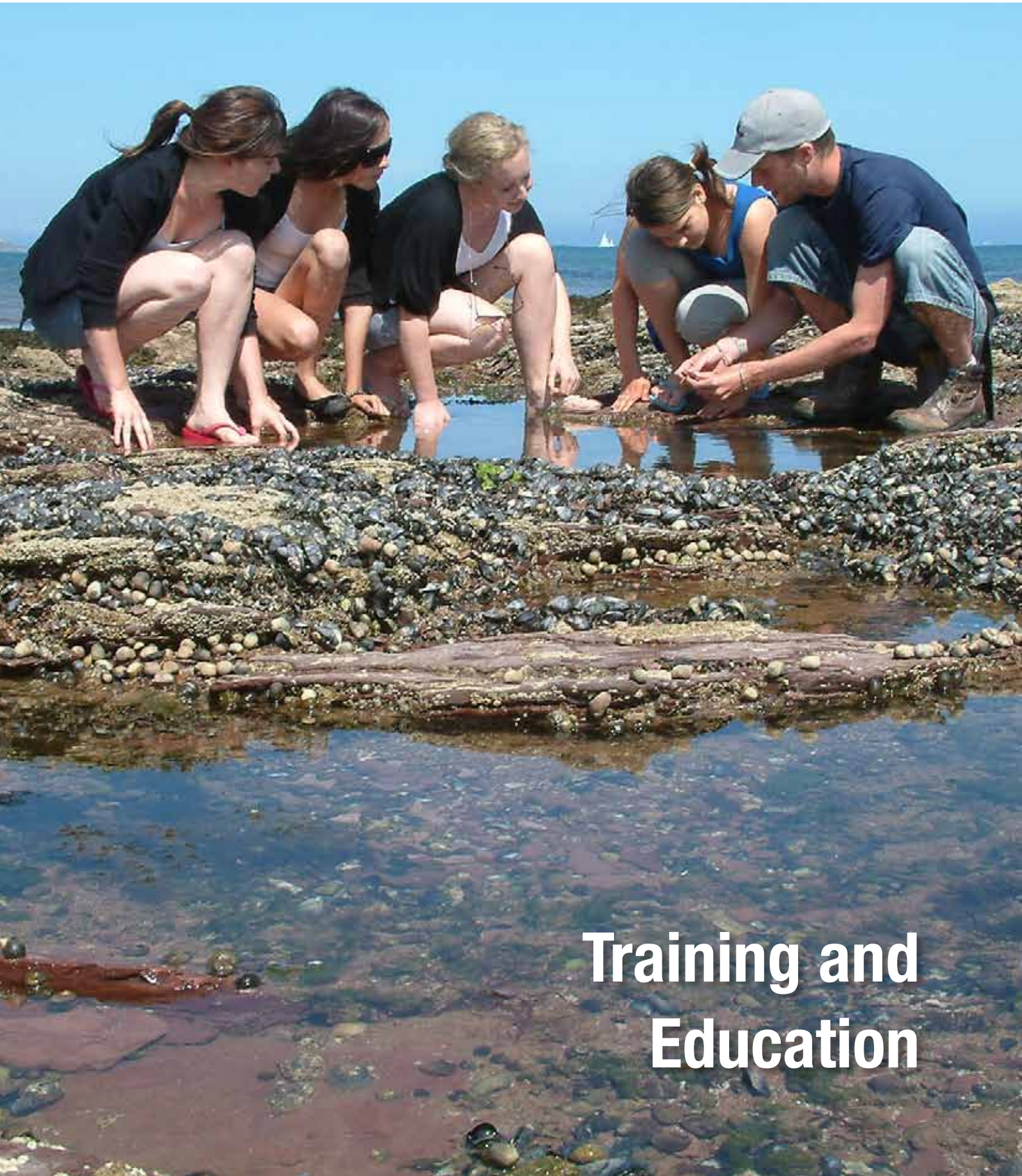




# In Practice

Bulletin of the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management



**Training and  
Education**

# Project LEMUR: Training the Next Generation of Wildlife Professionals

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**In 2000, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) conducted a survey of the issues facing the heritage industry. The survey highlighted a significant decline in heritage skills across the UK, such as species identification and habitat survey skills. The survey also revealed the difficulties faced by those who manage heritage sites in finding people with the requisite practical experience and abilities to help maintain them. As a result of this survey, HLF in 2005 awarded a total of £7 million to help fund the setting up of 10 exemplary heritage training bursary schemes that would improve the quality of skills available to the heritage sector by providing new entrants or existing staff with work-based training opportunities.**

