



# Skills for Living Landscapes and Seas Project

2014 - 2017



LOTTERY FUNDED

# Introduction

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**Delivered by Ulster Wildlife, the 'Skills for Living Landscapes and Seas' project provided 18 twelve-month paid traineeships over three years (2014 – 2017). Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund's Skills for the Future Programme, the traineeships provided practical, hands-on natural heritage skills whilst supporting trainees to undertake a Northern Ireland specific Lantra accreditation.**

Ulster Wildlife developed the project following published research (by Lantra, The Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and the British Ecological Society), which indicated a skills gap in the natural heritage sector and highlighted the need to better complement academic learning with fieldwork skills. This was mirrored in Ulster Wildlife's own experience with significant numbers of applicants applying for posts with limited or no related practical experience in the types of skills a role would require.

The traineeships covered a wide variety of relevant skills, including control of invasive species, species management, ID and surveying, environmental legislation and community engagement. Transferable workplace skills were also addressed, including teamwork, media skills, personal performance management and volunteer support and supervision. The 'Skills for Living Landscapes and Seas' project was delivered by a part-time Project Coordinator with Ulster Wildlife's highly qualified and experienced Nature Reserves and Living Seas staff delivering the training (both in the field and in classroom settings) and passing on their knowledge and skills to the next generation of conservationists in both the land and marine sectors.

This report provides an overview of the project, reporting on outcomes and looking to the future of training provision within Ulster Wildlife. It also includes short summaries from all the trainees who completed the programme.



**Trainees and representatives from HLF at end of project celebration**





# Outcomes and Achievements

| Outcomes  | Achievements  |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Open up the sector by attracting a more diverse range of trainees and programme participants - targeting those under the age of 25, career changers (40 plus) and those without a third level environmental qualification</b></p> | <p>Ulster Wildlife exceeded the anticipated recruitment targets with 263 applicants under the age of 25 applying for the traineeship (target 75), 144 were career changers (target 30), 181 applied with no third level qualification (target 105) and 192 applied with a third level environmental qualification (target 120).</p> <p>The 18 appointed trainees were made up of 7 under 25s (target 9), 4 career changers (target 3), 7 with no third level qualification (target 12).</p>   |
| <p><b>Development of a cohort of trainees with improved natural heritage and employability skills</b></p>   | <p>18 trainees were recruited and successfully completed the traineeship and attained 'Introduction to Heritage Skills for Land / Seas' Lantra accreditation. One candidate left the traineeship early in year one due to personal reasons but with HLF approval, Ulster Wildlife recruited an additional trainee in year three to ensure targets were met.</p> <p>15 transferable skills training courses were delivered across the three years of the project including Time Management, Managing Personal Performance, Volunteer Support and Supervision, Presentation Skills and Interview and Job Application Techniques.</p> <p>All of the 11 year one and year two trainees secured employment within the first six months of completing the traineeship with 9 of them working within the natural heritage sector. Of the year three trainees, one secured employment within the sector immediately on completion of the traineeship with the remaining 6 committed to pursuing a related career.</p> |
| <p><b>Develop an accredited programme of training</b></p>   | <p>Ulster Wildlife became a Lantra Approved Training Centre and developed and delivered 'Introduction to Heritage Skills for Land / Skills' which included 10 Learning Units covering practical habitat management, species/habitat identification and monitoring, environmental legislation and community engagement/education skills.</p>   |
| <p><b>Ulster Wildlife staff learn new skills and gain confidence in delivery of heritage skills training</b></p>  | <p>Five Ulster Wildlife staff attained the Level 3 Award in Education and Training and registered as Lantra Instructors.</p>  |
| <p><b>Capacity of Ulster Wildlife to deliver in-house heritage skills training is increased</b></p>   | <p>Ulster Wildlife has developed and delivered two further customised courses accredited to Lantra with an additional 7 staff attaining the Level 3 Award in Education and Training and registered as Lantra Instructors.</p>   |
| <p><b>Share good practice in training with the wider sector and others</b></p>  | <p>Ulster Wildlife hosted HLF Skills for the Future funded trainees and their Project Coordinator from Cumbria Wildlife Trust in years one and two. Everyone enjoyed three days of training and sharing experiences and learning between the two projects.</p> <p>Ulster Wildlife also partnered up with 8 other NGO's who offered the trainees placement time with their organisation or opportunities to attend external training courses.</p>  |

