



*“I started off volunteering with Somerset Wildlife Trust as much as I could, however, working part time so I could study and volunteer meant that I had no spare change to get the industry ‘tickets’ needed to find a job in conservation. The traineeship came along at the perfect time. It meant that I could get invaluable on the job experience and some industry qualifications as well.”*

*“My mentor was brilliant at teaching me the ins and outs of conservation and passing on knowledge you can only get by being in the industry. The traineeship taught me so much more than just practical skills. It built my self-confidence and made me believe that forging a career in conservation is possible. I went home every day feeling like I had made a positive difference to our wildlife.”*

*“Being a quiet, introverted person, the traineeship really helped me to come out of my shell. Leading volunteer groups was something I wasn’t particularly looking forward to. I actually thoroughly enjoyed talking with the volunteers and it helped me to be more confident talking to large groups of people.”*

Steve had previously had a career in hospitality where he managed pubs and events. Knowing that this wasn’t his passion nor what he wanted to for the rest of his life he sought to change that. He always had a love for nature and the outdoors. After spending some time travelling, Steve cemented that passion and decided that he’d like to work outside. He started the journey into conservation by doing a DipHE Environment Science with the Open University. It was during some residentials that he did some conservation/surveying work and decided that he wanted to work with wildlife and conservation charities.

Steve hit the ground running when he started the traineeship and couldn’t get enough of being out on reserves doing practical work. The physicality of the work was tough to begin with, but soon got easier as he’s physical ability increased. The Traineeship was a genuine life changer for Steve, and he feels he would not have the quality of life he does now without it.

<b>Formal Achievements</b>	
Lantra	Brushcutters, 4X4 Off Road Driving
NPTC	CS30/31 Chainsaw Crosscutting, Maintenance and Felling
Highfield	Level 3 Emergency First Aid
AQA	Hedgelaying, Post and Rail Fencing, Stockproof Fencing, Volunteer Management, Leading a Group, Communicating Through the Media, Looking and Conservation Grazing, Dry Stone Walling, Coppicing, Winter Tree ID.

**Where are they now?** After the traineeship Steve started working for a nature reserves contracting business. working for various conservation charities such as Somerset Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation Trust, National Trust and Natural England, carrying out a lot of practical conservation work on their reserves and developing strong working relationships with these organisations. Steve was, though, keen to work for a South West Wildlife Trust and in September 2021, started working as an Assistant Warden for Devon Wildlife Trust.



*“Wild Paths gave me the opportunity I needed to prove to myself I am worthy to work in the conservation sector and that I can excel in the field when given the chance.”*

*“I took to the practical tasks naturally and found an affinity with working out on the land. I also found myself drawn to the wellbeing work that Avon Wildlife Trust was doing and that has brought me to where I am at now.”*

*“I feel like Wild Paths has helped me to follow my intuition and dreams of living in a way that aligns with my values. It’s also given me the skills and confidence I needed to begin my journey into the world of conservation work.”*

Before Wild Paths, Ainsley was into conservation but couldn't seem to get a job in the field of UK conservation. He graduated from university studying Zoology in 2015 and did various volunteer conservation work abroad but found that was financially unsustainable. After years of applications and getting nothing, Ainsley sort of gave up on trying to find work in conservation and worked in bars, restaurants, warehouses and offices. The year leading up to Wild Paths he had 5 different jobs but each job he found didn't fulfil him so he continued to move on. Directly before getting the Wild Paths placement Ainsley was working in finance (but says he has no idea how he had no background in this!) and was so pleased to be able to quit that job and move on to doing something that aligned with his values.

#### **FORMAL ACHIEVEMENTS**

Lantra: Brushcutter

NPTC: Chainsaw certificates CS30 Chainsaw maintenance and cross-cutting and CS31 Felling small trees up to 380mm.

Highfield: Emergency First Aid at Work

AQA: Coppicing Woodland Shrubs & Trees, Introduction to Conservation Grazing, Introduction to Livestock Checking, Looking, Introduction to Woodland Management for Nature Conservation, Volunteer Management: Working with Volunteers, Emotional and Mental Well-being, Hedgelaying, Leading a Group, Leading a Guided Walk, Working with Children and Young People in Conservation, Constructing a Post and Rail Fence, Constructing a Stock Proof Fence

**Where are they now?** The traineeship was cut short because of lockdown and Ainsley struggled a little during lockdown to find the right path going forward. After lots of thought he found himself drawn to study Ecopsychology with Natural Academy. Having finishing this course he began running workshops on natural mindfulness and nature connection with an aim of empowering people and improving their wellbeing. Ainsley lived in a small community on the land of Embercombe in Devon, assisting with the maintenance of the site and the land here and also volunteered with Somerset Wildlife Trust, delivering their wellbeing program based on the 5 pathways to nature connection. Since then, Ainsley has been employed by the Avon Wildlife Trust as Reserves Manager with duties covering 'My Wild City' and management of Bennett's Patch & Whites Paddock, Brandon Hill.



