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The first step to choosing a career is to make sure you are actually willing to commit to pursuing the career. You don’t want to waste your time doing something you don’t want to do. If you’re new here, you should read about: Still unsure if becoming an ecologist is the right career path? Take the free CareerExplorer career test to find out if this career is right for you. Perhaps you are well-suited to become an ecologist or another similar career! Described by our users as being “shockingly accurate”, you might discover careers you haven’t thought of before. Becoming an ecologist requires a combination of education, experience, and specialized training in ecology and related fields. Here is a detailed description of how to become an ecologist: Earn a Bachelor's Degree: Obtain a bachelor's degree in ecology, environmental science, biology, or a related field. Gain practical experience through internships, research projects, or volunteer opportunities in ecological research or conservation. Consider Graduate Studies: While a bachelor's degree may qualify you for entry-level positions in ecology, pursuing a graduate degree, such as a master's or Ph.D., can provide advanced training and specialization in a specific area of ecology. Graduate programs offer opportunities for in-depth research, mentorship, and professional development, which can enhance your qualifications and career prospects as an ecologist. Gain Experience: Gain experience through internships, fieldwork, or research assistantships during your undergraduate or graduate studies. Seek opportunities to work with experienced ecologists, conduct field research, analyze data, and contribute to ecological research projects. Building a strong foundation of practical experience and technical skills is essential for success as an ecologist. Develop Specialization: Consider specializing in a specific area of ecology based on your interests and career goals. Specializations within ecology may include community ecology, population ecology, conservation biology, ecosystem ecology, or restoration ecology, among others. Developing expertise in a particular area can help you stand out in the field and pursue opportunities aligned with your interests and strengths. Network and Seek Opportunities: Network with professionals in the field of ecology, attend conferences, workshops, and seminars, and join professional organizations such as the Ecological Society of America (ESA) to connect with other ecologists and stay updated on industry trends and job opportunities. Certifications Obtaining relevant certifications can demonstrate your expertise and commitment to potential employers, especially in specialized areas of ecology. Here are some certifications that may be beneficial for ecologists: Ecological Society of America (ESA) Certification: The Ecological Society of America offers certifications in ecological restoration and ecological modeling. These certifications demonstrate proficiency in specific areas of ecology and may enhance your qualifications for certain positions, particularly in restoration ecology or quantitative ecology. Wetland Professional Certification: The Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS) offers certification programs for wetland professionals, including wetland scientists, wetland managers, and wetland delineators. These certifications demonstrate expertise in wetland ecology, assessment, and management, which may be valuable for ecologists working in wetland conservation or regulatory compliance. LEED Accredited Professional (LEED AP): The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) accreditation is offered by the U.S. Green Building Council and demonstrates expertise in sustainable design and environmental stewardship. While not specific to ecology, becoming a LEED AP may be beneficial for ecologists interested in sustainable development, green infrastructure, or urban ecology. GIS Professional (GISP) Certification: The GIS Certification Institute offers certification programs for Geographic Information Systems (GIS) professionals, including the Certified GIS Professional (GISP) designation. GIS skills are valuable for ecologists working with spatial data, landscape analysis, and habitat mapping, and obtaining GISP certification can demonstrate proficiency in GIS technology and applications. Wilderness First Responder (WFR) Certification: While not specific to ecology, obtaining certification as a Wilderness First Responder can be valuable for ecologists conducting fieldwork in remote or rugged environments. WFR certification demonstrates proficiency in wilderness medicine and emergency response, ensuring the safety and well-being of field researchers and expedition teams. This article will give students an insight into the best career options for a future in... 6 hours ago Read Full Details The following article gives an insight into the best professions in the world. 9 hours ago Read Full Details Check out the list of Career Options After MA. 