



CIEEM

# inpractice

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Becoming a Better Botanist:  
Tools for Early Career Ecologists

Why Effective Ecological  
Reports are Essential

The Ethics of Employing  
Freelance Ecologists

Data Management Standards  
on Construction Projects

## Ethics and Standards



# Career Profile

**Name:** Drew Lyness BSc (Hons)

**Organisation:** CIEEM

**Job title:** Volunteer Engagement Officer

**Years in the sector:** 5



## What inspired you to pursue a career in ecology?

In my primary school years, I lived in urban South London and

my daily routine was disconnected from nature. However, my parents took me to the WWT London Wetland Centre in Barnes. It was then that everything changed, and my passion for birdwatching was ignited. Getting close-range views of exotic wildfowl was something completely new, and I found the diversity of birdlife awe-inspiring. I even saw a wild bittern out on the reserve! I have never looked back. Wildlife conservation was a world that I was willing to dive into head first. I think of myself as living proof that young people must have access to wild places so that they can appreciate their value and wonder.

## How did you get here/what was your career path?

In the fortunate position of knowing (a least roughly) where I wanted to pursue my future career, I undertook biology and geography at A-level, and used my results to join an Ecology BSc course at the University of East Anglia (UEA). However, between A-levels and beginning university, I had a 6 month job at a well-known food store to save funds because I had heard that access into the ecology sector often relied on having significant voluntary experience. I used my savings to fund a 6 month summer residential internship as an Assistant Reserve Warden. Living in the heart of possibly the UK's most biodiverse nature reserve, RSPB Arne in Dorset, was truly

magical. Singing woodlark became my morning alarm clock!

Volunteering provided the knowledge and practical skills I needed to understand how conservation is delivered on the ground. Building a portfolio of contacts at the RSPB was a vital element for me in gaining my first paid role in the ecology sector. Over the coming years I joined an RSPB local group, volunteered with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and became president of UEA's Conservation and Wildlife Society. After graduation, it took just two job applications before I was rewarded with my first paid job in wildlife conservation, as Local Groups and Volunteering Support Officer with RSPB Eastern England. After three excellent years in the role, I switched to my current role at CIEEM so I could apply my experience to new challenges on a different side of the sector.

## What are your main responsibilities?

In my current Volunteer Engagement Officer role at CIEEM I am responsible for developing good volunteer management standards across the Institute, providing practical support to Member Networks and Special Interest Groups, and developing the role of volunteers as ambassadors for both CIEEM and the overall profession.

## What does a typical day/week look like?

My work involves predominantly supporting and building positive working relationships with volunteers and, in pre-COVID times, travelling the country (on public transport) to meet volunteers across Britain and Ireland who donate their time to CIEEM. My role has since adapted to technology and involves online meetings to provide support to volunteer committees remotely, as well as leading on volunteer recruitment, induction and recognition procedures.

I have a mixture of responsive work and longer-term projects focusing on updating CIEEM policies and procedures for managing volunteers. I aim to ensure volunteers find their roles both impactful and rewarding.

## What do you like most about your role?

Meeting so many amazing people with a wealth of diverse expertise, who share my concerns about the future of our planet and want to act on the biodiversity and climate crisis! It is a privilege to motivate, provide the tools and enable volunteers to make a real impact.

## What skills and abilities have benefitted you the most?

People skills are vital, especially to build successful working relationships with colleagues and volunteers and to communicate with the public. This is transferable across all roles in the sector. Being a keen naturalist, and having a broad knowledge of British wildlife, have been highly useful.

## What one piece of advice would you give to someone looking to join the sector?

It is often said, it is not what you know but who you know. The ecology sector is a small world, and it can feel as though everyone knows each other. Networking is vital, so my advice would be to build up a list of key contacts as a priority. Join wildlife-related clubs or societies. Volunteer with them if you have the time. You won't regret it!



Shorelark by Drew Lyness