

G. PhD Historical and Philosophical Sciences, 2010

UCL Faculty:

- Social & Historical Sciences

Current role:

- Regional Forest Program Coordinator

Previous role:

- Coordinator of Regional Activities

Sector:

- Charities & NGOs

At the time of this survey, G. had just accepted a position to work at the headquarters of the International Union for Conservation for Nature (IUCN), and was still based in West Central Africa, working as a Regional Forest Program Coordinator for the same organisation.

From 2000 to 2010, G. was mainly based in Gabon and was the Coordinator of Regional Activities for an American botanical garden, a role which involved working in conservation biology, particularly research and training. G. developed the Regional program, opened its national representation, raised funds, and managed and participated in field projects. During her PhD, G. explains that her role with the botanical garden became part-time. After this work, G. also held consultancies in Gabon until 2011. In 2011, G. became the Regional Forest Programme Coordinator for IUCN, based in Cameroon, and worked throughout west and central Africa. In 2012, G. was offered an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Postdoctoral Fellowship, but declined it, due to her job with IUCN.

Through all of her career choices, G. has sought positions which increase her ability to influence conservation practice and policy in large and highly respected organisations.

G.'s conservation work has continued on from her PhD research, which examined a conservation context of the changing political ecology of fire-use in savannahs in Gabon. G. explains that her work had lessons for cultural usage of landscapes and fire management in national parks. While a PhD is not required for her work, G. feels that this PhD study has been essential in her various roles, has given her credibility with stakeholders and presented opportunities for career progression.

G. explains that her prior training as a botanist, followed by her PhD training as an anthropologist has given her a strong interdisciplinary background. In particular, G.'s work with the Department of Anthropology's Human Ecology Research Group (HERG) was essential in helping her understand wider conservation issues as she had come from a strictly biological background. G. maintains an important link with UCL as a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Anthropology which helps bridge the research-policy gap in conservation science by linking research to policy and field situations.

As an expert in the field of African conservation, G. uses transferable skills in understanding complex nature conservation situations, reading French documents, writing and quickly synthesising information, transferring research to policy, interacting with other researchers, managing staff, budgeting, negotiating contracts and meeting donors. Several of her non-technical skills were aided by her PhD, but G. notes that managing staff, budgeting, negotiating contracts and meeting with donors were skills she had learned before obtaining a PhD or using them in her current position. G. explains that, 'PhDs in my field don't prepare people to administrate, they prepare people to understand, synthesise and research.'

In entering employment after completing her PhD, G. was challenged by a 'lack of interview experience and a lack of contacts in the wider field which help in obtaining jobs.' G. explains that she gained her current position with the IUCN 'without any contacts, with a blind application, which was thought by some colleagues to be somewhat rare.'

G. has used several methods to secure positions, which include browsing job websites and advertisements in industry- and sector-specific publications and connecting with personal contacts.

G. advises current PhDs about to enter the employment market in conservation biology to gain experience in managing projects and communicating project results. 'A researcher will have difficulty in applying their results if they do not begin this process prior to or during their PhD.' G. also warns of the risk of leaving the field too early, stating, 'So many people conduct a PhD and that is their only field experience; it is important to continue in the field after.'

Reflecting on her career to date, G. feels those considering a PhD should only do it if they feel they need the training or intend to continue on a career path in research. 'A PhD is not necessarily needed by conservation scientists to do good work.'

Tags:

■ Social & Historical Sciences, Policy, Researcher, Charities & NGOs, Non-Academic