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There are a range of ecology and environmental management related undergraduate degree programmes available in the UK and Ireland, so there are plenty of courses to choose from. Studying an ecology or environmental management degree will allow you to: Understand how to manage the natural environment Understand how ecosystems work Learn about species diversity Understand how human activities are altering ecological systems Understand how natural changes in the environment (such as climate change, flooding, erosion etc.) affect species and habitats Learn plant and animal identification skills and ecological survey techniques Specialise in terrestrial or aquatic ecology For further information on finding the right undergraduate course for you, please take a look at our Finding the Right Course – Undergraduate Study document. Postgraduate Study There are over 200 postgraduate ecology and environmental management related postgraduate degree programmes available for study in the UK and Ireland. Benefits of studying a postgraduate degree include: Gaining additional skills Studying a topic that interests you in greater detail Specialising in a particular area Enhancing your employability For further information on finding the right postgraduate course for you, please take a look at our Finding the Right Course – Postgraduate Study document. Hello, I'm Rob, Rob Marchant, a professor of tropical ecology at the University of York. So there's a teaching element, and I lead a couple of courses. So one on land use change and land use management. One on sort of field based teaching. Research, and for me at the moment that's probably the, the biggest part of it. So I run a research group around tropical ecosystems. I very much started off say in this field of paleoecology, going to swamps, taking cores of sediment. Coming back, analysing them in the lab. Understanding and describing those past changes. We still do quite a lot of that work still, that fundamental research. But we also are increasingly, rather than looking down and into sediments and back through time, we're looking forward and trying to develop participatory scenario approaches, so bringing people together. Being able to be flexible and to listen to people and to listen to, you know, some of those challenges and be able to be open to those new ideas that come through. One of the key things is as an ecologist, as a paleoecologist, you know, we now work with modelers, we work with archeologists, we work with anthropologists, we work with historians, we work with sort of social scientists, we work with theatre groups, we work with artists. It's really important that we have people with the skills who know what those challenges are going to be and how we can work with nature. How we can work with ecosystems, how we can work with landscapes, to navigate those futures. Meet Gabrielle. She's 24, from Hull, and is a graduate ecologist at RammSanderson. Part of our Bitesize world of work series.I love working outside. When you actually see the animals you really appreciate what our countryside has.What does your job as an ecologist involve?During the summer, my job involves doing what we call 'phase one habitat surveys'. This is where we go out and survey specific environmental conditions, looking for protected species, like bats and badgers. Once we find them, we work out ways to protect them from human activity and development.During the winter, my job is very desk-based. My daily tasks involve writing reports and licences.Gabrielle identifies protected species and helps to protect them.Did you always know you wanted to do this job?Definitely not. I didn’t even know it existed when I was at school! I always knew that I wanted to work with animals and the obvious route was to become a vet.I volunteered with lots and lots of organisations, including local ones, and also with orangutans in Borneo while I was travelling. It became clear to me that I didn’t really want to be a vet, I wanted to help conserve animals instead.Gabrielle identifies protected species and helps to protect them.What skills do you use in your work?A lot of my work is based on being able to identify common plants, mammal signs and bat calls, so subject knowledge is very important. I draw on the plant biology that I learnt in school a lot – it's just as important as animal biology.I need to use lots of soft skills too. Organisation is important as I have to meet deadlines for getting reports to clients. Time management is also important as I have to juggle my workload – I might be managing three different reports at once, and also have field surveys to do. Teamwork is also really important because we never work alone and ICT skills too because I use the computer every day.Gabrielle's job involves working at her computer, as well as getting out in nature.What was your educational career path?At GCSE I took triple Science and that was really helpful because we went into a lot of depth in each subject (Physics, Chemistry, and Biology). At A-level I took all three sciences and History. Biology was the critical one for this job, but I don’t think I’d be as good at writing reports without History.Then I went to university and did a degree in Zoology – that was the best experience of my life! I’m currently doing an online master's degree in Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem Health.It took me a long time to become an ecologist. Alongside my degree, I did lots of volunteer work and training courses in things like mammal identification. This really helped me to get ahead in this type of work.Gabrielle's job involves working at her computer, as well as getting