# Impact Snapshot

38

externally accredited training courses attended by trainees



completed traineeship

18

trainees successfully

1,652

children engaged with nature on our land and in our seas through education



681

applications received

8

placements eNGOs engaged



Ulster Wildlife staff registered as Lantra Instructors



131

applicants through to assessment days

153

public engagement events run with the trainees



50

media articles published about the trainees and the work they do



Adam Butler delivering a marine education session to local primary school



Katy Bell delivering a family wildlife event at Balloo Wetland



Olli Franks practicing his marine biological monitoring skills



Marine trainees attending a coastal training day

# Diversifying the Heritage Sector

Although open to all people with an interest in pursuing a career within the sector, Ulster Wildlife aimed to attract and recruit a diverse range of applicants to the traineeship and offer a programme that enabled individuals to apply with little or no background knowledge in natural heritage skills, but with the passion and enthusiasm to work and learn throughout the year.

Target groups for recruitment were those under the age of 25, career changers (over the age of 40) and those without a third-level qualification. In terms of applicants, these targets were significantly exceeded indicating the huge demand for paid traineeships in Northern Ireland. Recruitment ran as a three-stage process which included a written application, practical assessment and finally a one-to-one interview.

| Target Group                               | Stage 1 Applications | Stage 2 Interview | Stage 3 Appointments |
|--|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 25 and Under                               | (75) 263             | (18) 37           | (9) 7                |
| Career Changers                            | (30) 144             | (6) 22            | (3) 4                |
| No 3rd Level Qualification                 | (105) 181            | (24) 7            | (12) 7               |
| Age 25 – 40 (with 3rd level qualification) | (120) 192            | (15) 24           | (6) 8                |

Key: (Target) Actual

## The Development of an Accreditation through Lantra Awards

Working closely with Lantra, the leading awarding body for land-based and environmental training courses and qualifications, Ulster Wildlife staff developed and produced a customised accreditation, giving the traineeship a structured focus with trainees gaining a certificate and skills card on completion to reward their achievement.



Trainees carrying out a hedge survey



Trainees attending a fencing course

'Introduction to Heritage Skills for Land / Seas' covered ten comprehensive units with a mix of classroom and outdoor practical learning across Habitat and Species Management and ID, Control of Invasive Species, Environmental Legislation, Introduction to Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Coastal Processes.

Five Ulster Wildlife staff attained Level 3 Award in Education and Training and were registered as Lantra instructors to deliver the training and assess competence throughout the traineeship. Over 200 hours of training were delivered throughout the three-year project and this has greatly increased Ulster Wildlife's capacity to develop and deliver training courses in the future.

A key highlight for trainees was the opportunity to apply their learning out in the field under the watchful eye of Ulster Wildlife's experienced and knowledgeable staff. This much-needed practical experience was invaluable and enabled the trainees to match the requirements of job opportunities which would have previously been out of reach.

**"It's great that you get a chance to learn, but the best thing is you'll probably be out doing it for real the next week." Year 3 Trainee**



# The Traineeship

**The Project Coordinator acted as the main point of contact for the trainees, supporting them throughout their traineeship and mentoring them through the process of transition from training placement into employment or further education.**

The trainees worked alongside the Nature Reserves and Living Seas staff, following the teams' annual work plans which enabled them to gain hands-on experience of a range of practical conservation work across all seasons. Classroom based training plus scheduled office time allowed the trainees to complete their Lantra portfolios. Trainees also benefited from developing essential transferable skills with sessions on Time Management, Managing Personal Performance, Writing and Delivering Presentations, Volunteer Support and Supervision as well as Job Application and Interview skills.

The seas trainees were afforded time out on nature reserves during the winter months, which greatly assisted the nature reserve team with meeting important scrub cutting and site maintenance targets. In turn, land trainees received the opportunity to work alongside the seas teams during their busy events season in the summer, allowing all trainees to gain a much broader understanding and depth of experience from the whole organisation.

The Project Coordinator supported the trainees to identify and address their own skills gaps and set personal development goals in their training to make the most out of the traineeship. Trainees were given the opportunity to work with other teams within Ulster Wildlife such as Marketing and Communications, Education and working alongside the Northern Ireland Marine Task Force Officer, wherever their personal interests and career goals lay.

