone! It’s an attractive proposition and therefore competitive – but don’t let this deter you – with the right skills and determination it’s possible to create an amazing career filming the world’s magnificent wildlife.

Your main choices are: to be employed by a production company (or broadcaster like the BBC); to act as a self-employed camera operator (which could still mean working for a production company or broadcaster but in a freelance capacity); or you create your own projects and start your own company.

Training and qualifications

But before you get to that stage you need to get as much training and experience as possible. There are no formal qualifications required by employers, but some, like the BBC for example, are likely to look more favourably at those who have degrees in either zoology/biology or a film-making related subject. In addition there are currently two MA courses in the UK worth looking at:

- UWE (University of the West of England) – 1 year postgraduate MA Wildlife Filmmaking (http://courses.uwe.ac.uk/D4P31/)
- University of Salford – 1 year postgraduate MA Wildlife Documentary Production (www.salford.ac.uk/pgt-courses/wildlife-documentary-production)

For those without the time/means/academic ability to take three years or so to do a degree, there are plenty of other options for further training. Wildlife Film Festivals run various excellent workshops and masterclasses and for those wishing to gain certain specific skills there are short courses such as those run by Wildeye – the International School of Wildlife Film-making – based in Norfolk (www.wildeye.co.uk).

Developing skills (how to improve your chances of success)

There is no set path that will guarantee you success, but there are definitely a number of things you can do to prepare yourself for the best chance.

Learn about natural history by studying, by reading, by watching TV and through first-hand experience in the field. A good knowledge of wildlife throughout the world is highly desirable (but not essential as you always research your topic), along with a good grasp of world geography.

The more you know about the industry the better – so:

- Subscribe to and read the e-zine Wildlife Film News every month (it’s free! www.wildlife-film.com)
- Read Wild Pages: The Wildlife Film-makers’ Resource Guide – explore the directories to see who does what (www.wildeye.co.uk/wild-pages)
- Surf the Internet – find out more about production companies from their own websites.

The best way to develop your filming skills is to start practising with a digital camcorder or DSLR that can shoot video. Practise your camera skills and your fieldcraft together – then watch the footage on your TV and make notes about what you need to improve. How do the pictures compare to films you want to emulate? Learn to understand filmic-grammar. Improving your stills photography skills will also help you understand the basics of lighting, exposure, lenses, framing shots etc.

Seeking employment (where to look for work and network with possible employers/collaborators)

It’s true that it’s often ‘whom you know’ not ‘what you know’ that gives you the biggest breaks in this industry. Letters, emails and phone-calls are some methods but there is nothing like meeting people face to face, and
wildlife film festivals and courses are the best place to do this. Go to as many festivals as you can – such as Wildscreen in Bristol or the Wildeye Conservation Film Festival in Norfolk – details of these are in the festivals directory of www.wildlife-film.com. They all have excellent masterclasses, workshops, seminars etc.

Possible routes in:
Approach camera operators to see if they need an assistant or are happy for you to shadow them. This may well be unpaid to start with but it will be invaluable experience if you can get it. It will certainly be hard work and you may have to do everything from carrying equipment to driving and cooking. You can either contact camera operators directly (you’ll find them listed at www.wildlife-film.com), or approach production companies and ask if they have any camera assistant work-experience/shadowing with any of their camera operators. ‘Shadowing’ basically means you just accompany a camera operator (unpaid of course) and learn from watching them. If you’re lucky they will teach you a great deal.

If you are already skilled enough you can approach a company with your showreel on DVD. This should be about 5 minutes (never more than 10) of varied footage showing what you are capable of. It could accompany a pitch if you have a strong film idea as well.

Do it Yourself
Increasingly these days wildlife camera operators are starting their own companies and creating their own projects. These can then be sold on to broadcasters, distributors, via DVD or the internet. The book Conservation Film-making: How to make films that make a difference – has chapters on how to fund your film project and reach audiences.