out in nature.Try everything. You don’t know what you’re going to fall into or what you'll really likeGet as much work experience as you can. This is a hard industry to get into, but it's easier if you have a lot of experience and some transferable skills. It makes you more desirable to employersIt can be demoralising sometimes to go for interviews and not be offered the job, but if you know what you want, you have to just persevere and keep going.Ecologist average salary: £22,000 - £42,000 per year.Ecologist typical working hours: 39 to 41 hours per week. You could work evenings and weekends occasionally.You could get into this role via a university course or a degree apprenticeship. You'll usually need two to three A-levels, or equivalent, for a degree or degree apprenticeship. Alternatives to A-levels include taking a T-level (England-only), which is equivalent to three A-levels. Check with your course provider which alternative qualifications they accept.Sources: LMI for All, National Careers Service, GOV.UKThis information is a guide and is constantly changing. Please check the National Careers Service website for the latest information and all the qualifications needed and the GOV.UK website for more on T-levels.Work experience can help you make informed decisions about your future career.Work experience can help you make informed decisions about your future career.Language:EnglishCymraegGaeilgeGàidhlig Ecologists study the interrelationships between organisms and their environments. For example, they may research how the creatures in forests, deserts, wetlands, or other ecosystems interact with each other, as well as their environments. Some may study how the removal or return of apex predators like wolves affect other species in the area, or the strengths and weaknesses of invasive species compared with native species. What Does an Ecologist Do? The reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park made national headlines in the 1990s, and brought about a major boost in the park's biodiversity. This victory for native ecology is unfortunately more than balanced out by the creep of invasive species like zebra mussels, Kudzu vines and Burmese pythons in other parts of the United States. The roles species play in their communities are complex, and changes to those communities can be extremely disruptive. By increasing our understanding of how nature works, ecologists can help us make better decisions that minimize the effects of our activities on other species and the planet. Since evolution is the ultimate designer, their knowledge is also key to helping us model our products, industries, buildings, institutions, and communities after what we see in nature, making them more efficient and sustainable. When it comes to the environment, ignorance is danger rather than bliss. The work of ecologists brings us the knowledge and tools to we need to protect it. Solving Environmental Problems Ecologists use their expertise to solve environmental problems. They may: Investigate the factors at play in a disturbed ecosystem Anticipate potential effects of proposed actions, or Design sustainable practices Ecologists may do fieldwork to collect and analyze data on environmental conditions, or to assess or certify a habitat. They use the information they gather to plan habitat management or environmental restoration projects, including procedures, resources, schedules, and budgets. Ecologists communicate their recommendations to landowners, clients, and policymakers, often with maps made with geographic information systems (GIS) or diagrams created with computer-aided design (CAD) programs. RELATED - Ecology: Examining the Relationships Between Living Things Many ecologists work for state and federal government natural resource agencies. These workers may write environmental impact statements evaluating the potential effects of industrial, commercial, and public sector projects. Others manage ecological resources as natural resource managers. Ecologists employed by environmental consulting companies may assess the environmental impacts of clients' projects, and design sustainable practices to minimize negative effects. Ecologists also monitor and restore disturbed populations and ecosystems for governments and private organizations>. They may also apply for environmental remediation permits on behalf of clients. Researchers and research assistants conduct research in the field and in labs to answer questions how species and their environment interact. Ecologists in program management positions advise policy makers through committees and reports. Colleges and universities also employ many ecologists as professors and staff researchers. They may also work for parks and recreation areas as naturalists and environmental educators. While ecologists are employed nationwide, there are generally more jobs in the western states, and particularly on the west coast. In the East, ecologically-sensitive Florida had the highest number of zoologists and wildlife biologists as of May 2013. What Is the Average Ecologist Salary? Ecologists, who fall under the broader category of environmental scientists and specialists, earned a median salary of $73,230 as of May 2020. The top 10% in this field earn more than $129,450, while the lowest 10% earn about $42,960. 