Trainees were paid an annual training bursary of approx £10k with 10% held back upon successful completion of the 52-week placement.



**Powerboating Training Day**

Additional externally delivered training included Brushcutters and Trimmers, PA1 and PA6 Pesticides and Strained Wire Fencing for the Land trainees with Sea Survival Skills, RYA L2 Powerboat license and Snorkel Instructor Training for the Seas trainees. Other specialist courses specific to trainees' individual skills and requirements for job progression included Tree Surveyor training, GIS, L3 Award in Education and Training, and Trailer license.



**Oak halving in Glenarm Nature Reserve**

One of the key key areas the trainees found beneficial during their year was the opportunity to network and gain vital contacts within the sector - an important step in securing positive progression at the end of the traineeship. Placements were organised with Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, RSPB, National Trust and Loughs Agency. The seas trainees also spent time aboard the Corystes research vessel with AFBI, allowing them to gain invaluable experience in time at sea, data collection and scientific research.



**Snorkel training**

# Trainees' Stories

## Year One Trainees

### Olli Franks

With a degree in Archaeology, Olli had previously undertaken a lot of environmental volunteering but was keen to get a paid role within the sector. Olli felt the trainee placement was "the perfect opportunity with a combination of experience and training being a perfect mix."

Following on from the traineeship, Olli has secured roles with City of London Open Spaces and London Wildlife Trust. He has since started a part-time Masters in Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystems, something he feels he "would never have been able to access if it hadn't been for the opportunity with Ulster Wildlife."



### Dylan Gray

Upon completion of the traineeship, Dylan was successful in gaining employment in Exploris Aquarium. He is currently working to save money in order to fund his progression onto a Masters qualification, studying in Cork.



### Michael Close

During his year with Ulster Wildlife, Michael spent some placement time at the Steiner School, as he found teaching a passion of his whilst on the traineeship. Since completion Michael has worked in gardening jobs and at Belfast Zoo until he gathered enough funds to travel to Germany where he is currently studying to become a Steiner School teacher. He will return to the UK in 2018 to continue his studies and begin placement experience.



### Ryan Bradley

Ryan was committed to conservation through his years of volunteering at his local nature reserve and with various organisations within the sector. He has a degree in Filming, had tried his hand at pursuing a career in music whilst also working at a Homeless Shelter in Belfast when the opportunity to apply for the traineeship came about.

Ryan successfully completed the traineeship, subsequently securing employment with Ulster Wildlife as Estate Maintenance Assistant within the Nature Reserves team.



### Katy Bell

Coming to the programme with a degree in Zoology and Masters in Conservation Biology, Katy already had a firm foothold on where she wanted her career to go. With a passion for bumblebees, Katy excelled in her practical work on the nature reserves and in particular with her community engagement and education sessions.

Upon completion of the traineeship, Katy secured employment with an environmental consultancy and moved on to take up a role with RSPB as Project Officer with the Cooperation Across Borders for Biodiversity project.



# Trainees' Stories

## Year Two Trainees

### John Wadsworth

Having managed his own farm and working as a self-employed contractor for 15 years, the economic downturn spurred a desire to diversify his career, so John seized the opportunity to avail of the traineeship to help with this. John always had an "appreciation for the environment and an interest in nature." The traineeship allowed him to develop this knowledge as well as his transferable skills, such as public speaking and job application techniques.

John secured the role of gardener at Rowallane Gardens for the National Trust and says of the traineeship "it gave me the opportunity to secure a job that that I was enthusiastic about, a new found respect for nature and wildlife and increased my knowledge, which I have been able to apply to my new role."



### Orlagh McLaughlin

Orlagh had a degree in Environmental Biology and came to the traineeship with a natural flair for education and public engagement. Orlagh wanted to pursue a teaching career but chose the traineeship to develop her knowledge of conservation so she could bring that learning into the classroom.

Orlagh is completing a PGCE at Northumbria University whilst working for St Gerard's School and her goal is to "educate young people through creative teaching methods in the environment and help build a more responsible society."

Whilst Orlagh doesn't work directly within the sector, she has returned to Ulster Wildlife many times to assist with events and education sessions as well as inspiring her current school pupils to take action for the environment including involvement in Ulster Wildlife's Grassroots Challenge Programme.

