BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY CAREERS CONFERENCE, February 2015

A scientific career in an environmental charity

A presentation was given by a scientist from The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (www.rspb.org.uk/forprofessionals/science/research/) on ‘Ecological Not for Profit Careers’ who was working in the organisation’s research section. This summary document on what was presented, with additional information added by the Careers Consultant, contains the following:

1. Speaker biography
2. How research is done in a ‘Not for Profit’
3. The roles on offer and how to get in
4. Further info. on roles and careers in the natural environment
5. Job Hunting Resources

Please Note: The information provided below is transcribed from notes taken during the event. Where possible, links have been provided to relevant online information so that readers can verify the information in this document. Dr Calum Leckie, UCL Careers Consultant

1. Speaker Biography

The speaker said that when they graduated with their first degree it became apparent to them that when they were looking for specialist jobs in ecology, a PhD would be needed (note from CL: this might be a specific issue related to research focused positions). After completing a PhD the speaker then worked for a time in academia in a postdoctoral research role. After this, they worked for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO: http://www.bto.org/) a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that conducts a lot of scientific research.

2. How research is done in a Not for Profit

The RSPB is not just UK-focused but does a lot of international work. Unlike academia, the science done is set by the priorities of the organisation where conservation is the end goal. The speaker said that she spent a lot of time working with policy makers, such as DEFRA: (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs). Because of this you have to translate the science into policy in a way that both internal and external ‘stakeholders’ can relate to. An interesting point was made about the research environment in a ‘not for profit agency’ – due to funding limitations you have much less access to the research literature (in comparison to academia) and also more limiting supporting technology.
3. The roles on offer and how to get in

Ecologists are mainly employed as scientists at the RSPB, and at the moment there are around 60 employed scientists. However, there are many other roles within the organisation such as:

- Land Management Adviser
- Data Stewardship
- Education – support for schools
- Reserves (?)
- Policy and Advocacy

In the research department many are employed as ‘Conservation Scientists’ and most have a PhD qualification. When recruiting for scientists the organisation looks for candidates with a publication record, analytical skills, field work skills and project design and data collection experience.

Other qualities looked for are a drive to see science having an impact beyond academia and evidence of interest in conservation and conservation NGOs.

For ecologists looking to work for a not for profit agency the speaker recommended that you target agencies that are part of the ‘State of Nature’ partnership. This consists of 25 organisations who are ‘involved in the recording, researching and conservation of nature in the UK and its Overseas Territories.


4. Further Info on roles and careers in the natural environment

- Detailed descriptions (including nature of day to day work, entry requirements, career progression, where to find advertised positions) for a number of specific roles in the natural environment can be found on the Prospects careers site at:

  http://www.prospects.ac.uk/environment_agriculture_sector_graduate_jobs.htm.

  Roles described include:

  • Agricultural consultant
  • Arboriculturist
  • Commercial horticulturist
  • Ecologist
  • Environmental consultant
  • Environmental manager
  • Farm manager
  • Fish farm manager
  • Forest/woodland manager
  • Marine scientist
  • Nature conservation officer
  • Recycling officer
  • Soil scientist

  • Careers information is also provided by a number of relevant Professional Bodies: The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, www.cieem.net; The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management, www.ciwem.org; The British Ecological Society: www.britishecologicalsociety.org/careers
5. Job Hunting Resources

**UCL JobOnline**: Use the ‘Animal & Plant Resources’ search term to find job roles / internships that are targeted at university students and recent graduates.

[http://www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/jobs > UCL JobOnline](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/jobs)

Other sites:

- [www.greenroles.co.uk](http://www.greenroles.co.uk)
- [www.endsjobsearch.co.uk](http://www.endsjobsearch.co.uk)
- [www.countryside-jobs.com](http://www.countryside-jobs.com)
- [http://environment.guardian.co.uk](http://environment.guardian.co.uk)