



Dorset Wildlife Trust Conservation Skills Programme

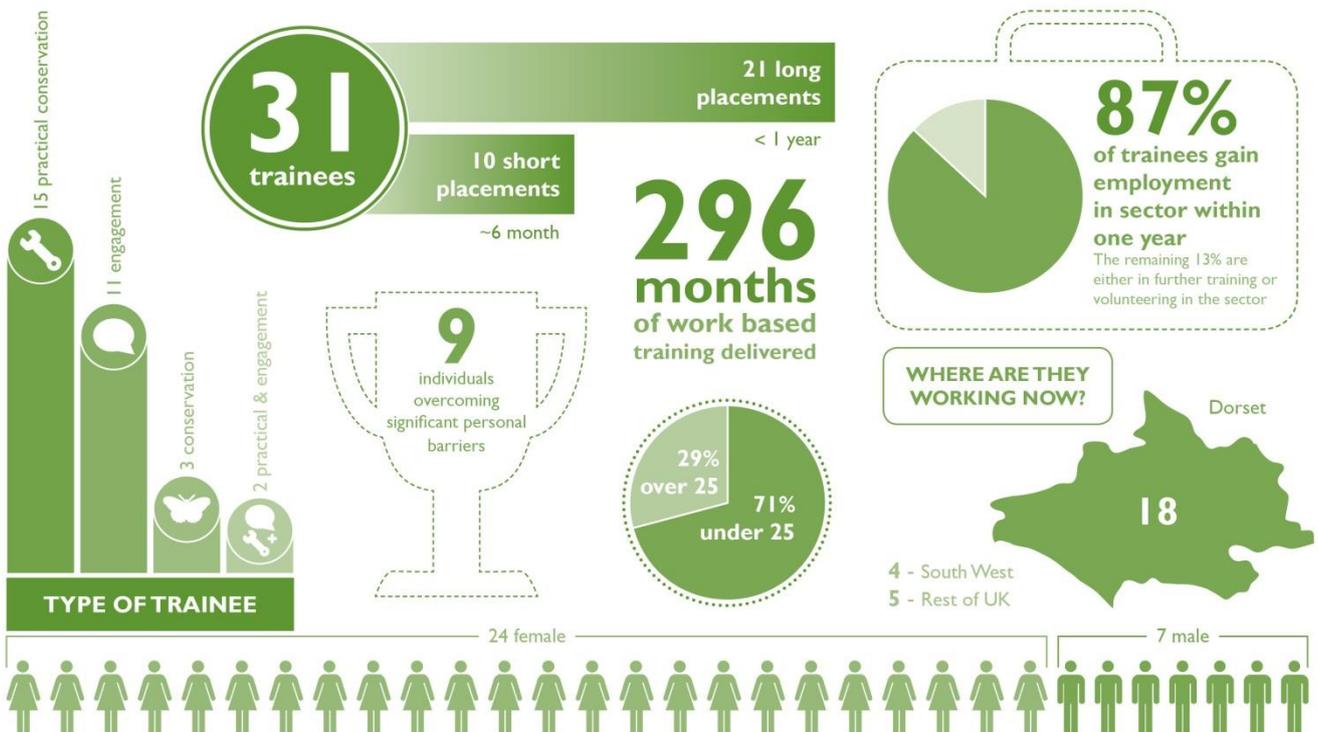
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Evaluation Report February 2016

Executive Summary

The Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) Conservation Skills Programme (2010 to 2015) funded through Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Skills for the Future provided opportunities for 31 individuals to become trained in the skills and knowledge required to pursue a career in practical nature conservation, and to reinforce the practical nature conservation workforce in Dorset. 87% of trainees (27 individuals) gained employment in the sector within 1 year, and 18 of these continue to work within Dorset.

Dorset Wildlife Trust
Conservation Skills Programme 2011 - 2015
 Delivering high quality training for nature conservation in Dorset



1) Introduction and background

The HLF 'Skills for the Future' funding programme was launched in 2009 with the aims of funding high quality work based training opportunities to equip people with the skills to pursue a career in heritage, enhance the capacity of the heritage sector to deliver training and share good practice and to demonstrate the value of heritage skills to modern life. All programmes were expected to deliver all of the following four outcomes:

- Increase the range and quality of work-based training to develop skills in the heritage sector.
- Meet identified skills shortages in the heritage sector.
- Increase the capacity of the sector to deliver training and share good practice.
- Increase the diversity of the heritage workforce.