The results of the survey are not a startling revelation to those of us working in the industry. However, what is significant about this £7 million award is that it was a national acknowledgement that the heritage sector is in desperate need of financial help to start planning for future skill gaps in the heritage sector. It was HLF's hope that this funding would provide a significant injection of funding to kick start this process so that it will become mainstream funded in the future.

As a result of this funding, the LEMUR project (Learning Environments in Marine, Urban and Rural areas), a joint initiative between Ambios Ltd (not for profit), Sheffield Wildlife Trust, and Herefordshire Nature Trust (who are leading and co-ordinating the project), was successful in securing £704,000 of funding support in 2006. LEMUR is one of 10 partnership projects nationwide to receive the funding ([www.hlf.org/bursaries](http://www.hlf.org/bursaries)).

The LEMUR project is an accredited heritage training model that has proven to offer a shorter route to developing the necessary field skills and competency required to enter a professional post in nature conservation. The training and work experience on offer by the three partners have either a marine, urban or rural theme, hence the project's title 'LEMUR'. The heritage bursaries in Herefordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire have a rural theme linked to woodlands, wildflower meadows, rivers, orchards and agriculture. The Sheffield bursaries have an urban theme linked to urban wildlife corridors, whilst in Devon, bursaries have a marine theme linked to coastal habitats such as estuarine sites.

The project offers 36-week work placements to passionate and enthusiastic individuals who are intent on making a career of nature conservation. To date 36 trainees have passed through the programme. Each trainee receives a tax and National Insurance free training bursary allowance of c.£200 per week. Eighty percent of the placement is spent working at the host placement organisation alongside experienced wildlife professionals who act as their mentors during this period. These mentors guide and support the trainees in a safe and nurtured way. This 'on the job' experience is backed up by a tailored training package provided by the LEMUR partners that is geared up to providing the fundamental building



**Open day led by LEMUR trainees to showcase their skills**  
Photo: James Fair

blocks in species identification, ecological habitat survey, habitat management and heritage interpretation. These skills are also backed up by important work skills such as project management, computer and communications skills.

It is during this 36-week period that the trainee can put these skills into practice, and reinforce them whilst working on real conservation initiatives that their placement host is delivering. This way, the LEMUR project is helping to increase capacity within host organisations enabling them to raise delivery of their respective conservation objectives.

Herefordshire Nature Trust, Sheffield Wildlife Trust and Ambios Ltd act as a 'learning hub' from which they out-post trainees to placement hosts within their 'themed' area. The placement host has direct responsibility for and supervision of the trainee throughout the placement period. The LEMUR hub provides additional support and training throughout.

The LEMUR Heritage bursary placements on offer are extremely diverse and geographically spread from South Yorkshire to Devon, taking in Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire along the way. The types of placements on offer have focused on provision of skills and experience in species identification, survey work, habitat management practices and heritage education. Organisations hosting placements have included Herefordshire Nature Trust, Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Malvern Hills Conservators, Warwickshire County Council and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust in the rural hub; Marine Biological Association, Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, Sharpham Outdoors Trust and Living Coasts in the marine hub and Green Estates, Sheffield City Council, Sheffield Wildlife Trust and Working Woodlands Trust within the urban hub.

The LEMUR experience begins with the recruitment process, which is co-ordinated by the Herefordshire Nature Trust and supported by each of the hubs. Each of the host placement organisations works closely with their local LEMUR hub

manager in selecting their trainee. The LEMUR team remove the administrative burden from the recruitment process on behalf of the placement host, leaving the host to simply short-list and attend an interview day with their local hub manager.

The trainee's journey begins with an induction day with their respective LEMUR hub team. The day maps out expectations, milestones, their training, administrative requirements and the all important LEMUR mentor support network. The rest of the week is spent being inducted by their placement host before attending a three-day team-build alongside the rest of the trainees and the LEMUR team.

