

Breaking Ground: Pathways into Conservation and Land-based Careers

Early Careers Resource Pack for the West of England



About this Guide

CPRE Avon and Bristol present this resource pack to provide guidance for young people who are seeking training, job opportunities, and careers in the nature and land-based sector.

If you care about the impact of climate change, want to protect nature and play a part in how the countryside is managed, this guide will help you. You'll find the courses that are available to build your skills and see what careers are possible in nature conservation, countryside management, horticulture and farming.

We recognise that it can be difficult to break into this work so we have included some case studies from individuals who have overcome barriers to progress to their current role. The guide begins with a list of resources to allow you to investigate training programmes and higher education pathways.

We know that some individuals from underrepresented groups face particular barriers in entering the sector. Where possible we have included inclusive opportunities that can provide additional support and advice.

A Countryside for All

Alongside many other environmental organisations, CPRE Avon and Bristol seek to engage underrepresented groups in nature-based opportunities.

Inequalities in access to the natural environment are connected to income, age and disability, and are particularly challenging when it comes to ethnicity or race¹. However, it's not just about visiting the countryside, it's about the lack of participation in jobs and careers that will shape the countryside of the future.

As of this year (2025), underrepresented groups comprise only 6% of those working in the environmental charity sector, compared to 15% found in the total UK workforce². CPRE Avon and Bristol works to ensure a thriving and beautiful countryside for everyone. We strive to bring together a diverse range of people whose different perspectives, experiences and insights will inform how we respond to and plan for a resilient countryside for people and wildlife.

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Building Skills

Here you will find details of local apprentices, training programmes, directories, educational courses and volunteering opportunities within the sector.

Volunteering

Voluntary work is a way to build stackable skills whilst giving back to the community. Voluntary roles range from more flexible one-off volunteer sessions to longer commitments.

Organisations offering practical volunteering sessions in the West of England:

[YourPark Bristol and Bath](#)

Urban park conservation

[CPRE Avon and Bristol](#)

Hedge planting/hedgelaying

[Somer Valley Rediscovered](#)

Habitat management, Nature Watch and events

[Avon Needs Trees](#)

Tree planting/tree care

[Avon Wildlife Trust](#)

Habitat management and Youth programme

[The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project](#)

Public engagement events and surveying

[Forest of Avon Trust](#)

Tree planting & orchard care

[More Trees BANES](#)

Seed harvesting and tree planting

[The Community Farm](#)

Community farmer days, gardening and wildlife surveying (lift share options available)



Longer term volunteering:

Some providers offer volunteering programmes with a longer commitment, allowing for more time to develop skills and network. These can extend from several weeks to months.

[Forestry England](#)

Shadow volunteer scheme

[Mendip Hills National Landscape](#)

Ranger volunteering

[The Black Seeds Network](#)

Platform for environmentalists of colour to socialise, gain support, and seek opportunities. Providing skills development, networking events, media opportunities, and more

[Wildfowl and Wetland Centre \(Slimbridge\)](#)

Reserve volunteer and paid student placement opportunities

[Street Goat Bristol](#)

Become a community goat herder/milker



Building Skills

Training

Short courses and informal training

These short courses focus on specific certificated skills increasing employment prospects. They offer training in practical rural skills e.g. chainsaw certificate, ecology, species identification and ranger skills.

[Tree Life](#)

Short online courses and formal qualifications in arboriculture

[Youth Environmental Service Bristol](#)

Entry-level paid opportunities for 18-25 year olds

[Avon Wildlife Trust Grow Leader Course](#)

Horticulture and land management 8 week course

[Other Avon Wildlife Trust Learning Courses](#)

Ecology, land management and nature craft courses

[Field Studies Council](#), [Acer Ecology](#), and [Biological Recording Company](#), [Ecology Training UK](#)

Online & in person ecological training courses

[National Hedgelaying Society](#)

Hedgelaying training events. For training local to North Somerset see [Wrington & Burrington Hedging Society](#).



Training continued

[Capel Manor College](#)

Wildlife and conservation workshops

[Hedgelaying Skills Gold Award \(Skills Card\)](#)

5-day practical training course in hedgelaying including a one day assessment, leading to accreditation.

[Elm Tree Farm](#)

Smallholding with supported training for those with learning disabilities and autism

[Open University](#)

Free natural history short courses

See more providers at [Countryside Jobs Training Directory](#)

Where can I work?

Conservation and land-based work typically falls within private, public and non-profit sectors. Private sector roles involve working within businesses and companies which make a profit from their operations. This could include environmental consultancy, ecology work and agricultural work.

Public sector roles involve working with government organisations and local authorities. Examples of this are park/ranger work with councils, and roles within governmental bodies such as Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), and the Forestry Commission.

