

Top 10 tips for getting a career in ecology

Having a career in ecology can be extremely exciting, varied and very rewarding. There are many different jobs you can get involved in and picking the right one for you can be a challenge in itself. Getting onto the career ladder can be tricky and you'll often have to compete against many others for the same position. We've put together this 'Top 10' list of tips, based on the most frequently asked questions at our annual Undergraduate Ecological Careers Conference, to provide you with advice about getting a career in ecology and what you can do to help make you stand out from the crowd.

- **Talk to people in different jobs and sectors and network, network, network!**
Careers within ecology can vary hugely with an overwhelming amount of available options, so take the time to go and speak to people in jobs you are interested in. This can be a great way to find out about opportunities and can open doors for you. Attending ecological conferences, science festivals, volunteering and speaking to those at your university can help you meet people from a range of backgrounds and enable you to make more informed decisions.
- **Show passion and knowledge for your subject**
Demonstrating a genuine interest in ecology is essential, and you need to prove this by doing other things apart from just studying, such as attending events, volunteering, writing or giving talks and doing work experience. However, some skills/knowledge employers want can't always be gained from ecology specifically and so getting involved in other activities such as sports can allow you to gain additional skills that are as equally important.
- **Write about your science!**
Getting your work published, or writing about an area of ecology you are passionate about, can really show potential employers your interest and love for the subject. From student/local newspapers and wildlife magazines to online blog forums and academic journals, it is possible to get published both in print and online.
- **Get some practical experience, but remember, quality beats quantity**
Choosing a career can be difficult, so test some out first! Doing work experience, internships and voluntary work can be great ways to meet people, develop essential skills, e.g. for the lab or field, give you an idea of what working in that sector is like as well as boost your CV. However, be strategic about what you choose to do to make sure you don't waste your or other people's time.
- **Attend talks and even give one about your work**
Going to public talks, scientific conferences and debates can be great to meet people and learn more about a subject. But don't stop there – why not give your own? You could present at a small conference, give talks at natural history societies or other local nature groups. Doing this will develop your presentation skills and show you are interested in communicating your science beyond your immediate peers.
- **Learn species identification skills**
People with species ID skills are in increasing demand, and these skills can be required for many careers in ecology, including consultancy, research, outdoor education and work with ecological NGOs. You can teach yourself by using a field guide and recording what you find, or attend specific courses or training events.
- **Be flexible**
Whilst it can be good to have a career goal in mind, the nature of ecology means that often there is huge variety in what you can do or end up doing. Remember that you need to be flexible and take opportunities as they come to you – starting out a career in ecology can be tough but any opportunity can give you skills and experiences that can help you get to your ultimate goal. Be persistent and don't give up!
- **Take advantage of social media**
Social media is a great tool to boost your online profile, hear about new opportunities and network with people you may not necessarily interact with on a day to day basis. Choosing the right platform for you is the key to getting it right and making it work for you.
- **Join a society**
There are lots of societies relevant to ecology. These are great ways to network and establish contacts within the field, have the opportunity to attend different events and conferences, hear about new study or job opportunities, gain access to academic literature as well as access grants for travel and research.
- **Further training or learning is sometimes necessary**
For some jobs in ecology you may be required to undertake some additional training, get another qualification or learn a new area. For example, in consultancy you may be required to have species licences or for a job in research you will need a Masters or PhD. Make sure you do your research as to what additional training or qualifications you need as you will need to factor in funding and time into your decisions.