2020 US Bureau of Labor Statistics salary figures and job growth projections for environmental scientists and specialists reflect national data not school-specific information. Conditions in your area may vary. Data accessed September 2021. What Is the Job Demand for an Ecologist? Growing awareness of the extent of environmental disturbance and a greater focus on sustainability are expected to drive significant job growth in the environmental sector. Much of the demand is expected to come from private companies, non-government organizations, and primary and secondary schools, more so than at universities and federal agencies. Keep in mind that people who study ecology are often hired under other job titles like environmental consultant, natural resource manager, program manager, lobbyist, and lawyer. Ecology Jobs & Job Description Ecology jobs might focus on explaining life processes and interactions, the movement of energy throughout ecological systems and how ecosystems develop. Ecologists can conduct research, seek an applied position, or even a teaching position. Regardless, successful ecologists will be responsible for many similar tasks, including: Develop and test hypotheses about populations, communities, and ecosystem function Conduct field, lab, and theoretical research Analyze data using statistical models Study plant and animal characteristics over time Assess the biodiversity of ecosystems and examine influencing factors like pollution Provide useful data and advice to internal and external parties Use modeling techniques to assess the potential impact of ecosystem changes Publish the results of studies and research within the workgroup and throughout the field Manage multifaceted projects Support strategic initiatives and business development for the region Establish productive relationships with clients and partners Second-tier ecologists often function as team lead or senior advisor to their workgroup. Accordingly, they may have more managerial responsibilities, such as: Producing concise technical documents like proposals and presentations for stakeholders Conducting planning, research and analysis, and assessments in order to best direct the project Applying for permits and navigating regulatory processes Ensuring quality and continuous improvement through innovation, and meeting timelines and benchmarks Consulting activities including: project management, tracking billable time, communicating schedules, directing/ supervising staff, and driving profitability Successfully bidding for and manage projects and funding opportunities Creating a challenging and supportive professional environment Ecologists at various education levels are hired for a range of different jobs. Associates degrees are adequate for lab, field, or research technician positions. Those with Bachelor's degrees may find work as program scientists in government, or as environmental educators and teachers. Master's degrees are generally required for environmental consultants, environmental planners, and program managers in private industry. They're also required for program managers, wildlife biologists, and natural resource managers in government. Similar positions at nonprofit organizations also require a 4-year degree. Doctorates are required for faculty and research positions in academia, and for any type of research position in the private sector, government, and nonprofits. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the field, ecology students study life sciences such as zoology, microbiology, and botany, as well as chemistry and earth science. Mathematics and computer science are also essential skills. Since ecologists advise and communicate with others, good writing and communication skills are helpful. Practical experience is very important. As early as possible, try volunteering or working as a professor's lab or research assistant, or spend a summer at a biological field station. As an alternative, help out at a park, nature center, or related government agency. Many colleges and universities offer Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) programs - seek them out. Internships are also excellent opportunities - try searching for them via the Environmental Careers Organization. You can also get help from the Student Conservation Association, which matches students with volunteer opportunities. Ecology - Related Degrees What Kind of Societies and Professional Organizations Do Ecologists Have? The Ecological Society of America (ESA) ( ) administers optional professional certifications, offers networking opportunities through section and chapter activities, holds an annual conference, and puts out several publications. The Organization of Biological Field Stations (helps member stations increase their effectiveness in supporting critical research, education, and outreach programs. Its website offers a directory internships and REUs, a list of upcoming field courses, a station directory, and manuals and best practices for running field stations. Other Recommend Resources Editorial Note: We earn a commission from partner links on Forbes Advisor. Commissions do not affect our editors' opinions or evaluations. If you’re looking for a job that brings your love of the environment into a purpose-filled career, you might consider becoming an ecologist. As an ecologist, you’re not limited to working as an outdoor park ranger picking up litter. Ecologists perform diverse tasks and can work