At the team-build there are a series of activities designed to bond the new team of trainees together and to provide metaphors for working effectively such as prioritising work and quality of communication. The trainees also receive training course tasters operated by the different hubs, such as barn owl pellet analysis, bat surveying and vegetative grass identification, etc.

Immediately after the team-building event the trainees return to their respective learning hubs for two weeks of intensive practical 'hub core' training, that gears them up to start their role with their host. The training reflects the types of role on offer. The marine hub provides a solid foundation in heritage interpretation skills and practical experience in planning and running a real education event for large groups of school children within the shore zone. The rural and urban hubs offer a solid foundation in botany, species identification and habitat survey skills. Here the trainees learn basic principles of botany, the use of a range of floras in identifying species, habitat condition, assessment principles, they gain knowledge of differing species' ecological importance and their specific wildlife protection, landowner liaison skills, risk assessments and knowledge of differing habitat surveys such as National Vegetation Classification (NVC) and Phase 1. By the end of the two weeks, the trainees are able to plan, implement and report on a full Phase 2 survey of an ancient woodland as per industry standards.

It is from this point onwards that the trainee begins work with their host on a full-time basis. Thereafter, the LEMUR team continue to provide skills and accreditation support to the trainee that add value to their time at the host.

The earlier hub core training is later backed up by a further five-day block of training once the trainee has settled into their role at the host – usually a couple of months later. This training incorporates a variety of protected species surveys and mitigation measures for dormice, great crested newt, badger and bats, etc. In other hubs there is a focus on grassland survey



**LEMUR trainees undertake a botanical identification test**  
Photo: LEMUR Project

skills, which is run along the lines of the hub core training for woodlands.

Where the specifics of each trainee's role demand specialist in-depth training such as MapInfo (GIS) or is simply out of the scope of the host's ability to offer it as an 'on the job' learning experience, the project makes available an allowance of £500 to the trainee to attend a course. Examples of courses attended by trainees have included additional specific species identification and survey courses for beetles, moths, fungi, bumblebees, bats, butterflies, NVC, pond survey and ecology, barn owls and reptiles. Other courses have included RYA Powerboat handling, GIS (MapInfo) and GPS, Marine Mammal Medic (run by British Divers Marine Life Rescue), hedgelaying, dry stone walling, and traditional chair making. Some of the trainees have used their additional training allowance to join IEEEM in order to tap into other courses.

Another feature of the LEMUR scheme is networking with other professionals and amateurs. Each group of trainees in each hub is responsible for planning, promoting and running a 'hub open day' event to showcase the skills that they have learned so far. These events allow fellow trainees from other hubs to learn a little more about another dimension of work in the heritage sector. The event provides a safe platform upon which to practise and develop skills required of a trainer and event organiser as well as for the trainees to network with potential employers. LEMUR is also plugged into the network of amateur biological recording groups and societies within their hub area. The trainees join in with additional volunteer based activities in their spare time. This way they maximise their learning and make the beginnings of important contacts to help them through their careers.

The project has a team of dedicated skills assessors whose role it is to support and verify the competence and skills level of the trainee whilst working 'on the job' at their host. They do this by arranging to observe the trainee carrying out a specific activity in the work place, and then follow-up with specific days at the hub to review each trainee's portfolio of evidence. By the end of the 36-week placement, they will have achieved three units from either the Level 3 National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Environmental Conservation or a Level 3 National Open College Network (NOCN) qualification in Biological Assessment Skills (designed and trialled by the LEMUR project).

Finally, the project closes with a celebratory graduation event whereby the trainees and hosts come together to reflect on the LEMUR experience over the past 36 weeks.



**Rob Bacon, Wye Valley AONB trainee, showcasing his bumblebee training**  
Photo: LEMUR Project



**LEMUR trainees moth trapping with Malvern Hills Conservators, Ian Butler and Bernadette Noakes**  
**Photo: LEMUR Project**

It was the LEMUR partners' 30 years of combined experience of running several different heritage training schemes beforehand, coupled with the commitment by the host organisations to provide high quality placements, that helped make a successful multi-partner bid to the lottery fund to run the LEMUR project. The bringing together of all this experience has allowed the best practice learned from each of the former training schemes to be incorporated into a nationwide learning framework called LEMUR. Now, after three years of running LEMUR, the project has proved to be extremely well honed and effective in continuing to feed the environmental sector with appropriately trained new entrants with a range of background skills and experiences.