The experience of DWT in recruiting for practical nature conservation staff had shown that there was a great demand from people from a wide range of backgrounds. These ranged from environment graduates to those without skills, qualifications or experience. A common factor amongst applicants was a lack of practical skills and experience, and whilst graduate level education was not a prerequisite for a career in practical nature conservation, this factor has tipped the recruitment process in favour of graduates. The experience of DWT was reflected in the Lantra Skills Assessment report for the Environmental and Land Based Sector (2009) and the Lantra research Factsheet for Environmental Conservation (labour market information). The nature conservation sector had to some extent become reliant on graduate volunteers committing to long term volunteering as a means of developing practical skills, and often having to pay for their own expensive skills training. This was obviously a major barrier to people with less financial resources from accessing careers in the industry. DWT had found through recent volunteering programmes that there was a desire for young people from non-academic backgrounds or those limited by economic circumstances to find employment in the conservation sector, and wanted to offer an opportunity for such individuals to gain practical conservation skills and assistance in securing jobs.

Hence, in 2010, Dorset Wildlife Trust was awarded £195,300 from HLF (total project cost was £240,992) with the following approved purposes;

- Production of training plan.
- Delivery of at least 12 work based training placements totalling a minimum of 144 months of training in nature conservation in line with the agreed training plan.
- To increase the range and quality of the work based training to develop skills in the heritage sector
- To meet identified skills gaps or shortages in the heritage sector.
- To increase the capacity of the sector to deliver training and share good practice.
- To increase the diversity of the heritage workforce.

A further award from HLF of £156,100 was secured in 2012 to provide an additional 12 work based training placements; so that DWT received an overall grant of £351,400 (total project cost was £415,350).

The main target group for training placements was young people not in employment, education or training in the 16 to 25 years age range, and the programme aimed to reinforce the practical nature conservation workforce in Dorset.

The project focussed on equipping individuals with the key practical skills that are required to enable effective conservation management of the natural heritage and to enable participants to pursue a career in practical nature conservation.



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2) Programme delivery

Recruitment & selection

Over 600 individuals applied to the scheme for the 31 places available. The over-riding principle adopted within the recruitment process was “who would get the most out of this” whilst also balancing the need of the sector to take people on with the capabilities to succeed in meeting the requirements of filling the identified heritage skills gaps. Additional measures were taken to promote the opportunities to young people from disadvantaged and excluded backgrounds using networks established via volunteering activities, the extensive use of social media as well as more traditional routes such as advertisements in Countryside Jobs Service. In order to minimise any perceived barriers to the application process, applications were invited in any form that they individual chose to utilise, with an application form provided as a default if required. Initial selection was based around inviting approx. 40 applicants for 8 training places to attend a shortlisting day. This enabled project staff to informally assess a higher number of potential candidates, and to gain a clear insight into final selection for formal interviews that were held at a later date. This process allowed for candidates that were perhaps not strong in the skill of application writing to still be considered for final selection. The selection and interview process was adapted so that initial sifting of applicants was based on criteria concerning enthusiasm, commitment as much as for skills and qualifications already held. Selection days were designed with emphasis on aptitude, observation and casual discussion rather than purely on formal interviews. Feedback was offered to all unsuccessful candidates. The shortlisting day was also utilised as a training session for all attendees, as only 8 of the 40 would go on to gain traineeships. It was felt prudent therefore, to provide a session on development as part of that day, for the benefit of those that would prove to be unsuccessful in gaining an interview.

Training plan

The training plan developed at the beginning of the programme was delivered via a combination of practical work based training delivered by DWT staff, a range of specialist externally assessed training such as chainsaw and Forest School certification, and accredited training such as the AQA Unit Award Scheme. As well as support from the project management team, each trainee was allocated an individual mentor. As the programme progressed, the importance of the relationship between mentor and trainee became apparent, and the benefits to both parties could begin to be seen.

DWT devised the training plan so that key skills were learnt from 3 main categories:

- Land management skills including hedgelaying, coppicing, stock handling and practical skills such as chainsaw and brushcutter or in the case of engagement role, Forest School qualifications and experience.
- Planning, survey & monitoring skills including species and habitat identification and survey, creation of management plans, wildlife law and the planning process.
- Transferable skills including communications skills, presentation skills, First Aid, Health and Safety as well as assistance with the job application and interview process.

Trainees left placements equipped with both the expected certification and accreditation AND the required work experience to enable them to succeed in securing employment, for example as assistant warden or assistant education officer. Details of the training plan were provided to HLF in November 2010 and are available on request from DWT.

