

Laura Griffiths
Assistant Water Vole Officer

Having spent a decade working with children in schools and in hospitals, I felt ready for a new chapter. I have always had an affinity with nature from those early childhood experiences of falling in the reën by my house trying to catch a newt and making a homemade flower press out of stones, but I hadn't really appreciated that there was an entire conservation sector out there. The more I researched career possibilities, the more I was sure this was the path for me.

Deciding to embark on a new career in conservation was a significant change, so I started by enrolling on a part-time HND in Environmental Conservation Management at Bridgend College. I have learned an incredible amount so far from grassland and woodland management to surveying, hedgelaying and fence construction, and I am only halfway through the course! The college also has a great conservation volunteering programme to help develop those essential skills and regularly works in conjunction with INCC on projects.

As a result of this work with INCC, a fantastic opportunity came up to apply for a summer internship as an Assistant Water Vole Officer, and I was lucky enough to get one of the positions. Over the summer, I have learned the protocol for surveying in what can be a very harsh environment, how to identify suitable upland Water Vole habitat and field signs, how to set up wildlife cameras to monitor the presence of the invasive and predatory American Mink, and how to collect, record, and store droppings for eDNA analysis. I have collaborated with colleagues from other organisations, represented INCC at a community nature event, and completed various training courses including outdoor first aid and fundraising.

However, most importantly, in a sector where it is well-known that jobs are extremely competitive, this post provided a much-needed opportunity for someone early in their career to gain new skills in that crucial first conservation role. It has also confirmed to me that I do indeed love wildlife surveying, and I plan to continue developing my knowledge of different wildlife species so that I can put it to good use in my next conservation role!