*“Our traineeship programme was so full and varied; that is the wonderful diversity of the conservation industry.”*

*“The practical skills that I developed throughout have been invaluable along with the confidence I now have in leading volunteer groups and engaging with the public; something that I thought I would most likely struggle to feel comfortable doing...not so! I have loved my time doing great work for our wildlife. The benefits that our work does for nature is rewarded ten-fold by what nature gives us back.”*

*“You really can be a trainee at any age (being in my 50’s, a grandparent - I should know!) And you never stop learning. So, I would urge anyone thinking they would like to do something similar to just go for it, you have nothing to lose and an awful lot to gain.”*

Caroline had a previous career in administration, legal, finance and HR but, being fortunate to have grown up on her parents’ small farm and having experienced an idyllic childhood, knew ultimately that this wasn’t what she wanted her whole life to consist of. After some significant life events, Caroline decided it was time to follow her heart.

Caroline first applied for the traineeship in 2018 but was unsuccessful so she volunteered for Devon Wildlife Trust, which she found helped her get to know the type of work involved and cemented her desire for a career in nature and the outdoors even more. She advises others not to give up if you are not successful in securing a placement first time round. Caroline continued to work evenings to supplement the bursary and found the traineeship very flexible. Caroline has found her stress levels greatly reduced from spending more time out of the office and in our beautiful countryside, and says the traineeship has already brought many benefits into her life.

#### **FORMAL ACHIEVEMENTS**

Lantra:	Brushcutter (undertaken during Caroline’s initial volunteering).
NPTC:	Chainsaw certificates CS30 Chainsaw maintenance and cross-cutting and CS31 Felling small trees up to 380mm.
Highfield:	Emergency First Aid at Work.
AQA Award:	Volunteer Management, Leading a Work Group, Coppicing, Hedgelaying, Constructing a Stock Proof fence/Post and Rail Fence, Community Engagement & Inclusion, Woodland Management, Conservation Grazing, Livestock Checking (Looking), Leading a Guided Walk, Creating Wildlife Ponds, Wildlife Gardening, Working with Children and Young People in Conservation, Dry Stone Walling, Emotional and Mental Well-Being, Communication Through the Media.

**Where are they now?** Seven months into her training, Caroline was successful in obtaining a position within Devon Wildlife Trust as part of the Working Wetlands team as an Advisory Officer in the Tamar catchment. Caroline’s role aims to improve the quality and extent of semi-natural habitats and ecosystem services, such as water and soils, making best use of nature-based solutions. Caroline visits farmers and landowners to see what advice and help can be offered and says, *“My learning is definitely still in full swing, and I will be looking to undertake further formal qualifications to progress in the role alongside my own continual learning. I still pinch myself, it’s wonderful!”*

## Case Study – Claire Hollingsworth

## Somerset Trainee (2021-22)



*“I wasn’t sure it would be possible at my age to start a whole new career in conservation, but when I saw the Wild Paths scheme, I knew I had to go for it. It was the perfect opportunity to gain invaluable experience and qualifications to boost my CV. “*

*“It was fantastic to have a training budget which enabled me to get the key industry ‘tickets’ I needed for future employment, but just as important was working alongside experienced reserves staff – they really helped build my confidence with the practical elements of the role. By the end of the traineeship, I felt competent and capable of taking on a reserves assistant role. I absolutely loved working on the reserves and every day I came home exhausted but happy.”*

*“The traineeship is a great thing to do if you are starting a career in conservation. You will get all the skills that you need for the industry, support from some wonderful people and it’s an opportunity to work for the one of the best conservation organisations in the country.”*

Claire decided on a complete career change after she was made redundant from a long-held career in NHS analytics. Having always loved nature and being outdoors, she resolved not to return to an office-based job. She took the first steps towards a career in conservation by volunteering for a local community trust and taking some short online courses such as plant ID and badger surveying. At the start of the traineeship, Claire had to adjust quickly to the new working environment and physical demands of the job but soon felt like a valuable member of the team. One of her main positive experiences was learning to use a chainsaw and getting plenty of practice with woodland thinning and tree safety works. She also thoroughly enjoyed working with the livestock at Chancellors Farm whilst assisting with TB testing and livestock check. This was a unique experience that helped develop a practical understanding of working with cattle.

### FORMAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Lantra: Brushcutter  
NPTC: Chainsaw certificates CS30 Chainsaw maintenance and cross-cutting and CS31 Felling small trees up to 380mm.  
Highfield: Emergency First Aid at Work.  
AQA Award: Volunteer Management, Leading a Work Group, Coppicing, Hedgelaying, Constructing a Stock Proof fence/Post and Rail Fence, Community Engagement & Inclusion, Woodland Management, Conservation Grazing, Livestock Checking (Looking), Leading a Guided Walk, Creating Wildlife Ponds, Wildlife Gardening, Working with Children and Young People in Conservation, Dry Stone Walling, Emotional and Mental Well-Being, Communication Through the Media.

Claire is now working for Yeovil Rivers Community Trust as a project officer carrying out restoration works and enhancements to local rivers and ponds. She is enjoying working in partnership with other charities and local landholders and on community engagement projects helping to deliver nature-based volunteering activities. She is planning to keep her land management and chainsaw skills current by volunteering with Somerset Wildlife Trust.