

inpractice

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Training and skills



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Training in species identification is central to the programme. ©NHM

Identification Trainers for the Future – Inspiring the next generation of UK wildlife experts

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The Natural History Museum is one of the world's foremost institutions for the advancement of the natural sciences. The Museum's Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity acts as a centre to promote the appreciation and study of UK natural history and a hub for partnership-based UK natural history engagement, training and research. Through a new project called *Identification Trainers for the Future*, the Centre aims to actively address a critical and growing skills shortage within the UK biodiversity sector: wildlife identification and recording skills. This will be achieved through a number of placements offering early-career ecologists specialist training in species identification and survey, museum curatorial skills, training delivery and broader transferable skills.

Introduction

In recent years CIEEM has been at the forefront of highlighting the ever-increasing skills gap in UK ecological professionals. As we are all aware from

Ecological Skills: Shaping the profession for the 21st Century (IEEM 2011), species identification skills, and the underpinning understanding of taxonomy and systematics, have been in severe decline

within our profession. This is at a time when our natural environment is under extreme pressure from human activities, and the need to monitor change within the UK's biodiversity is increasing. If the UK's wildlife is to be conserved for future generations and important ecosystem functions are to be protected, tremendous challenges must be faced.

Our knowledge of the distribution and abundance of species and habitats, and of how and why these are changing, relies fundamentally on reliable biological recording. In order to document, monitor and understand changes in biodiversity, we need to support people to acquire survey and sampling skills, the ability to accurately identify species, and (for many groups of organisms) techniques for the handling and preservation of reference specimens.

Feature Article: Identification Trainers for the Future – Inspiring the next generation of UK wildlife experts (contd)

As well as being a major collections infrastructure and visitor attraction, the Natural History Museum is a world-leading scientific research institute. The Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity provides a focus for core elements of our UK natural history research, public engagement and training activity. With our expertise in UK species identification, scientific communication and education delivery, and a focus on enhancing and supporting development of UK biodiversity understanding, we find ourselves in a unique position to tackle the skills-decline that is highlighted above.

The Heritage Lottery Fund's Skills for the Future programme has generously sponsored a new 3½-year project named *Identification Trainers for the Future*. Over the next three years, 15 trainees will be given the opportunity to develop their career in the UK biodiversity sector by undertaking a 12-month, work-based training placement at the Natural History Museum. Additional training and workplace experience will be provided through partnerships with the Field Studies Council and the National Biodiversity Network Trust.

Alongside the placements, the project will develop a wide range of freely-available resources. These will include video-based identification and field survey master-classes, downloadable training course materials and keys to selected groups of UK insects and plants. We also hope to encourage dialogue and forge stronger practical links across the UK biodiversity sector, so that we can tackle the ecological skills shortage issue together.



Trainees will develop field survey skills. © NHM



© NHM

The placements

Our trainees will undertake an intensive training programme to equip them with the knowledge and ability to identify a broad range of UK taxonomic groups, as well as the skills to survey and monitor wildlife in the field. The training will include museum curatorial skills relating to the handling and storage of reference specimens, in addition to interpretation and public engagement skills. Crucially, the programme will also develop the communications and training skills that will allow our trainees to pass on their knowledge to others.

Trainees will work with Natural History Museum staff from the Centre for UK Biodiversity, curatorial and Learning and Education teams. They will also spend time with the Field Studies Council, either at one of their various field studies centres around the country, or in their head office or publications department, depending on the trainee's particular areas of interest. Transferable skills including first aid training, networking skills and time management will also be taught.

This holistic programme of training and experience will generate skilled, articulate and employable individuals with specific expertise in biological recording and the ability to work across the natural heritage sector.

Our first round of five trainees will start in March 2015 and applications are open until the 12th December 2014. No age limits are being set for the positions, however pre-requisites are that applicants should have a minimum of 3 A-levels (or equivalent), no more than 6 months paid employment in a sector-relevant position, nor have previously been enrolled in a similar traineeship post. Each trainee will receive a £16,500, tax-exempt, bursary to cover their living costs.

For more information on the project, the placements and how to apply, please see our website www.nhm.ac.uk/idtrainers or email us at IDtrainers@nhm.ac.uk. You can also keep up-to-date with the latest developments with the project, including reports on our trainees progress, via our website and the Natural History Museum's

Reference

IEEM (2011). *Ecological Skills: Shaping the profession for the 21st Century*. Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Chichester. http://www.cieem.net/data/files/Resource_Library/Education/Education-Ecological_Skills_Project_Final_Report.pdf

Twitter feeds

About the Authors



Stephanie West has recently moved to the Natural History Museum as Project Manager for the HLF Identification Trainers for the Future project within the Angela Marmont Centre

for UK Biodiversity. Previously Steph worked as Senior Ecologist for Ecological Planning and Research, as a lecturer in Conservation and Wildlife Management and in Local Government. She has been a member of CIEEM for many years, and has previously served on the Committee for the South East Regional Section.

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John Tweddle is also based at the Natural History Museum, where he is Head of the Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity; a dedicated centre for the collaborative

study of UK natural history (www.nhm.ac.uk/ukbiodiversity) and a hub for knowledge exchange between professional scientists, amateur naturalists and other nature enthusiasts. John has previously worked as an ecologist at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and as a consultant palaeoecologist.

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