Placement type and length

In year 1, all four placements were a year in length with a focus on Practical Conservation, and all four trainees remained for the complete training year. In year 2, one placement focussed on Community Engagement whilst the other three remained as Practical Conservation. One trainee found employment after approximately 6 months in placement, which gave DWT the opportunity to reflect on whether it was always in the trainees’ interest to stay in placement for the full 12 months. It was concluded that trainees would be encouraged to apply for jobs, and leave the scheme *as soon as they were ready*, and with the agreement of HLF any underspend could be utilised to offer additional training placements.



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From this point, trainee placements became more diverse in focus with a few crossover Practical and Engagement, and Conservation placements being offered. Whilst each traineeship was established as a year-long opportunity, many of the individuals were able to progress into sector employment before reaching the 12 month point. With the extra funding from HLF, and due to an agreed extension on timings to September 2015, DWT in total offered 31 placements between February 2011 and September 2015, instead of the 24 originally planned. Of these 21 were 'long' – up to 12 months in duration, and 10 'short' – around 6 months in duration. Fifteen training placements focussed on Practical Conservation, 10 on Engagement, 3 on Conservation and 2 as a combination of Practical & Engagement. In total, 296 months of work based training were delivered.

The difference made to trainees

Overall, 27 out of the 31 trainees found employment in sector within 1 year of leaving their placement, representing 87 % of the total of individuals benefitting from the programme. Of the remaining four trainees, two have progressed into further training (one into accountancy & one into a further Local Authority traineeship in the conservation sector) and two are still volunteering in the sector. A table showing employment history since finishing their placement of each of the 31 trainees can be found in Appendix I.

When the individual journeys of the trainees are examined, it is apparent that there were a number of common barriers to why they had found it difficult to obtain employment in the sector;

- Lack of formal education in relation to ecology/conservation, although individuals were passionate about entering the sector.
- Lack of practical 'on the job' experience (even though many held formal qualifications).
- Personal financial circumstances preventing them from entering the sector via the traditional route of extensive volunteering.
- Mental health and/or self-confidence issues or other previous health difficulties.

It is also interesting to note that many trainees were under-employed before entering the scheme, working in part time or poorly paid industries.

The five selected case studies at the end of this document show how trainees overcame one or more of these barriers during their time on the scheme.

The difference made to mentors, wider staff and the organisation

Involving 31, mainly young, people into the organisation provided a real opportunity to invest energy into DWT and the conservation sector more widely. There can be an assumption that all benefits in offering traineeships are felt by the trainee only, and the costs borne by the organisation, with little or no benefit to them. However, when we carried out a review of the programme with our mentors, we found that they were overwhelmingly positive about having trainees and gave the following reasons.

- Boosting morale - putting energetic, grateful people into an organisation with 'can-do' attitudes, who just ooze enthusiasm, had a very noticeable effect on the rest of the staff. It acted as a pretty good antidote to jaded thinking and cynicism!
- Innovation – a fresh way of thinking, rather than that established through many years of carrying out the same activity in time honoured fashion. This was particularly noticeable in engagement activities, where trainees were often better equipped to engage with the public than the existing staff were.
- Extra capacity - an extra pair of hands when running a pond dipping day or an extra chainsaw operative when clearing birch was extremely welcome and trainee efforts really made a difference. In some cases, trainees have really taken the lead.
- Bringing new skills - trainees brought with them a whole new set of skills, ideas and innovations to the organisation. For example, with 22 of our trainees being under 25 years of age, they tended to be extremely adept in using social media to communicate. The organisation benefitted from their expertise, as they have helped to promote the Trusts' work via twitter, their blog posts at <https://dorsetwildlifetrust.wordpress.com> and by providing photographs to the communication department.
- Job satisfaction and leadership opportunities – staff appreciated the opportunity to develop their management skills and Nigel Brooks, mentor, reported *"I actually felt like I had helped someone progress in their life and seen them develop. I feel I have contributed and this has been a positive buzz in my job"*.



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- Mentors were proud of how the trainees' confidence had developed, and how the depth of trust in the relationships between them had grown.
- Personal reflection and development - looking after trainees meant that many mentors have reflected on their own communication styles. Mentor Neil Gibson who reported he "*enjoyed the challenge of building the team involving the trainees. I'm proud of the team mucking in and the trainees being part of it*" admitted that he had found communication with an extremely introverted and under-confident trainee a particular personal challenge.
- Training opportunities - joint training opportunities have benefitted staff, for example staff attended in house amphibians, reptiles and dragonfly training days.
- Raising the profile of the organisation - the 31 former trainees act as ambassadors for the organisation as they progress into their careers.

