

## Student report from BES 2015 Summer School



**Eloise Wells**  
**University of Sheffield**

Earlier this July marked the launch of the BES Undergraduate Summer School. Fifty aspiring first year ecologists from thirty one universities assembled at Malham Tarn Field Centre, North Yorkshire, to attend a demanding and rewarding week of lectures, workshops, fieldwork skills and careers mentoring.

As successor of the BES Undergraduate Fellowship Scheme the Summer School benefited from a wealth of experience and enjoyed a host of prestigious guest speakers. Upon arrival we were greeted with a plenary lecture from Prof Sue Hartley who gave an inspirational account of her work, focusing on the effects of availability of silica on pest resistance in plants. Her talk not only set the precedent of the week, but also complemented the school's main emphasis, to become actively involved in learned societies.

The next day began bright and early with a tour of the reserve from the National Trust, followed by Simon Leather's fascinating introduction to Entomology. After this we developed field skills using traditional methods as well as having the opportunity to operate a motor powered pooter. With our samples collected we began carefully identifying what we had captured. Our session concluded late into the evening upon the release of an insect we had previously doused in fluorescent powder in order to witness this fascinating method of tracking their location.

Surrounded by the astounding beauty of 90% of the National Trust's raised bog, we were privileged to receive an interactive lecture from Clare Trinder, featuring peatland development. Being taught about this incredible environment while we could feel it beneath our feet was both a truly unique and thoroughly engaging experience. The afternoon workshop focused on careers. Andrew Halcro-Johnston and Zoe Webb, representatives of Amey and Arup, offered us an insight into ecological consultancy. As part of their thought provoking session we were presented with a real-life scenario in order to find our own solutions between conflicting factors, this interactive approach opened our minds and left us inquisitive as to the many vocational applications of our degrees.

These activities and further lectures focusing on science communication, conservation and microbiology, were punctuated throughout the week with many extra opportunities to further our interests. Our PhD mentors, the jewels in the crown of the summer school, directed bird, bat and moth identification activities and facilitated the creation and presentation of group research project proposals. We also enjoyed an introduction to the importance of outreach, and received invaluable support with CVs.

For many of us this was the first, insightful step into the inner workings of organisations such as the BES and CIEEM. Aside from the enjoyment of meeting like-minded students this was an excellent opportunity to thoughtfully consider career options, surrounded with advice and experience of many other professionals in a variety of industries. The BES Summer School has been highly informative and enormously influential on how we plan to spend our remaining years at university, especially how we will get involved with this and similar societies, in order to prepare ourselves for our lives beyond our undergraduate degrees.

\*The following extracts from students' experiences expand on the many benefits and opportunities received from participating in the event.

**Chris Woodham**  
**University of Oxford**



For me one of the highlights of the week was meeting many like-minded students from across the country, as we were able to spend time chatting and discussing ideas with each other and with our mentors. Universities should nominate their students to take part in the 2016 summer school not only because the BES summer school is a chance to meet other like-minded students, but also because the great depth and array of careers advice and information available during the summer school can be invaluable for students trying to make decisions about their future. When I went into the summer school I was interested in a career in ecological research but unsure of the practicalities of this career path, having been to the summer school I now know that making a career out of research may be difficult, but is definitely achievable as long as I follow the right path. My improved understanding of careers as a result of attending the summer school will help me make decisions regarding module choices and research projects in the second and third years of my undergraduate degree, this new focus for my choices in the second and third years of my course is a direct result of attending the summer school and is another reason why I believe universities should nominate their students for the 2016 BES summer school.



**Lara Bates-Prior**  
**Oxford Brooks University**

The BES summer school is not only about teaching skills for your current degree, but also provides support for your future. For students who are willing it is one of the best experiences to gain some vital information about what to do when getting a job, what skills are required and what jobs are out there. We are all aware that it is a hard road to get that dream job and this summer school helped with networking and creating a support structure you can ask those vital questions too. A university should want to nominate their dedicated student to this program as it would be one of the most helpful and educating programs they could do at the end of their first year.

My main aim for going to the summer school was to gain a better understanding of what jobs were out there in Ecology and how I could gain employability for those jobs. The key message I gained from the course was that networking and building your skill profile are everything. Many people who choose this career path are very passionate about it, have dedicated their whole lives to it. For me, meeting people who have also always held a fascination with the natural world has made me friendships that will last through my professional life time. A great asset for the future.

This course has made it so much clearer to me what the most important things to focus on are in my 2nd and 3rd years. The modules that will help me the most to gain the skills I need. Not only that but creating Mock projects helped to understand the process and gave me example of what an effective dissertation will be. To summarise, it has given me a clearer path to follow so that I may reach my goals, and in my opinion the BES summer school has been one of the most thought provoking and useful things I could have even done to prepare me for my career.



**Ron Rotbarth**  
**University of Stirling**

My personal highlight has been Ken Thompson's talk about the effective communication of science to the public. As a former biologist at the University of Sheffield, columnist for The Telegraph and author of several books, he engaged in both academic research and the "translation" of scientific findings into less complex and dry terms. The insights he gave us into his work for

The Telegraph and the often misleading articles in the news about science made me aware of the challenge and pitfalls that is scientific writing for the public. This further encouraged me to use my blog to write about my passion, ecology.

The variety of topics the BES covered in only five days has made us all reflect on our career aspirations and aims. But above all, it brought together bright and motivated ecology students from around the UK to share their thoughts, ideas and experiences. If the talks and presentations opened the gateway to a new rational world of ecology, the interaction with other students was the inspiration that transformed my perspective on how to build my future career. Now, the pathway for my last two years at university is much clearer than it has ever been before.

Universities should make use of the opportunities that lie within professional events like the BES summer school, as it can be a major boost to the students' motivation – an issue that universities these days struggle with more often than not. The first summer school has been a huge success and represents a valuable instrument for universities in their aim for highly educated and experienced graduates. With that in mind, institutions of higher education in the UK should be encouraged to invest in these schools in order to enable more students to take part in what I can only describe as the most influential event in my student life.