The non-profit, or “third” sector, encompasses environmental charities and social enterprises. As expected, these roles are typically the least well paid out of the three.

However, non-profit roles are currently gaining on the public sector, with salaries rising 14% in 2024 compared to 6% in the public sector.³

Building Skills

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships offer a way to earn money as you learn, with the opportunity for greater earning potential once you are fully qualified. Some of these land-based apprentices are listed below.

[St Werburghs City Farm Propagation Place Apprenticeship](#)

Horticulture and sustainable land management

[National Trust Apprenticeships](#)

Includes Gardening and Ranger roles

[Forestry England Apprenticeships](#)

Includes Forest Craftsperson role

[Level 4 Assistant Ecologist](#)

Apprenticeship currently in development - see CIEEM for updates

[Bridgwater & Taunton College](#)

Includes Countryside Ranger and Farm Worker Apprenticeship

Search for more online at [Find an Apprenticeship Service](#)



Career Guide Directories

[Skills Connect](#)

A free online directory for career guidance. It has a section on Nature Recovery with a breadth of information and resources.

[Green Jobs for Nature](#)

Provides details on green jobs nationally and a video series showing entry routes into the sector.

[Bristol Post-16](#)

Advice and a directory of apprenticeships and career opportunities in Bristol City Council.

Support for disadvantaged young people

Many young people face additional challenges to employment due to disability, mental health issues, poverty or disadvantaged backgrounds. Listed below are some organisations that provide support through mentoring and group sessions to help you gain confidence.

- [Learning Partnership West](#)
- [Brandon Trust](#)
- [Creative Youth Network](#)
- [The Birch Collective](#)
- [Babbasa](#)
- [Black2Nature](#)
- [YourPark Roots to Wellbeing](#)

Job searching

Most advertising for the conservation and land-based sector can be found on specific sites rather than more general ones. The links below are a good starting point when searching. Apply a filter to show entry-level positions in the West of England.

- [EnvironmentJob](#)
- [CharityJob](#)
- [CountrysideJobs](#)
- [CountrysideJobs Training Directory](#)
- [GreenJobs](#)
- [4xtrahands \(Agricultural work\)](#)
- [Guardian Jobs](#)
- [SustainabilityJob](#)
- [National Trust Jobs](#)

Building Skills

University - Undergraduate courses

There are a wide range of formal courses to gain qualifications for careers in conservation, animal care, wildlife conservation and ecology. A University degree, at undergraduate level, will equip you with academic qualifications that will help your employment prospects.



University of Bristol

University of Bristol Veterinary School courses for 2025:

- BVSc Gateway to Veterinary Science
- BVSc Veterinary Science
- BSc Veterinary Nursing and Companion Animal Behaviour

University of the West of England (UWE)

University of the West of England courses for 2025:

- BSc Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Science (with Foundation Year)
- FdSc Integrated Wildlife Conservation
- BSc Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Science

Bath Spa University

- BSc Wildlife Conservation

Universities in the Wider region

Undergraduate courses in West of England for Ecology and Conservation at the following universities:

University of Gloucestershire
Bournemouth University
University of Plymouth
University of Exeter



College - Rural skills courses

Colleges offer an alternative entry into practical roles. These can provide routes into careers in conservation, animal management, forestry, agriculture and horticulture.

Levels of diploma range from Level 1 up to Level 8, with entry requirements increasing for each level. See explanation of UK qualification levels [here](#).

[City of Bristol College Course Directory](#)

Animal Care and Horticulture courses

[Weston College-Animal management \(16-18\)](#)

Gain practical skills caring for animals

[Bicton College- Land Management and Wildlife Diploma](#)

Practical skills development including land management, ecological surveys, ranger skills

[Holme Lacy - Forestry & Arboriculture Course](#)

Arboriculture operations including tree felling

[Bridgewater & Taunton College](#)

Forestry and Arboriculture and Land-based Studies

[University of Bristol Botanic Garden](#)

Training for RHS level 2 horticulture qualification

[Roots to Work Bath City Farm](#)

Work placement in horticulture/wildlife/grounds maintenance with AQA Awards

Case Studies

In this section, case studies explore some real examples of journeys and progression into the sector.



Ayesha Ahmed-Mendoza
Programme Manager
Black2Nature

“By the time I was 13 years old, I was the youngest person to see 400 birds in the UK. Despite this, it did not occur to me that I could work in nature education. I had imposter syndrome for years, taking me years to confidently run birdwatching walks.”

What is your job role?

Programme Manager for Black2Nature, which aims to give access to nature to Visible Minority Ethnic children, teenagers, families and communities for the benefit of their mental health and well-being, physical health and educational attainment. We do this by arranging nature camps and one day events for young people.

