Changing lives: childhood walks lead Elinor on her way to bee saviour career

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When Elinor Meloy started wildlife spotting with her grandmother at her local wetland reserve, little did she know it would later spark a passion for pollinators.

Elinor's research on a rare species of bumblebee found at the Newport Wetlands reserve, a site which has been supported by HLF, has led to her advising ecological experts and featuring as a student icon on billboards around Swansea.

But for Elinor, 23, the story of her academic success started closer to home. "I have been visiting the reserve since I was 11 and volunteering as a warden since I was 16. I have a close family connection to the reserve as my uncle is the warden and my nana is a volunteer warden."

Elinor's earliest memories of the reserve involve being surrounded by nature and discovering wildlife with her grandmother during school holidays. "We'd walk around in the sunshine and I used to point out butterflies. My nana recorded them and taught me about the different species. The reserve is where I fell in love with British nature and it has shaped my academic and career choices."

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As a volunteer, Elinor discovered a passion for rare species. "The amazing pollinator populations found at Newport Wetlands, particularly the Shrill Carder Bee – one of the rarest native social bumblebees in Britain – inspired me to survey and research the resident social bees for my undergraduate dissertation.

"I aspire to become a research ecologist and academic so sharing my research is my life ambition." Thanks to volunteering at the Newport Wetlands reserve, made possible by National Lottery players, this dream has started to become a reality.

"My research on the Shrill Carder Bee at the reserve led me to become an ambassador for the International Bee Research Association, to present to Cardiff council and to become a member of Swansea Ecology Research Team."

Following her Zoology degree Elinor began a master's project, again focusing on pollinators, and her research paper was used by Swansea, Cardiff and Torfaen councils to help with their land management policies.

Her academic triumphs and dedication to volunteering meant that Elinor was one of six students chosen to feature on Swansea University's Making Waves campaign. "I've appeared on billboards in Swansea and I'm soon to be seen on the backs of buses and billboards across the country!"

Elinor is currently working for HLF as a team assistant, but still helps her grandmother survey at the reserve from time to time. "I help her in the summer when I'm free but this time I can identify the species myself thanks to her teaching me over the years. I learnt from the best."





Patrick Olner



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England’s threatened wildlife to be brought ‘back from the brink’