The difference made to the conservation sector

Thanks to the programme twenty seven new highly trained, competent and passionate conservationists are now employed in the sector, several of them filling the specific gaps that were identified in the preparation of the project. Along with other SFF alumni from other schemes, these individuals represent the next generation of senior managers and highly skilled practitioners in the sector, and we have already seen that trainees have gone onto supervisory roles, and excitingly taken on mentoring roles with other trainees or apprentices. DWT aimed to reinforce the nature conservation workforce in the county, and is justly proud to be able to report that 18 former trainees are employed in the county conservation network, with a further 4 still working in the South West. It will be extremely interesting to see how this network of alumni develops in the long term.

Feedback from employers has been excellent, for example Claire Gronow from Moors Valley Country Park reporting "*Moors Valley has employed two DWT trainees to date in Assistant Ranger roles. The training provided them with an excellent grounding in countryside management; good basic practical skills, habitat management knowledge, wildlife surveying and experience of working with volunteers. They have come out of the scheme with a good work ethic and are good team members*".

Chris Glead-Owen from CGO Ecology states "*CGO Ecology has been lucky enough to employ three Skills for the Future trainees, two of whom are now on our permanent staff. We're a small wildlife consultancy, and we have found the scheme to be a rich vein of enthusiastic, well-trained new recruits. Skills for the Future fills a gap in the market between traditional Further Education/Higher Education, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training. Our recruits have come to us with the perfect mix of practical habitat skills, wildlife survey experience, and aptitude for the ecological job market.*"

The programme also provided evidence that it is possible for non-graduates to do well within the conservation sector by entering it via the traineeship route, and to compete successfully with graduates in securing employment. This was largely due to the skill set afforded them during their placements and also to the support provided in identifying and defining transferable skills and experience.

3) Programme review

The Training Programme

The fact that 87 % of trainees have gone into employment in the sector indicates that the programme was successful in getting individuals to where they wanted to go. Key factors in the success of this process were:

- Open recruitment process which allowed people from non-traditional backgrounds to shine.
- Development of good working relationship between mentor and trainee.
- Emphasis on the provision of transferable skills training such as interview techniques and communication skills as much as on land management, planning, monitoring & survey skills.
- Creating Individual Training Plans with each trainee.
- Encouraging trainees to seek employment as soon as they were ready.
- Group dynamic created by having at least 4 trainees within a cohort.
- Emphasis on practical experience and being given responsibility for activities or project when ready building trainees' confidence.



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Early in the programme, there were some areas of concern which had to be addressed including:

- Over reliance on trainees for weekend working by some staff in the early days of the programme.
- Occasional poor relationship or misunderstandings between mentor and trainee eg at Kingcombe.
- Trainees in different placements comparing their experiences and feeling they were missing out in some way.
- Health and Safety provision for new inexperienced individuals in the workplace had to be addressed via revising procedures and risk assessments.

Achieving these benefits has required a lot of hard work and dedication on the part of the staff involved. Especially in the first few months, trainees require quite considerable one to one input, which can put pressure on mentors' own workloads, but as mentors increased their own confidence, solutions were put in place to ease this. Having young or inexperienced people in an organisation can present some new challenges with regards to health and safety procedures, which have required careful thought and offering training such as personal effectiveness and time management has filled some gaps in the trainees' skill base, which we hadn't initially anticipated.

If the DWT programme had not been funded, it is reasonable to assess that a proportion of the 31 trainees may have eventually entered the conservation workforce after further volunteering and/or self-funding of qualifications, perhaps over a number of years. However, there would have been a lower number of new workers, and also the feedback from trainees and employers does overwhelmingly suggest that they would not have been as highly skilled or emotionally well-equipped to successfully bolster the industry.

Assessment against original HLF aims

- *increase the range and quality of work-based training to develop skills in the heritage sector*
A robust and replicable training model and programme within DWT has been formulated that can be adapted for future use, or by other organisations. There has been a step change within DWT so that there is now an ethos of mentoring and passing on skills to trainees, volunteers and other staff.
- *meet identified skills shortages in the heritage sector*
DWT had previously identified that lack of practical skills and experience was meaning that it was difficult to recruit high quality staff at assistant warden or ranger level. The fact that 27 out of 31 trainees found employment within the sector quickly (within one year of completion, and in some cases before the year was up) shows that their skills were widely in demand. Trainees have been consistently at the top of the pile and have secured interviews readily.
- *increase the capacity of the sector to deliver training and share good practice*
DWT prepared a paper concerning their experiences of recruitment and selection and this circulated early in the scheme, so that other projects were able to make use of lessons learnt in Dorset. DWT staff have participated in HLF workshops on sharing good practice and given presentations regarding the scheme to The Wildlife Trusts. DWT formed a partnership with Devon, Wiltshire and Somerset Wildlife Trusts to share their experience and successfully applied to HLF for a funding to deliver a four county side training programme for 46 trainees, Wildlife Skills, which started in 2014. DWT have most recently advised West Sussex and Hampshire Wildlife Trusts regarding setting up and running training programmes. The use of AQA accreditation to support training delivered in-house, has been taken forward widely within DWT and is now also used extensively in support of the Trust volunteering programme.
- *increase the diversity of the heritage workforce*
Of the 31 individuals who benefitted from training placements, 22 were under 25, 25 were female and 7 male. None of the trainees identified themselves as disabled, however several did disclose during training that they have experienced mental or physical health difficulties and low confidence or self-esteem. Nine of our trainees were regarded as having overcome significant personal barriers whether that was overcoming a health difficulty, breaking into a new industry with little or no experience or overcoming a financial barrier to gaining enough skills and 'on the job' experience.