How did you get into this line of work?

Due to my personal circumstances I did not pass my A-Levels. After school I worked in pubs and restaurants working my way up to becoming an Assistant Manager. I had volunteered at Birdgirl's first two nature camps in 2015 and 2016, helping with admin and sharing the nature skills I learnt being out in nature from a young age.

By 2020, when Black2Nature became a charity, I had started part-time work. I became Events Manager in December 2020 when the post became fully-funded and Programme Manager in January 2024 at the age of 35.

What is your top tip for young people looking to get into a role like yours?

Get the relevant experience you can by taking all the opportunities that come your way such as social media, writing, taking photos, and videos. Learn about other cultures and ethnicities. Come and volunteer for Black2Nature!



Lauren Fairfax
Graduate Ecologist

What does a typical day of work look like?

Either writing reports/desk based data search and mapping work, or out on site completing a variety of species and habitat surveys. It is not standard 9-5 (especially not in summer when bat survey season is in full swing), but the winter months can be quieter.

Tell us about your career journey.

I got into the role through reaching out to local ecological consultancies to ask for advice on where to get relevant experience and how to expand my CV. This landed me some interviews for seasonal positions and from there I have gained full-time employment.

What informal experience helped you get into this role?

Volunteering! Without question the experience (and connections) got me where I am today.

As well as chairing Lancashire Wildlife Trust's Youth Council, I have spent 3+ years doing a variety of other volunteering with the Wildlife Trust including carrying out newt surveys under instruction to gain my newt license. Through this I have gained connections, friends of friends who know someone who has experience in X or Y which can help. Building a network of industry contacts is key.

Case Studies



Robyn Faux
Hedgelayer

How did you get into this line of work?

When I left school I went into a mental health apprenticeship role for 2 years and carried on working 3 more years in this industry. During this time my mental health was suffering and couldn't leave the work at home, so I decided to go back to school and do something for me. I have always been obsessed with trees and fungi - as well as their beauty they provide us with clean air, food and homes for habitat.

I went to Bicton college and studied Arboriculture and forestry for 2 years, gaining many qualifications and life lessons. After this I did some free surgery work and tree surveying but nothing was quite hitting that spot - I didn't feel like I was helping the trees and I could do more. This is when I came across hedgelaying.

I saw a local hedgelayer- Steve McCulloch- laying the most beautiful hedge near where I lived. Just like that I wanted to know more - I was so intrigued. I got the guts to ask to do some work experience with him and he kindly agreed.

Lucy Stockton
Farming Engagement Officer
Mendip Hills National Landscape

How did you get into this line of work?

I always loved nature but it took me a while to connect that with knowing I wanted to work in the conservation sector. I had never really enjoyed science at school due to lack of inspiring teachers and it took me volunteering in a conservation organisation in my gap year to inspire me to go on to study Biology.

This role attracted me as I think we can have a bigger impact when we work with landowners and farmers rather than just working to improve things on nature reserves. I'm interested in how conservation and nature recovery can expand its reach and would like to help blur the line between conservation and farming.

“It's hard work but I absolutely love it and couldn't see myself doing anything different.”

What qualifications and training are needed?

A chainsaw ticket is helpful (cross cutting and chainsaw maintenance), but you can also learn this on the job. I undertook a traineeship with the Hampshire Hedge Project which allowed me to work with Steve to learn the craft of hedgelaying.



What kind of tasks does your job involve?

- Practical conservation and rural skills
- Managing volunteers
- Project management, operations and development
- Managing budgets
- Organising and running events

Case Studies



Joshua Hale
Chew Valley Project
Manager
Avon Needs Trees

What is your job role?

Managing two complex planting projects and coordinating the staff and volunteers who make planting happen. In the winter, it's more site-based, supporting delivery. Over the spring and summer, volunteer recruitment, training, events, and tree care.

How did you get into this line of work?

I've spent most of my career in community engagement and volunteer management. This developed into setting up and running volunteer-led projects. This was my first step into full-time on one project, and I am really enjoying the challenge.

What is your top tip for young people looking to get into a role like yours?

I've taken multiple part-time, short-contract roles; they tend to be less competitive and have enabled me to develop my skills and experience. Smaller organisations will look for more transferable skills as they will need you to do a greater variety of tasks, I have found that this has helped me get my foot in the door.

“My volunteering has consistently given me an edge in applications, specifically helping me to demonstrate passion and solutions-focused approaches to challenges.”



Caitlin Coombes
Nature Recovery Advisor
Forestry Commission

What does a typical day of work look like?

