

Placement Reflective Log

The placement accomplished was done with Purbeck National Trust based in Dorset between the 15th of June and 27th July 2016.

During this time I worked with leading property ecologists on the Purbeck National Trust estates including Godlingston Heath, Hartland Moor, Slepe Heath, and the extended Studland Peninsula.

A vital part in the process of conservation is learning to network with those individuals who have skill sets or a particular area of expertise in a field of ecology not known by yourself. Every Thursday, one of the leading property ecologists and I would meet with a botany group at one of the many large sites owned by the National Trust. The function of the Botany group was voluntary, and its purpose, to complete a survey of each site so as to build a database of all the flora species for the summer period. This served to identify the biodiversity of each site, whilst providing a regional context for species distribution amongst the National trust estates. This was insightful because I had learned to identify many species from the volunteers and navigation of field guides. These skills were then heavily relied upon during my summer dissertation data collection, and also are incredibly useful when carrying out habitat assessments, which are frequently done by Natural England and other conservation based organisations.

During office days, I would combine my initiative and knowledge of Arc GIS to produce maps of species distribution such as the Purbeck mason wasp, which is endangered and only found in the Isle of Purbeck from the entire United Kingdom. This map showed the Historical distribution of the species dating back to the late 19th Century and was incredibly valuable to the National Trust in determining the species most valuable nesting sites and ancestral regions in the Studland Peninsula. In assessing this map, the National Trust could make informed conservation based management decisions to help protect the remaining nest sites of this species, and to enhance its habitat to encourage population increase and species range extension to other sites.

The Head Property Ecologist had asked of me to carry out some research on S41 listed Moth species that were found at a Studland moth survey. In doing this research I expanded my knowledge and capacity of interest to Moth species. A key part to employment in field ecology is having a well-defined generalist knowledge of different species, and so this research as well as botany work has furthered this.

The National Trust trained me how to use the Living Record online database. This online resource allows ecologists of all abilities to add a siting of a particular species to an aerial photographic map with the use of a grid coordinate and date. Over time, this database builds and allows organisations such as the National Trust to see variation of species data temporally throughout time, and spatially through distribution. Again, this allows for informed conservation decisions based on data collected and submitted online by all members of this online database.

In using the Living Record online database, I have now mapped and plotted extensive tracts of biodiversity for botanical species across Hartland Moor, Slepe Heath, Godlingston Heath, and Worth Matravers coastline. This was part of a project completed by one of the National trust volunteers to map the entirety of Purbecks flora. Part of the process in networking is transferring skills and creating records for future generations of ecologists to work with and so, in digitizing the mapped flora of Purbeck I have played a part in this process.

In preparation for and during the placement I made it a priority to research the National Trust Conservation Directorate, which educated on the National trust owned estates, included habitats, conservation techniques, risks to conservation techniques, the historical value of the estates, and the future aims and objectives for those estates. This was beneficial as the management plans for each of the National Trust owned estates highlighted key species of conservation interest including the Purbeck Mason Wasp, which is a species I am working on in my dissertation. Not only this, but to read about and experience the combined opportunities and challenges faced by the Industry of field Ecology, reinforced my respect and aptitude for the range, complexity and responsibility of decisions being made to ensure the best case scenario for all projects ensues. A highlight personally is the different outlook of academic research to industry based research; How academic decision making is inferred by correlation and trends in data within a hypothetical setting, whereas industry decision output is greatly dependent on available resources in making decisions, such as funding, exploitable work force (- with reliance on volunteers -), community cooperation, and limiting legislation.

Time management has also been a skill I have honed since my time at the National Trust. As I do not have a car, I had to rely on an hourly public transport service to get to and from the placement, which meant leaving an hour before the working day in order to get to the placement early and make a lasting impression.

In Summary, I have learned and expanded many transferable skills, which are vital to the Industry of field ecology. For example; improving and expanding Identification skills, increasing my skills in ArcGIS and Living Record, Networking with Volunteers and members of staff from other organisations, and improving my time management. My perceptions of field ecology have been challenged, yet my desire and motive to find work in this industry have only been inspired.

Many opportunities have followed from my time spent at the National Trust. A good impression has presented opportunities for me to appear in the ITV series 'Walks with a view', presented by Julia Bradbury, where I am filmed handling a slow worm and taking part in a botanical survey of a wetland heath and mire system. There has also been the opportunity for paid work, where I have been trusted to unlock, set up and facilitate National Trust presentations on fungi at the discovery centre in Studland. Through the placement and experiences since, I have been able to make trusting and lasting relationships with employers and staff at the Purbeck National trust, which will serve to increase my employability through a strong and reliable reference.