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Within DWT there is little or no perception that women are unable to carry out physical conservation work such as chainsawing, and nine of the 15 practical trainees were female. However, there are still some areas of the industry where this would be considered unusual. One female trainee secured a job with a medium-sized countryside contractor firm on leaving DWT, who had never previously employed a woman in this role, and it was reported back to DWT that she 'held her own' and indeed, was easily able to step up to the position of team leader as and when required.

Cost benefit analysis

In 2010, DWT was awarded £195,300 (out of total of £240,992) and then a further £156,100 (out of total of £174,408) in 2012 giving a total of £351,400 (£415,400 total project). This was intended to fund 24 placements in total, each of 12 months in duration, ie delivering 288 months of work based training, at a unit cost of £1442 per training month or £17,308 per trainee.

Because DWT actively encouraged trainees to move to employment as soon as they were ready, underspends actually allowed 31 placements to be offered, and a total of 296 months of work based training were delivered. Hence the unit cost per trainee was £13,400, but because of the differing lengths of placement the unit cost per month of training is a more useful measurement. This is calculated as £1403, which includes the £800 bursary payment.

Volunteer support

The project attracted considerable volunteer support, contributing £22,500 in kind, mainly focussed on administrative support in the office and driving the minibus. There were some limited training opportunities delivered by volunteers such as dragonfly identification and winter twig identification.

4) Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions from the programme;

- The opportunity for trainees to gain a long and continuous period of 'on the job' experience was highly beneficial to them.
- The combination of extensive work based training and specialist qualifications has been proven to equip individuals with the skills required to enter and succeed in the conservation sector.
- Individuals who had been prevented from following the traditional long term volunteering route into conservation due to lack of financial support were able to access the industry because of a bursary being offered, enabling them to gain the practical experience they needed.
- Self-confidence was commonly the biggest barrier for trainees to get over, and extensive time investment in soft skills, such as job applications, successful presentations and personal effectiveness training definitely paid off in securing paid roles for trainees.
- Individuals who previously did not hold formal qualifications performed as well in training as those with, for example, a degree in a relevant subject and there is no significant difference in their ability to secure employment.
- Selection procedures based on aptitude testing for a variety of conservation roles was an extremely powerful tool in identifying individuals who will excel in the sector, regardless of their academic backgrounds.

Recommendations from the programme to consider when running similar schemes;

- The relationship between mentor and trainee is vital in ensuring positive outcomes. With this in mind, mentors should be carefully selected and training invested in them. Mental health awareness, confidence building and working with people with disabilities are all areas that perhaps conservation sector workers are not necessarily very experienced in, and additional training for mentors in these skills would be beneficial.
- Starting a training placement with a structured programme, followed by a period covered by an Individual Training Plan after personal review, works well for trainees to make the most of the opportunity, without being too onerous on the organisation.
- Not all trainees needed one year to get to the point when they were ready for employment, and so a range of length and types of training placements is recommended. Such flexibility in a scheme, maybe also including



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part time placements, would also increase the accessibility of the programme to individuals who, for financial or other reasons, could not commit to a full year.

- Broader recruitment and selection procedures so that non-graduates and those without technical backgrounds can show their potential should be more broadly utilised in the sector as a whole, for all roles – not just traineeships. This will result in new skills and experiences being brought to the industry from a wider cross section of our community, for example this has already been demonstrated by some of our 'transition' trainees who brought ideas from their roles in other industries. This method has been well received and adopted by other organisations.