Every day is different, last week was a morning spent at Slimbridge Wetland Reserve, talking to the project team leading on a landscape recovery project in Gloucestershire and helping them refine their project plans. Then it was back to the office to continue reviewing draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy documents and maps.

Tell us about your career journey.

I volunteered with local Wildlife Trust groups and did two summer internships as an ecologist. I did a degree in Biology with a Year in Industry. To find a placement, I contacted what felt like hundreds of organisations. This was really difficult, because a large majority of these were charities and didn't have the funds to support me.

What is your top tip for young people looking to get into a role like yours?

Being persistent, and not giving up! I've contacted hundreds of organisations and network wherever possible. Phone calls, emails, the lot. If you don't ask you don't get! This can feel daunting (and often soul-destroying!) but honestly persistence is key. If nothing else, it demonstrates your determination and passion for the role and for the sector.



What do Employers Say?

To find out how environmental organisations in the West of England are approaching recruitment and youth skills development, we surveyed several organisations who are members of the West of England Nature Partnership (WENP). Here is what they had to say:

Key takeaways from the survey

- Providing experience for young people, whether through volunteering, paid work, or internships, is recognised as a way to remove barriers to involvement in the sector.
- At entry-level, soft skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, adaptability) are valued alongside professional qualifications or work experience.
- Young people, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, can bring a unique and valued perspective to the sector.
- Uncertainties are highlighted around resources to support paid opportunities for young people, particularly for charities which rely on project-specific funding.



What opportunities do you offer young people?

“People over the age of 18 can volunteer for any of our programmes. Paid placements through the Youth Environmental Service (YES) when it’s up and running.” - YourPark Bristol and Bath

“Regular volunteering opportunities such as Riverfly Monitoring or River Detectives” - Bristol Avon Rivers Trust

“(Projects such as) Young Rangers, Wilder Youth, and Wilder Coast.” - Mendip Hills National Landscape

“We currently have a youth volunteering group which is monthly and a closed cohort with spaces being advertised as they become available.” - Avon Wildlife Trust

“We are setting up a youth events programme which will be available to any young people to attend and meet new people.” - Avon Wildlife Trust



Removing Barriers to Countryside Jobs

Connecting with younger and more diverse audiences is vital to ensuring the benefits and value of the countryside are shared and understood.

In 2024, we worked in partnership with a youth-based social enterprise in Bristol, to explore the attitudes and lived experience of young people of colour in considering nature and land-based jobs. Some of the views that were expressed are identified below:

Appeal:

"I like the idea of working with my hands"

"I care about the environment and climate change"

"I care about justice and fairness and how the people who are affected by climate change and poor environments, do the least damage"

Barriers:

"I don't know anyone who works in the sector"

"I have no idea what sort of jobs exist, how to access training and where the training would lead"

"The work does not pay well. I am not sure if the work could lead to a successful career"

What could influence choices:

- Work experience that would connect young people to the sort of jobs that are in the nature and land based sector.
- Meeting someone who is in the role to hear from them about how they started, what qualifications they needed, how they progressed.
- Financial support for training and paid work.
- Easily accessible digital information.
- Short films about people's experience that are real and engaging.

"Visiting CPRE's event last year was eye-opening, and hearing different people talk about things like hedge laying and watch sheep shearing, it made me realise that there's a whole world out there."



How we are using these insights:

- A grant from the Farming In Protected Landscapes Scheme allowed a group of young people of colour, interested in conservation, to attend and report on our Countryside Day, benefitting from meaningful encounters with employers, CPRE members and the rural community.
- With further funding from FiPL, we invited a group of young people to create a short film on the Wrington & Burrington Annual Hedgelaying Competition in North Somerset.
- For more information on initiatives at CPRE Avon and Bristol, see our website or [subscribe to our newsletter for updates](#).



Can you be a Hedgerow Hero?

Hedgerows are ecological powerhouses, benefitting wildlife whilst helping us to tackle the climate crisis. We have an ambition to create and restore 10km hedgerow in the West of England by CPRE's centenary year in 2026.

Hedgerow Heroes sessions take place over the winter months and are a great opportunity to gain conservation experience. [Sign up](#) and join us for the next planting season. No experience necessary!



Thank you

We hope that this guide has given you ideas and inspiration about next steps and potential career pathways. Thank you to the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme, funded by DEFRA, for making the creation of this guide possible. Thank you to the West of England Nature Partnership network for their support and guidance, and to all the organisations and individuals who participated in the surveys and provided such detailed responses.

References

1. Natural England, [Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment – The national survey on people and the natural environment](#), 2019
2. [The Race Report 2024](#).
3. [Countryside Jobs, Value and vocation: the current state of pay and prospects in conservation, 2024](#)
4. [CPRE Avon and Bristol Diversity and Inclusion Statement](#)



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