



SERC Training Scheme

The SERC training scheme delivers a substantial part of SERC's core work for Service Level Agreement partners, particularly the county-wide Monitoring Strategy. The training scheme enables SERC to attract high calibre volunteers who commit to at least six months full time to deliver this work programme. Almost everyone who comes to SERC has a first degree in science, and about half our trainees have an MSc or PhD, but still find they lack the relevant work experience to be recruited in to the ecology profession. The scheme provides essential key skills and knowledge that enables trainees to fast-track progression in their chosen career path.

A small team starts at the beginning of the year to help prepare for the new survey season while the previous cohort of trainees are analysing and reporting on the previous year's survey. The full team is in place at the start of June when there is a programme of induction and intensive training to give trainees the skills they require to carry out the survey programme. While the main survey season is spring to autumn, some field survey is carried out throughout the year providing invaluable winter botanical skills.

Being a trainee at SERC is a full time commitment, 9.30-5.00 five days a week, for six to twelve months. Trainees are encouraged to remain at SERC until they find paid work in the environmental sector to get the most benefit from the scheme. Most fund themselves by claiming benefits and when eligible signing on to 'New Deal'. Those ineligible for benefits fund themselves; a year at SERC being a much cheaper option than paying for an MSc and more likely to lead to a sustainable paid career in conservation.

SERC provides an apprenticeship in ecology, enabling team members to carry out an ambitious work programme and provide them with the experience and skills they need to apply for various legally protected species licences. Project management, team working and report writing are skills that all trainees have the opportunity to develop at SERC. Trainees also acquire very good GIS skills as well as a good grounding in aerial photo interpretation, NVC and habitat mapping. Regular training sessions led by expert ecologists cover identification and survey techniques for a range of taxonomic groups, plus habitat management, and farming.

Nothing enables acquisition of in-depth skills as effectively as being able to consolidate training by putting it straight in to practice carrying out real work. This is one of the SERC training scheme's greatest strengths and where it most differs from an academic course. Work covered includes aquatic invertebrate and macrophyte survey, and detailed botanical monitoring work. Other core work includes great crested newt survey, and surveying for bats using time expansion detectors and analysing the recordings.

SERC has an almost perfect track record in getting people into paid ecology jobs within a year of starting the training scheme. In recent years this has predominantly been with consultancies but trainees have also gone on to work for Wildlife Trusts, local authorities and countryside agencies. Some organisations come to us direct, without advertising, when seeking to fill posts. SERC itself is the main first employer of its own trainees.

Hannah Gibbons is a classic example of how the scheme works. She was a trainee here four years ago, and this is what she has to say about the scheme:

"Although I had a BSc and an MSc I was still unable to find a job in conservation due to a lack of practical skills. I learnt a great deal at SERC including plant identification and how to carry out habitat surveys and protected species surveys. I gained majority of my plant identification skills when specimens were not flowering, a skill which has really helped me in my subsequent employment roles.

Since volunteering at SERC I have worked as a Field Botanist for the University for Reading, an Ecological Consultant, and for the Somerset Wildlife Trust on the Brue Valley Living Landscapes Project. SERC provided a much needed step into employment following university education. I had a great time learning a wide range of skills from a wide range of people and I made some excellent friends who I hope to stay in contact with for many years to come."



Structure of Training Scheme

Role title: SERC Ecological Assistant

Key responsibilities:

Project Planning:

- Survey preparation
- Landowner permissions

Monitoring Surveys:

- Pond surveys using PSYM methodology (aquatic macrophytes, aquatic invertebrates to family)
- Great Crested Newts
- Detailed Botanical Monitoring
- Habitat Classification and Mapping (involves NVC classification)
- Bat monitoring using time expansion detectors
- Dormice

Data entry and analysis

- Use of Excel for data manipulation and Access databases
- Analysis of time expansion bat records using 'Batsound'
- Statistical analysis of monitoring survey results

Report writing

- Research of other relevant work
- Summaries of each years monitoring survey findings
- Analysis of monitoring survey to show Ecological change over time

Training

- To achieve the work programme above
- Additional training covers a wide range of areas relevant to seeking work as an ecologist

Other project work

Trainees can contribute to a wide range of consultancy projects (e.g. invertebrate identification for SCC's Hestercombe Project).

Time frame of training scheme and work programme

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Year 1	Small number start to prepare for main survey season					Full team (12) in place from start of June, coinciding with university graduation						
Year 2	Trainees leave for paid jobs											
Planning searches												
Site selection												
Permissions												
Water Vole survey												
Newt survey												
Pond survey												
Botanical survey												
Bat survey												
Data entry												
Data analysis												
Reports Yr 1												
Yr 2												

	Main period of activity
	Lesser period of activity