### Danielle Shortall

With a Biological Science Degree and background in volunteering in conservation, Danielle has benefited greatly from the traineeship and immediately transitioned into her new role as Assistant Ranger with the National Trust on Castle Ward Estate.

"It would have been impossible for me to get that position if it had not been for the trainee opportunity. I felt prepared and ready for the interview. Previously I was only able to talk about examples of how I would do something, the focus then shifted to 'in my role at Ulster Wildlife I did this' so it was a totally different dynamic to the interview."



### James Rainey

Arriving on the programme with a huge passion for all things related to nature conservation, James had a strong background in volunteering work within the sector and he continued to seek every opportunity he could whilst on the traineeship to gain as many skills and short accredited courses as he could to boost his CV and job prospects for the future.

He was the first trainee to avail of time aboard the AFBI Research vessel, the *Corystes*, and got so much out of his first trip that he took on a second one to further his knowledge and experience. His hard work paid off and he went straight into temporary employment with NIEA after the traineeship and is now the current Northern Ireland Marine Task Force Officer.



# Trainees' Stories

## Adam Butler

For Adam, the trainee scheme was about getting a “different type of experience” to his previous roles in teaching and he particularly wanted to develop his knowledge and experience of policy work.

Adam cited “the opportunities to learn from peers who had great experience” as a very positive aspect of the programme.

Adam had built up important networks during his time as a trainee which helped him transition into a new role with Northern Ireland Environment Agency as a GIS Mapping and Data officer.



## John McLaughlin

With a degree in Psychology, John took the opportunity of the traineeship to change his career path and pursue his passion of work within the conservation sector having previously dedicated many hours of his own time volunteering at his local nature reserve.

During the traineeship, John developed education sessions for his local secondary school and also used this as an opportunity to get young people engaged in nature and visiting their local Ulster Wildlife nature reserve.

John took up a part time maternity cover role within Ulster Wildlife as Grassroots Challenge Project Officer working to engage young people doing Duke of Edinburgh's Award with nature and wildlife and has now secured the role of Project Officer for Ulster Wildlife's Sea Bird Recovery Project on the Isle of Muck.

# Year Three Trainees

## Nick Wilson

“The living landscapes traineeship helped me develop a foothold in my dream career path within the natural heritage sector, gaining invaluable experience and skills throughout my year. I look forward to harnessing my skills and employing everything I've learnt in the near future.”



## Sofia Goncalves

“I came to Northern Ireland as part of the European Voluntary Service to be a nature reserve volunteer with Ulster Wildlife for a year. That year made me discover my interest in practical conservation and fuel my wish of working in this field in Northern Ireland, so I stayed to try to find a job but found this a hard goal to achieve. Fortunately, I managed to get a place on the traineeship and get the training and experience that I hope will allow me to get a job in conservation in this country.”

# Trainees' Stories

## Year Three Trainees

### Genevieve O'Reilly

"Coming to conservation later in life, largely through volunteering and unpaid work placements, having the opportunity to train and learn full-time with the assistance of a bursary was a big break for me.

"The broad scope of the training and the experience gained working with a fantastic team in a great organisation, has really boosted my skills, confidence and enthusiasm to follow my dream of a lifelong career in nature conservation."

Genevieve secured employment as Community Engagement Officer with Lagan Valley Regional Park upon completion of the traineeship.



### Clare McMorrow

"The traineeship gave me so many opportunities I would have otherwise not been able to complete, particularly completing Powerboat 2 training and gaining a VHF radio licence, completing the BSAC Snorkel Instructor award and getting ship-time conducting surveys aboard the AFBI research vessel.

"All in all, spending the year in a vibrant, hardworking, local eNGO was invaluable, and I hope it has prepared me well for continuing work."

### Claire Casey

"The year I spent at Ulster Wildlife was truly invaluable. I had always wanted to break into the world of conservation, however, even with a degree, I lacked the practical experience that most posts required.

"The past year has given me that much-needed boost in experience, and given me an insight into the natural heritage sector that I wouldn't otherwise have had."