The DWT Conservation Skills Programme has left a number of legacies;

- A network of thirty-one, mainly young, skilled and experienced new workers in the heritage sector, who are already showing how they can influence and shape conservation work in Dorset and beyond.
- The integration of trainees into the fabric of teams has become the cultural norm within DWT.
- The value to the organisation has been clearly demonstrated, which has resulted in a groundswell of support in DWT for the organisation to continue the delivery of high quality training. DWT are considering a number of options including direct funding of traineeships when funds allow, and will be pursuing external funding to enable a further structured programme to continue.
- The experience and lessons learnt from this programme have been shared and utilised to establish a partnership project between four Wildlife Trusts; Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire. This partnership was successful in obtaining HLF second round Skills for the Future funding for a regional wide training programme called Wildlife Skills for 46 trainees, which started in 2014.

5) Evaluation methodology

A number of resources were used to measure changes and to produce this evaluation report including;

- Individual training plans and reviews.
- End of placement reports.
- Exit interviews.
- Face to face, email and telephone interviews with mentors and trainees.
- Video evidence.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Details of 31 Dorset Wildlife Trust trainees and their employment history after placement

Case Study 1 – Jess Tilley

Case Study 2 – Jake White

Case Study 3 – Claire Thackwray

Case Study 4 – Nikki Hesketh-Roberts

Case Study 5 – Emma Godden



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APPENDIX 1

Details of 31 Dorset Wildlife Trust trainees and their employment history after placement

Type of traineeship	Employment status	All roles since completing training (most recent last)	Paid employment in sector within 1 year	Year in which placement completed
Practical	employed	Ecological survey work in Scotland	Yes	2012
Practical	self-employed	Runs own countryside services business	Yes	2012
Practical	in training	trainee accountant	No	2012
Practical	employed	Self-employed contractor on grassland restoration, Portland; Grazing Animals Officer, Poole Borough Council; Ranger for Christchurch and East Dorset Council	Yes	2012
Practical	self-employed	Runs own countryside services business	Yes	2013
Practical	employed	Countryside Warden, Stanpit Marsh Nature Reserve; Assistant Ecologist, Lindsay Carrington Consultants, Dorset	Yes	2013
Engagement	self-employed	Education Officer, Dorset Wildlife Trust; now runs own Forest School business in Dorset	Yes	2013
Practical	employed	Assistant Ranger at Moors Valley Country Park; Ranger for the National Trust in the New Forest (part funded by HLF)	Yes	2013
Practical	employed	Inland Team Assistant Ranger with Dorset County Council; Occupational Therapy Assistant, Dorset County Hospital	Yes	2014
Engagement	employed	Marine Aquarium, Midlands	Yes	2014
Engagement	employed	Education & Engagement Officer, National Trust, Dorset	Yes	2014
Practical	self-employed	Ran own horticultural and countryside services business; Lulworth Estate Worker, Dorset	Yes	2014
Engagement	self-employed	Independent Photographer and Illustrator	Yes	2014
Practical	employed	Studland Marine Warden, National Trust; National Trust, West Sussex	Yes	2014



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Type of traineeship	Employment status	All roles since completing training (most recent last)	Paid employment in sector within 1 year	Year in which placement completed
Practical & Engagement	employed	National Trust, Learning Officer, Dorset; Sir Harold Hiller Gardens Education Assistant; RSPB Little Tern Project Assistant; Wildlife Supporter Officer & Engagement Officer, Dorset Wildlife Trust	Yes	2014
Engagement	employed	Education Officer, Butterfly Conservation Dorset; Community Conservation Officer DWT- part of the HLF The Great Heath team	Yes	2014
Practical	employed	Community Engagement in Conservation, Spain; Dorset County Council, recycling & waste management	Yes	2014
Practical	employed	General Operative with Knighton Countryside; Estate Worker and Volunteer Co-ordinator, Upton Country Park, Poole Borough Council	Yes	2014
Practical	employed	Estate Worker, Greenmantle, Somerset; Community Conservation Officer DWT - part of the HLF The Great Heath team	Yes	2014
Practical	employed	Practical conservation contractor, CGO consultants Dorset	Yes	2014
Practical & Engagement	employed	Seasonal Wildlife Ranger for National Trust for Scotland; Practical conservation contractor, CGO consultants Dorset; Habitats Management Operative for Morton: Pattison	Yes	2014
Conservation	employed	DWT Conservation Officer; Ecologist, CGO Consultants	Yes	2014
Engagement	employed	Conservation Assistant Radnorshire Wildlife Trust & Assistant Conservation Officer, DWT; Visitor Welcome & Membership Team, National Trust Wimpole Estate	Yes	2014