Essential Reading
Careers in Wildlife Film-making – Guidance and advice for aspiring makers of wildlife films. Featuring many case studies from all over the world (www.wildeye.co.uk/careers-in-wildlife-film-making)
Conservation Film-making: How to make films that make a difference – Never has the time been more critical for film-making to help make a difference to the natural world. This book shows you how (www.wildeye.co.uk/conservation-film-making-book)
Wildlife Film-making: Looking to the Future – What does the future of wildlife film-making hold for us all? (www.wildeye.co.uk/wildlife-film-making)
Wild Pages: The Wildlife Film-makers’ Resource Guide – Many hundreds of listings – invaluable information at your fingertips to save hours of trawling through the Internet (www.wildeye.co.uk/wild-pages)
Go Wild with Your Camcorder – How to Make Wildlife Films – Information and advice on all aspects of making a wildlife film from choosing a camcorder to editing the final product (www.wildeye.co.uk/go-wild-with-your-camcorder)

Piers Warren, Principle of Wildeye International School of Wildlife Film-making (www.wildeye.co.uk) and Director of Wildeye Conservation Film Festival (www.wildeyefestival.org)

Specialist wildlife, nature and scientific filming and photography service. Clients include BBC Natural History Unit, National Geographic, Discovery Channel. Specialist in macro filming in HD and UHD. Stock HD video library of UK wildlife. Tel. 07706 014301. email: stevedownerfilms@aol.com. Website: www.wildlife-cinematography.co.uk

Gardenature is a family run business which has fast become Europes No 1 manufacturer and supplier of high quality products designed specifically for watching all forms of wildlife from the comfort of your armchair, from your garden or out in the wild. Visit http://www.gardenature.co.uk/company/

Wildlife Photography: use the TriggerSmart Camera trigger for stunning image capture! TriggerSmart Kit and Wildlife Kit use Infra Red beams to trigger stills, video cameras or other devices. Sound or light activation modes are part of the kit as well. Visit www.flaghead.co.uk and www.sabreswitch.co.uk for details, or ask for information and advice info@flaghead.co.uk

The UK Wildlife Film School .Real Wildlife – Real Locations – Real Skills – Real experience. Practical hands-on training workshops in Film production techniques, Recording audio, Filming in 4K and Editing in the field and Equipment logistics; all operating from remote self-sufficient base camps, in truly awe-inspiring locations. For more information, visit www.wildlifefilmschool.com

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CJS Focus on Wildlife & Animal Work www.countryside-jobs.com
Chris Shields presents a vast selection of stock natural history illustrations all available to license for publication. New commissions also undertaken. Subject areas include: Birds, Botanical, Fish, Fungi, Mammals, Prehistoric, Reptiles and Amphibians. Go to: www.illustratedwildlife.com

Nature photography by John & Tracy Langley. Sale of wildlife photographs, greeting cards & calendars. Ideal for gifts, office artwork or incentive products. Digital images supplied for business & website use. Website: www.ourwildlifephotography.com Email: ourwildlife@btinternet.com

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Working for Conservation
by Martin Harper, Conservation Director for the RSPB

In my mid-twenties I saw a job advertised to head up a team at WWF. It was way out of my league, but I remember looking at the person specification and thinking that given time I might be able to acquire the essential experience to be able to apply for such a job in ten years time.

I still admire WWF but I don’t work for them. Instead, I am lucky enough to be the Conservation Director of the RSPB – the largest nature conservation organisation in Europe.

And the reason that I do the job I do today is that through 20 years working in the sector, I have acquired the experience and skills to allow me to perform the role in the way the organisation desires. And I just happened to be in the right place at the right time to be well placed to get the job when it came up in 2011.

I see my career as vocational. My interest in nature was ignited in my early teens when my mother, a biology teacher, encouraged me to see the world differently. As the son of a vicar, I also had a pretty good sense of what was right and wrong so the more I read about destruction of nature, the more the fire in my belly to do something about it was stoked.

Today, it is contact with nature that keeps me going both in terms of reminding me of my ‘cause’ but also acts as therapy when that cause gets stressful.

During my time studying Biological Sciences at Oxford, I was fortunate enough to join a butterfly expedition to the Comores – an archipelago between Madagascar and Mozambique. This was my first opportunity to properly see and experience the tension between humans’ desire for development and the natural world. We returned after our finals and my interest in tropical biodiversity was encouraged through participation in the inaugural Tropical Biological Association course in Kibale Forest in Uganda.

The real turning point for me was taking the UCL Masters in Conservation. At last I could see a way beyond science and into practical conservation. The grounding that I received during my year in London with trips to Rum, the Lake District and Guernsey was incredibly helpful. I began to understand the policy and organisational framework of nature conservation both in the UK and internationally. It was also great fun and friendships made during that year have lasted as we all explored our separate career paths.