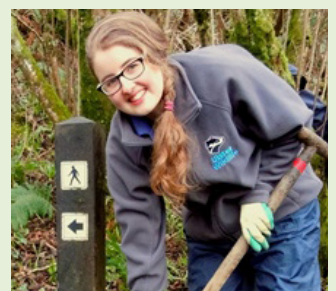
### Patrick Crothers

"My year with Ulster Wildlife has been invaluable. Despite having a degree, I lacked the practical experience and skills needed to secure a job in nature conservation.

"Working with one of the largest local conservation charities has given me that much-needed boost that I was lacking, from learning about wildlife and coastal environments engaging people with nature, I now feel fully equipped and, above all, more determined work in the sector."

### Emma Mulholland

Emma undertook the traineeship whilst also studying part time for a Biology Degree. She had previous volunteer experience with RSPB and her local wildlife group in Glenarm. She was keen to develop her biological monitoring and seabird ID skills during the traineeship, and completed short placements with BTO and RSPB monitoring black guillemots whilst also working as a trainee bird ringer. "The traineeship was an amazing experience. I was able to immerse myself in so many aspects of marine conservation and vastly improve my confidence in species identification. I thoroughly enjoyed being part of an excellent team."







# The Future of Training Provision in Ulster Wildlife

**The Skills for Living Landscapes and Seas project proved successful in both the delivery of a high quality traineeship through which 18 trainees gained invaluable natural heritage knowledge, as well as gaining employability skills. The programme also served to enable Ulster Wildlife to develop and deliver customised training provision and to build a strong working relationship with Lantra.**

Ulster Wildlife maintains a strong relationship with many other organisations within the natural heritage sector, and the project has allowed this to develop further.

An external evaluation was conducted on the project and it was clear that the trainees involved across each of the three years and Ulster Wildlife staff view the traineeship as an extremely positive initiative and key to supporting the development of skills within the sector.

For each trainee their individual experiences were different but, collectively, they all developed an understanding of the knowledge, skills and competencies required for a future career in the natural heritage sector. There has been an overwhelming consensus amongst the trainees that the project has supported their personal development, networks, contacts, skills and experiences. Whatever the future holds for the trainees, it is clear that the Skills for Living Landscapes and Seas project provided them with a solid foundation of skills and experience to support them in their future career.

Ulster Wildlife was delighted to win the Farming Life Danske Bank Commitment to Training Award for the Skills for Living Landscapes and Seas project in 2015 and was shortlisted for the same award again in 2016. This afforded a great opportunity to showcase Ulster Wildlife's training provision to the farming community and other organisations within the sector. Feedback from the sector shows it is clear that the traineeship gathered momentum as a reputable and invaluable pathway for those wishing to develop their skills and find work within the sector.

Previous feedback from volunteers highlighted they would like to see a more structured approach to heritage skills training in the organisation, and they would very much value the opportunity to gain a recognised award for the skills they learn. Regular volunteers now benefit by being able to link into external training courses such as Brushcutters and Trimmers, Fencing and Snorkel Instruction.

As a result of this experience, Ulster Wildlife has been able to develop two further customised, Lantra accredited courses – one for the Red Squirrels United project and one for the Grassroots Challenge programme. Both of these courses in 'Squirrel Conservation' and 'Nature Conservation on the Farm' are being delivered by the project teams, with seven additional staff members gaining a Level 3 Award in Education and Training and becoming Lantra registered instructors. This brings the total of Ulster Wildlife staff who are Lantra registered instructors to twelve.

Ulster Wildlife continues to develop a more structured approach to training delivery, with staff now having increased capacity, knowledge and skills to deliver work-based training in natural heritage skills and have also increased their knowledge of how qualifications and training are best developed and delivered. Ulster Wildlife is now a Lantra Approved Training Centre and plans to develop further training courses for delivery to groups involved in conservation, agriculture and horticulture.



**The Project won the Farming Life Award for Commitment to Training in 2015**



## Acknowledgements

Successful delivery of the Skills for Living Landscapes and Seas project has been possible thanks to the full support of Lantra, Ulster Wildlife staff and other organisations who offered up placement time for the trainees including National Trust, RSPB, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, AFBI, Loughs Agency, CeDAR and Steiner School, as well as the trainees themselves.

Thank you to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding the project through their Skills for the Future Programme.

### Lantra

[www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk)

### Heritage Lottery Fund

[www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)



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