

Freya Smith
Assistant Water Vole Officer

I have had a love for wildlife and the outdoors since I was a child. I grew up doing the big garden bird watches with my mum and spent most my holidays hiking in wilderness areas. So it's no surprise that by 13 I had already decided that I wanted to work in nature conservation.



Leaving school I pursued my passion by completing the level 3 Wildlife Conservation course at Bridgend College, moving on to the HND in Environmental Conservation.

Whilst studying both these courses I have learned a great deal about both the physical and theoretical aspects of wildlife conservation. Additionally, I have also learned a great deal as a member of the Bridgend College Conservation Volunteers, a group run by our lecturers to give further opportunities to students. Many of these volunteering trips have been with INCC and so throughout the past 3 years I have been able to participate on a number of their projects including their Upland Water Vole project. This is why I was so elated when INCC provided students this incredible opportunity to join the team surveying these illusive creatures.

During the past 3 months I have gained multiple valuable skills; how to survey Water Voles in upland environments, how to identify field signs and how to differentiate from similar species. I was even able to get first aid and fundraising training.

Since upland Water Voles have had to adapt to a different habitat than those in lowland areas, this job has also provided a unique skill in being able to identify habitat preferences specific to this environment. I also find working with an ongoing project exciting as I have been able to discover new information alongside the team, something I will definitely miss when this position ends. Collecting samples for eDNA analysis and reviewing camera trap videos are just a couple of these activities.

This job has been a valuable opportunity to work in a space where I feel able to ask for help and talk with all members of the group and as a young person soon to complete my degree, having this experience under my belt puts me in a stronger position when applying for future positions.

In the future I would like to work in upland areas as I have a keen interest in the species found there. I am especially interested in peat restoration and bryophytes and thanks to INCC and this opportunity I have developed a greater knowledge in this area.

