

# 2009 interns hard at work already

ONCE AGAIN THE PEOPLE'S TRUST FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES IS PLEASED TO BE SUPPORTING A GROUP OF YOUNG CONSERVATION RESEARCHERS. NIDA AL FULAIJ INTRODUCES THIS YEAR'S INTERNS AND THEIR EXCITING MAMMAL PROJECTS.

**P**eople's Trust for Endangered Species has given five inspiring young students the opportunity to gain a foothold in the world of conservation by awarding them each a grant of up to £4 000 to enable them to carry out a conservation project over the coming months, whilst being mentored by some of the leading scientists in the field.

Focussing on the plight of various UK mammal species, these budding young conservationists will have the chance to work with established teams of scientists, learn new field skills and study the ecology of species they haven't encountered before, working on some of the nation's best loved animals. This unique opportunity will enable them to gain valuable work experience, something many young graduates find hard to come by, in particular in the world of conservation.



Melissa Marr, from Aberdeen, is taking up a position at the Zoological Society of London to investigate

whether the decreasing genetic diversity within isolated populations of red squirrels makes them more susceptible to the lethal squirrelpox virus carried by the greys. If it does, then the reds will need help to resist the disease by linking up the remaining populations to improve their genetic mix. Melissa is a graduate of East London University where she gained a first class degree in Animal Biology and Conservation.



Working with the Bat Conservation Trust, Naomi Stratton, from Wrexham in North Wales, will join a team

looking into the effectiveness of the agri-environment schemes across Welsh farms. She will compare farms within the schemes with others that are not to see how bat activity on the land varies, especially whether these farms provide enough insects for the bats' foraging excursions at night. Naomi graduated from the University of Liverpool with a BSc in Zoology.



Moving back to his home town of Oxford to work with Oxford University's WildCRU, Alex Rey will see what

purpose badgers' paths and latrines play in their social networks and how this may affect potential interactions with nearby cattle or dangers such as roads. The badgers at Wytham Woods have been studied over many years and Alex's project will add to the great wealth of knowledge about this particular population. Alex studied Wildlife Conservation at the University of Plymouth.



Matthew Smith, from Bognor Regis in West Sussex, will be based at Sussex Wildlife Trust, and will be revisiting

60 sites where water voles were previously found throughout the county. Walking along 500m stretches of waterways he will look for the tell tale signs of their existence – mapping where they are found and where they are not

so that local conservation efforts for water voles can be judged for their effectiveness. Matthew is currently finishing his degree in Ecology & Biogeography at the University of Brighton.



Lastly, Nathan Robinson, from Yeovil in Somerset, will study the habits of lesser horseshoe bats, based at the University

of Bristol. It is thought that this endangered species may be suffering from a loss of suitable roosting sites so Nathan will be looking at what types of buildings these bats seem to prefer and why. Nathan studied Biology at the University of Exeter, where he gained a first class degree.

PTES is pleased to be offering these exciting internship opportunities for the eighth year. Jill Nelson, Chief Executive of PTES, said, 'We have now provided a stepping stone for 43 aspiring conservationists. Specialists in mammalogy are becoming scarcer. We are delighted to be able to offer such a valuable programme that will help ensure a future not just for our beleaguered mammal species but for our scientists too.'

## Badger exclusion: might it work?



Former PTES intern Andrea Barden spent her funding conducting a preliminary investigation into the results of a long-term project being carried out by Central Science Laboratory on the use of husbandry measures to exclude badgers from farm buildings and reduce potential for direct and indirect contact between badgers and cattle. Badgers are the principal wildlife host implicated in the transmission of bovine tuberculosis (bTB) to cattle.

Andrea's results suggest that exclusion methods, such as sheeted gates, electric fencing, panelling and roller doors, could have an important role in the control and management of bTB in the UK. However, the study also indicated that this role may be limited to specific farms and there are several issues, such as how to ensure measures are maintained and used consistently and potential displacement of badgers, which still need to be addressed. These issues, combined with a general reluctance from farmers towards using exclusion methods, due to a combination of inaccurate previous advice, lack of confidence in recognising signs of badger activity, practicality and cost issues, suggest there is still a long way to go before biosecurity measures are an accepted part of the bTB management programme.

We wish Andrea lots of luck in the next stage of her career and thank her for her contribution to an important piece of ongoing research.



Caught on camera: Andrea analysed hours of remote camera footage showing how badgers used farmyards and buildings.

