

Exercise 4

Read the blog written by someone who studies wildlife in cities, and then answer the questions.

Urban ecology

by Josh Taylor

I work as an 'urban ecologist', which involves studying how wildlife is affected by rapid, widespread urban development. This knowledge is used to advise planners on how to develop our cities in a way that allows wildlife to exist alongside the human population. It's perhaps not something you've heard of; after all, urban areas are the last places most people connect with animal conservation. That's certainly the impression I regularly get from those I speak to, at any rate. So I'm always happy to talk to anyone who shows an interest in the species that share our parks and public spaces. The variety of wildlife that can be found on our doorsteps is amazing!

Unlike many conservationists or ecologists, I've always felt comfortable in urban environments. Growing up in the suburbs meant my friends and I got to know every part of our city. Of equal importance to me, however, was having access to the extensive woods just a bike ride from my neighbourhood. My parents often took me there so I could burn off some energy and have the freedom to explore. As I got older, having easy access to these quite different environments helped inspire me when I was thinking about my future. Then I found a college that offered an urban ecology degree course and it seemed like the perfect combination. My decision was made!

I thoroughly enjoyed my course, and am lucky to have been involved in a range of interesting projects ever since – working with giraffes in Tanzania, or urban populations of butterflies in the United States, for example. But it's also the colleagues on any project who make it special. Many I've worked with have made important contributions to the world of animal conservation. Some are even experts whose research findings were covered in my degree textbooks! When I started my first project, as you might expect, I was constantly seeking second opinions, but the encouragement I received means I now trust my own judgement. And that's important if I'm going to be valued by other members of the team.

I'm now at the stage where I run my own projects, but that hasn't always been the case. In fact, like many graduates, I started out by taking on the role of technician, doing the routine and less interesting parts of project work. Having a fairly low salary is a bit of a disadvantage, but it gives you great opportunities for improving the techniques you've been taught. Before too long, you'll be in a position to start taking on more responsibility. In the beginning though, you'll do things like data entry, and checking and setting up equipment, which almost everyone's bound to have done already.

I love my job, but I appreciate that it might not be for everyone. For instance, every project is a new puzzle, with a ton of information to collect and read, often on paper. And it's important – you could well be looking at ways to protect a species that might otherwise be threatened by a new construction project, for example. And some things can't be rushed, despite the pressure you could be under from a building company, for example, or even a local authority. Some of the resources we have include satellite images and pretty advanced IT packages, but the majority of the work can only be done by someone outside, often standing around in all weathers. But for me, that's fine. Spending the day stuck in an office in front of a computer, on the other hand – now that's what I'd call a nightmare!

26

Question 10

How do people usually react when Josh explains his job to them?

A They are unaware that such a career exists.

☐

B They seem unsure that the occupation is worthwhile.

☐

C They are keen to share their own experiences of city wildlife.

☐

[1]