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Type of traineeship	Employment status	All roles since completing training (most recent last)	Paid employment in sector within 1 year	Year in which placement completed
Engagement	employed	RSPB residential volunteer in Kent; Field Officer for Fixing & Linking Our Wetlands (Manhood Wildlife & Heritage Group)	Yes	2015
Engagement	volunteering	Volunteer organising seal survey in Dorset & education role for DWT	No	2015
Conservation	volunteering	Residential volunteer, Aigas, Glencoe, Scotland	No	2015
Conservation	employed	Grassland project education officer; Catchment Technician Wessex Water	Yes	2015
Engagement	employed	Conservation Officer, Community Seagrass Initiative (HLF funded), Weymouth	Yes	2015
Engagement	employed	Wildfowl & Wetland Trust Assistant, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire	Yes	2015
Practical	in training	Dorset County Council Apprenticeship, Avon Country Park	No	2015
Engagement	employed	Education role for Norfolk Consultancy	Yes	2015



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Case Study I – Jess Tilley

Practical Conservation Trainee 2011/12



"I thought I was stuck in a career of office work, and I am so thankful for the opportunity to get away from that into my dream job of being a Ranger"

"It's such a great feeling to know that I'm able to play my part in ensuring that our rural heritage is not lost"

"I absolutely loved my training year, and learnt so much from everyone"

Jess was one of the 2011 trainees, and was working as an office temp when she got the call to confirm that she had been accepted as one of the first trainees of the new programme. She threw herself into her training year with huge amounts of enthusiasm and a smile that never left her face! She took on personal challenges and projects including building a boardwalk and bridge. Jess had no formal education in conservation prior to the traineeship, but gained the following formal qualifications during her placement:

NPTC:	CS30, CS31, PA1, PA6AW, Clearance Saw
LANTRA:	Brushcutter, abrasive wheels, Basic Tree survey and inspection
CIEH:	First Aid, Health and Safety, Manual Handling
Dorset Training:	Clearing Saw Operation, Cattle health, welfare and handling

Jess was described by Steve Davis, Programme Manager as “Her outgoing and highly personable nature complementing a real love for the natural environment provides Jess with all the skills and qualities to be highly successful in a people and wildlife type role. She would be equally suited to a warden role, as her thirst for work and adaptability coupled with her considerable skills set makes her stand out as the ideal individual for the demands of this work”.

Jess initially worked as a self-employed conservation contractor, before progressing into a role as Grazing Animals Officer for Poole Borough Council. She is now working as a Ranger for Christchurch and East Dorset Council.



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Case Study 2 – Jake White

Practical Conservation Trainee 2012



“I learnt so much working day-to-day as part of the team”

“I really appreciated having the opportunity to get to know about working in lots of different habitats, and learning about wetland and heathland restoration techniques”

Jake held a degree in a relevant subject, but lacked the practical conservation skills and experience he needed to gain employment in the sector. He had been volunteering with DWT when he could, but even regular volunteering does not provide specialised and expensive training, and it was difficult for Jake to take on the level of responsibility needed to help him progress. Jake jumped at the chance to get ‘on-the-job’ experience as a trainee within the Mid Dorset team, and quickly became a valued member of the team. He gained the following formal qualifications:

NPTC:	CS30, CS31, PA1, PA6AW, Clearance Saw
LANTRA:	Brushcutter, abrasive wheels
CIEH:	First Aid, Health and Safety, Manual Handling
Dorset Training:	Clearing Saw Operation

Steve Davis, Programme Manager, described Jake as *“an honest and industrious worker who has impressed me with his determination to carry out his training and consolidation work to an exceptionally high standard. Jake has a flair for working with others, his keen sense of humour combining well with his eye for details and his motivation in including everyone in achieving the aim of a job well done. He has all the qualities required for a role in management in the future”*

Jake left his traineeship before the year was up, as he gained employment as an Assistant Ranger at Moors Valley Country Park. He has subsequently gone on to become a Community Ranger for the National Trust in the New Forest, and is also the Project Manager for the Foxbury Heathland restoration project, which is also funded by HLF.



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Case Study 3 – Claire Thackwray

Practical Conservation Trainee 2013/14



“Without the opportunity offered to me by DWT, I doubt I would have managed to fund further qualifications”

“Before being accepted for the traineeship I had started to doubt that I would establish myself in the conservation sector. By the time I had gotten half way through the training year, I had begun to believe that I could make it happen”

Claire held a relevant formal qualification, but as a single mum to two boys, she had found it incredibly difficult to afford to access employment in the conservation sector via the traditional volunteering route. Claire threw herself into a practical conservation role with the Mid Dorset team.

