



A student's Perspective on the 2016 BES Summer School

By Becky McCerey

This July I was lucky enough to take part in the BES Summer School's second year to explore ecology careers and better my ecological skills. I've always had a love for the natural world and I feel so lucky to have had the opportunity to meet with like-minded students and immerse myself amongst researchers and professionals. Being matched with a PhD mentor was by far one of the most valuable parts of the summer school, it was great to have someone to go to with any questions about careers or PhD's. The mentors were the highlight of my experience, leading social activities and providing valuable feedback on CV writing and advice when applying for industrial placements. Creature Creations was our final social activity organised by our mentors and a hilarious way to say goodbye to lifelong friends and my field-family.

This year, following on feedback from the first year, was very fieldwork based. We had two sets of 4-hour fieldwork activities nearly every day allowing us to build on valuable ecological skills such as kick sampling and river chemistry analysis to upland plant identification. There are so many facets of ecology and we had the opportunity to learn about a great deal, from conservation to ecological consultancy. I even had the chance to experience sectors of ecology that I haven't had the chance to before such as entomology (where I caught my first butterfly) and microbiology.

What We Did:

Day 1 - We arrived at Malham and spent a couple of hours settling in and meeting my roommates for the week before a lecture from Prof Sue Hartley and a lovely evening walk to the cove.

Day 2 – It was an early start on Tuesday morning with a bird walk in the local area. Tuesday's field trips included an introduction to upland botany and river quality monitoring. Evening activities were organised by our PhD mentors and we immersed ourselves in a pub quiz complete with a Harry Potter section and tonnes of fun prizes followed by UV invertebrate tracking.

Day 3 – It was another early morning on Wednesday to learn moth ID by checking traps set the evening prior. Our field activities for the day saw an introduction to entomology where I battled with my weird fear of butterflies by successfully catching and identifying one! In the afternoon we enjoyed some caving where we learned about cave dwelling creatures and cave botany. We had some really interesting talks on Wednesday evening where we learnt about science and outreach communication followed by a careers and PhD talk with our mentors. Finally, before bed we enjoyed a bat walk identifying species with a batbox duets.

Day 4 – Thursday was our final full day and we had talks and activities centred around careers in ecological consultancy in the morning and spent the afternoon learning about

microbial ecology through identifying fungus on tree roots. Evening activities were lively on our final night as we enjoyed a brexit debate streamed live from London followed by creature creations, which saw lots of laughs and strange looking pipe cleaner creations. Day 5 – Our final morning in Malham flew over so quickly with a talk from the BES on making the most of society memberships and setting careers goals for the next 6 months. We had our last meeting with our mentors as we planned our final year projects and asked any final careers questions before we departed. Finally, our last guest lecture from Dr Nathalie Petorelli on conservation biology left us on a high. A final group photo and some emotional goodbyes later I was back in the car and on my way home.

Highlights of The Week:

The most valuable part of the week for myself was CV feedback from the PhD mentors, since revising and updating my CV I've already landed myself an interview for an industrial placement next year can't thank my mentor Lewis enough! There were two highlights to the trip for me, one of them being the amount of fieldwork we got to take part in and in particular going caving in the hills and exploring the cove even when it was scorching hot. Secondly, the friends I've made, the people I met that week I possibly wouldn't have met any other way and they're friends for life. Being surrounded by likeminded students and respected professionals was both daunting and really motivating, we really got a taste for the ecology profession and what we all have to look forward to as we pursue our careers.

What I Would Do Differently and Advice:

Despite having a really wonderful time, in hindsight I would have approached the experience a little differently. Mainly I would have left my inhibitions at the door. I was originally very reserved and quite embarrassed to ask speakers questions or to ask mentors for help relating to careers and CV advice. I wish I had asked more questions and integrated myself with the professionals more, although I did learn a lot and came away with lifelong friendships I wish I had spent more time getting to know more students and professionals.

I went into the summer school thinking I had a decent amount of ecology knowledge but I soon realised I had a lot to learn! It was great to hear about other people's careers in ecology and really motivating to find out what they would recommend we do as students when it comes to building our CV's. All in all, the school was completely invaluable and will recommend the promotion of the summer school through my university. I would 100% recommend any students thinking about applying to jump in and do it, you have nothing to lose and so much to gain from this experience.