Getting a job after graduating was a challenge. For my Master’s thesis I’d studied snow leopard prey in the Hovsgol region of Mongolia and became hooked on riding, climbing mountains and counting scat. This interest would see me take part in four expeditions over the coming years. Yet, getting into paid employment and actually carving out a career seemed hard – very hard. So, I did what nearly all my contemporaries did and what I encourage graduates to do today – I volunteered. I was living in London at the time and I was still
chasing the exotic, so I jumped at the chance of volunteering for a small charity called Tusk Force which raised money for big mammal projects around the world.

The six months I spent there were instructive and memorable especially when I appeared in Hello magazine dressed as a rhino cuddling Helena Christensen and Ali McGraw.

But, tipped off by one of the UCL alumni, I applied for and landed a job at Wildlife and Countryside Link – the network organisation for environmental NGOs based in England. It was a wide-ranging role and allowed me an insight into the different organisations that make up our diverse voluntary sector that proved really useful in the years to come.

Quite quickly, it was possible to categorise the types of organisation: big vs small, feisty vs stuffy, bold vs cautious, arrogant vs humble etc. And I found myself gravitating towards certain individuals many of whom I still work with today. I had a range of bosses on various issues from whom I learnt a great deal and to whom I owe huge debt of thanks for helping me find my way.

I ended up running Link for a year before becoming Conservation Director at Plantlife. In many ways it was perfect grounding for the job I do today with responsibility for all aspects of the conservation toolkit: science, reserves, advice and advocacy all contributing towards a coherent conservation strategy. Of course, there is a slight resource discrepancy between Plantlife then and RSPB now – we were 30 people working above a fish & chip shop in Belgravia, the RSPB is a £100m operation with over 2000 staff, benefiting from over a million members.

But the principles and approach that we adopted at Plantlife are exactly the same as we adopt at the RSPB today – strive to do whatever nature needs, be clear about your niche and then find innovative ways to inspire action either through your own organisation or with others.

My eleven years at the RSPB have been hugely rewarding as I have increasingly become involved in influencing people to exercise their power for nature both nationally and locally. I reflect on the daily struggles through a blog. I hope it’s informative and occasionally entertaining. For me, it can also be cathartic and an opportunity to share and test ideas.

The state of nature is not improving as fast as we would like, the pressures are growing but I sense a growing solidarity amongst the sector to work together and with business to do more. And, it is seeing the creativity, determination and chutzpah of current colleagues and those that are now joining the sector that gives me optimism that, you know what, we can pass on the natural world in a better state to the next generation.

For more work about the RSPB visit www.rspb.org.uk
You can follow Martin on his blog at www.rspb.org.uk/martinharper

CIEEM Wildlife Training - CIEEM offers numerous training courses around the UK and Ireland related to wildlife, including wildlife law, licensing, invasive species, great crested newts, reptiles, invertebrates, crayfish, otters, beavers, water voles, badgers, dormice, red squirrels, pine marten, Scottish wildcat, bats, barn owls, and others.
http://www.cieem.net/training-events

Borders College in Newtown St Boswells have been at the forefront of re writing and re designing the Game and Wildlife Management award at Higher National Certificate level. The College worked with a number of agencies including the Scottish Qualifications Authority to develop this new award which will run from next August. www.borderscollege.ac.uk
North Shropshire College, Walford Campus, Nr Shrewsbury 01939 262100 www.nsc.ac.uk
We offer an Animal Care L2 full-time course and apprenticeship, Animal Management L3 full-time course and apprenticeship. Part-time courses in dog grooming, vet nursing, and small animal care.

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If you're passionate about a career in wildlife conservation, then studying at Nottingham Trent University can help you succeed. We offer degrees that will equip you with the scientific knowledge, practical skills and enthusiasm to make a difference to the wildlife and habitats we share the world with: www.ntu.ac.uk/wildlifeconservation

The Species Recovery Trust runs a brand programme of wildlife training courses run by several experts. All the proceeds from the courses go to running our conservation programmes, forming the backbone of our work to save some of the UK's rarest plants and animals. More information at www.speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk

Courses in Animal Care, Animal Science, Countryside Management and Vet Nursing. Visit www.sruc.ac.uk/education or email recruitment@sruc.ac.uk for more information. Scotland's Rural College offers courses in locations all over Scotland, as well as by distance learning.

The CJS Team would like to thank everyone who has contributed adverts, articles and information for this CJS Focus publication. Next edition will feature Volunteer Work, published 15/2/16.

A4 sides this CJS Focus: 20 - Details believed correct but given without prejudice, Ends.