A few of the partners' previous training schemes have included Herefordshire Nature Trust's Environmental Experience for Life-long Learning Project (EEL), Sheffield Wildlife Trust's various adult learning courses and Project Kingfisher run by Ambios Ltd.

The Herefordshire Nature Trust's EEL project primarily provided 'on the job' training in field identification and survey skills to teams of graduate trainees since 1999. In addition to this, the award-winning EEL project ran separate skills courses that provided training for 157 wildlife professionals from 53 different environmental organisations. Courses ranged from Wildlife Law, Phase 1 and NVC survey techniques through to a variety of species ecology and identification courses, such as bumblebees and sedges and rushes. During this time, the EEL project managed to train and enthuse 64 trainees.

Ambios Ltd's Project Kingfisher was a European Social Funded project that set up an 'on the job' learning framework for 70 trainees to work alongside experienced wildlife professionals in the work place. In addition, a further 140 wildlife professionals received training support in a range of short courses such as RYA Powerboat Level 2 and National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC) chainsaw operation. An added focus of the project was the use of computer skills in the work place.

Education and training has been at the heart of Sheffield Wildlife Trust for years. The Trust has offered a wide range of training opportunities from one-day courses to accredited NOCN training and NVQs in environmental conservation. These training opportunities have supported and backed up the plethora of volunteer opportunities that exist at the Trust. Whether as a full-time or *ad hoc* volunteer, these training courses have provided the basis to gain the skills and experience needed to further a career in the heritage industry.

Like its predecessors, Project LEMUR has been hugely successful in getting over 94% of its trainees into diverse conservation roles. These roles range from marine education officers with the Wildlife Trust for Cornwall, ORCA, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust in Scotland, field ecologists working for ecological consultants located nationwide, conservation officers for Butterfly Conservation and Countryside Commission for Wales, assistant county ecologists with Warwickshire County Council, to National Nature Reserve estate workers for Natural England, countryside rangers, environmental centre tutors, environmental planning officers and assistant marine biological data officers.

Over the years, the combination of LEMUR, EEL, Kingfisher and Sheffield Wildlife Trust's range of adult learning programmes have helped supply the nature conservation industry with a significant number of new entrants with the types of practical hands on skills that employers are looking for. As of December 2008, these projects have trained in excess of 250 trainees and in excess of 300 other employed wildlife professionals.

All previous projects run by the partners have been extremely over-subscribed for places. LEMUR has received in excess of 1,200 applications for its 36 bursary placements. This clearly shows that there is still a high demand for this type of training initiative.

Current funding from the HLF is expected to cease in September, although, as of 16 July 2009, HLF have launched a new funding initiative called 'Skills for the future'. LEMUR has been invited as one of the ten existing bursary schemes to bid into this fund which will extend the current project to 2012. We will not know if we have been successful until 24 September 2009.

In the meantime, the LEMUR team is working hard to try and identify new partners and funding initiatives not only to support a LEMUR-type initiative, but also to make it sustainable and mainstream for the future. In doing so, the team have been producing a short film to capture both the essence of the LEMUR experience as well as a flavour of the skills issues that nature conservation is currently facing. In addition to this, the LEMUR team are running a conference at Kew Gardens on 18 September 2009 to showcase the project and disseminate its best practice. The LEMUR website is currently undergoing an update to capture interest from potential hosts and trainees, which will help inform and influence current drives to make LEMUR sustainable. If you would like to know more about how you can get to see the film or attend the conference, or find out how you can learn more about the training opportunities offered by LEMUR then please visit the website.

If you are looking for this kind of training opportunity in order to secure a post in nature conservation, or know of someone in this position, help us to secure future funding by going to the LEMUR website and completing the online questionnaire. This will help us to help you by making a case for continued funding.

LEMUR website: [www.projectlemur.org](http://www.projectlemur.org)

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