in a variety of settings. Their responsibilities might include: Researching water samples in a lab to examine the environmental impact of a new development Working as part of a team to plan for city growth while balancing natural areas Restoring a native wildlife habitat to help preserve a particular animal species Supporting a national park Teaching the next generation how to leave the environment better than they found it Ecologists often wear many hats, and their career trajectories are not always clear-cut. But if you’re wondering how to become an ecologist, we’ve pulled together the key required steps below. What Do Ecologists Do? Ecologists are environmental scientists who study how the environment functions and how humans interact with the environment to plan for the future. Ecologists make plans to improve the relationship between the environment and humans. They may advise organizations on their environmental impacts, conserve resources, stop damage to the environment and anticipate human impact. Ecologist Job Titles The ecology field has many specialties, including marine, vegetation, agriculture and forestry. As an ecologist, you can work for the government, private companies, museums and nonprofits. Here are some common jobs you can do with an ecology or environmental science degree: Ecology Job Responsibilities Ecologists’ job responsibilities can vary but may include those listed below. Environmental surveys: Working with organizations to examine how humans affect ecosystems by taking water and soil samples and collecting other data Animal and plant habitat studies: Evaluating ways to preserve habitats by understanding human impact and how scientists can improve natural areas River and wetland restoration: Cleaning and restoring areas to help water flow better in rivers, creeks and wetlands Invasive species: Mapping and tracking invasive species to protect local wildlife Plan new infrastructure: Anticipating and managing the environmental impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects Conservation plan: Creating plans to conserve environmental species as humans build and hunt on the surrounding land Compile environmental reports: Used for research for government, academia, companies and other organizations Field research: Working with organizations to develop policies Like many other academics, ecologists are often expected to teach, conduct research and manage more junior ecologists. How To Become an Ecologist The steps involved in this career path can vary, but we’ve laid out the most common path to becoming an ecologist below. Step One: Earn Your Degree The level of education you’ll need as an ecologist will depend on your specific career aspirations. Here’s a rundown of what you can do with various levels of education. Bachelor’s degree: With a bachelor’s degree in environmental science, ecology or a related field, you can assist with fieldwork and in laboratories. Usually, your course load consists of classes in conservation science, chemistry, animal science and policy. Master’s degree: Most leadership positions in the field require a master’s degree. You might consider a master’s in environmental science, conservation science, public policy, ecology or conservation biology. Doctorate: Those pursuing careers in academia and high-level positions in research or consulting should earn a Ph.D. in ecology or a related field. Many people gain work experience before pursuing advanced degrees in ecology. Step Two: Gain Work Experience It’s time to build your practical skills in the field. Get work experience through research, labs, data, conservation and fieldwork. You can gain work experience while pursuing a degree; many universities offer work-study programs and internships. Hands-on experience can help you choose an area of specialization for your career. Step Three: Obtain Professional Licenses Earn licensure related to your specialization within ecology. The field has many licenses and certifications to choose from; for example, if you work in rebuilding and restoring habitats, you may consider the Certified Ecological Restoration Practitioner (CERP) credential. Step Four: Consider Professional Certification Professional certification, memberships and advanced degrees can help you become a recognized leader in your field and give you an edge in the job market. We’ll discuss specific certification options in a later section. Ecologist Salary and Job Outlook The median annual pay for an ecologist is $76,480, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)—significantly higher than the national median of $46,310 per year. And the BLS projects a 6% growth in employment for these professionals between 2022 and 2032, which is twice as fast as the projected growth rate for all occupations nationwide. Certifications for Ecologists The ecology field offers many certifications for professionals with various specializations. We’ll discuss several below. Certified Hazardous Materials Manager (CHMM) If you’re active in the field and want to work on conservation and rebuilding habitats, consider the CHMM credential. Here’s how to earn this certification: Fill out an application Submit a transcript demonstrating a completed degree from an accredited college Submit employment verification demonstrating four years of work experience with hazardous materials, planning for hazardous materials, s