NPTC:	CS30, CS31, PA1, PA6AW,
LANTRA:	Brushcutter,
CIEH:	First Aid, Health and Safety, Manual Handling

Claire also reported, *“The traineeship offered me an amazing opportunity to develop skills and gain qualifications in practical conservation. The time and support offered to me by my mentor and DWT as a whole meant that I could develop a broad range of skills and really tailor my experiences to compliment my career aims. Aside from the practical elements of the training, a lot of the exercises helped me develop confidence in other areas that have led to me successfully finding employment. Learning how to write a really good application, honing my C.V and gaining some interview skills certainly went a long way! I went from being someone that hated the idea of public speaking to now regularly giving guided walks. I can honestly say being offered the training opportunity has made all the difference to being able to successfully begin a career in conservation”*.

Neil Gibson, Claire’s mentor said *“The SFF programme gave Claire a massive confidence boost that she could actually make it in this industry, despite the limitations of her personal circumstances. It also gave her all the practical skills needed”*.

Claire worked as a General Operative with Knighton Countryside on completion of her traineeship, and then secured employment as Estate Worker and Volunteer Co-ordinator, Upton Country Park, Poole Borough Council.



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Dorset Wildlife Trust Conservation Skills Programme

Case Study 4 – Nikkii Hesketh-Roberts

Practical Conservation Trainee 2012/13



“The Skills for the Future programme provided training and opportunities for me that I otherwise would not have been able to access”

“During my year as a trainee I enjoyed working in the countryside, seeing lots of different habitats and species and developing my identification skills”

“I also liked putting the chainsaw and brushcutter training into practice, working with volunteers and corporate groups and giving talks and guided walks”

Nikkii worked in corporate offices for many years, volunteering at weekends. She then left to pursue a volunteer project in the Amazon and when she returned put all efforts into changing her career. She volunteered with DWT for 8 months and took an admin role that came up, then when the traineeship with the Urban & East Dorset team came up she jumped at it.

NPTC:	CS30, CS31, PA1, PA6AW,
LANTRA:	Brushcutter, abrasive wheels
CIEH:	First Aid, Health and Safety, Manual Handling

Nikkii reports that “The traineeship really helped to increase my confidence and self-belief and as a consequence I am now firmly established in my career as an ecologist which I love. I’m always available with the chainsaw if any countryside management jobs need doing, and I’d love to somehow combine my current position with countryside management”.

“I gained brilliant first-hand experience of working within the sector. I actually got to lead group out on the reserves and found it was the best way to learn. I also had lots of fun, working outside in all seasons and all weather! Skills for the Future was an absolutely amazing opportunity to gain real practical qualifications that make you stand out from other applicants when applying for jobs. It truly bridges that skills gap that is usually unattainable without massive self-funding and how do you do that when you don’t have a job?! I feel very lucky to have been able to get a place”.

After successfully completing her traineeship, Nikkii was quickly able to gain employment in the sector as a Countryside Ranger. She has since moved into an ecologist role with a local Dorset company.



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Case Study 5 – Emma Godden

Practical & Engagement Trainee 2013/14



“I did my best to make a positive contribution to DWT’s work whilst a trainee and benefitted from the chance to improve my CV tremendously and that’s what makes the SFF programme so attractive. I would urge anyone thinking of applying to such schemes to do so”

Emma (second from right, above) had a background in working in direct marketing, but she realised that she needed to change her lifestyle and work with nature to combat depression and anxiety. Emma has blogged extensively about her personal journey at thewiseonewonders.wordpress.com. When Emma applied to the programme, she stated “having recently made several applications I still lack experience and qualifications to get interviews for paid positions. This scheme would help make me more employable and is valuable for the financial support it offers that I would otherwise not have if volunteering”. Emma identified early on that she wanted a broad based training experience covering both engagement and practical aspects, so spent the first 6 months of her placement based at the DWT Fine Foundation Marine Centre at Kimmeridge primarily working in engagement, and the final 6 months living and training on Brownsea Island in a practical conservation role.

NPTC:	CS30, CS31
LANTRA:	Brushcutter,
CIEH:	First Aid, Health and Safety, Manual Handling Forest School Level 2

Emma also said about her training year “It’s been marvelous! I have indeed been ‘living the life I please’ and ‘doing the best I can’, in training roles that I have thoroughly enjoyed this past year, whilst acquiring new skills and making the most of every opportunity that has come my way and I have never been happier”.

Emma has gone on to work as a National Trust, Learning Officer, for Sir Harold Hillier Gardens as Education Assistant, as RSPB Little Tern Project Assistant and most recently as Wildlife Supporter Officer & Engagement Officer for DWT.



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