

CAREER OF THE WEEK: Ecologist

What does an ecologist do?

An ecologist studies how living things (like animals, plants, and fungi) interact with each other and their environment. Their work often involves protecting wildlife and natural habitats, especially when humans are building things like houses, roads, or wind farms. The work of an ecologist might include:

Surveying Wildlife and Habitats: Ecologists often go out into the countryside, forests, wetlands, or urban areas to record what species are living there, check if there are protected species like bats, badgers, newts, or rare plants, and assess the quality of a habitat.

Helping with Planning and Development: Before a construction project happens (like building homes or roads), developers must check if it will harm wildlife. Ecologists will write ecological reports for planning applications, suggest how to avoid or reduce damage to nature, and sometimes help design green spaces or create wildlife corridors.

Conservation and Restoration: Ecologists may work on projects that protect endangered species, restore habitats (like turning farmland back into wetlands), and improve biodiversity in parks, nature reserves, or farmland.

Desk Work and Reporting: Back in the office, ecologists will analyse survey data, write Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) or Ecological Impact Assessments (EclAs), and use mapping software (GIS) to show where species and habitats are.

Ecologists work for a range of organisations, including environmental consultancies, government bodies (like Natural England or the Environment Agency), wildlife charities (e.g. The Wildlife Trust or RSPB), universities, or research institutions.

What can I expect to earn as an ecologist?

In England, ecologists typically earn between £20,000 and £55,000 per year, depending on experience and role. Graduate ecologists start around £20k–£25k, while mid-level professionals earn £30k–£40k, and senior or principal ecologists can make £40k–£55k+. Salaries are generally higher in the private sector and in London or the South East, while public sector or charity roles may pay less. Freelance ecologists can earn £200–£400 per day, especially with specialist skills or licences. Experience, qualifications, and project responsibility all influence pay progression.

What subjects should I study to become an ecologist?

Useful subjects to study include biology, chemistry, geography, and maths.

How can I start my career as an ecologist?

Typically, ecologists have studied a relevant degree in ecology or an environmental management related subject. Some employers may also look for individuals to hold a relevant postgraduate qualification, such as a Masters. To search for relevant courses, visit the UCAS website - <https://www.ucas.com/>.

Other potential ways to start your career as an ecologist include, completing an apprenticeship, a vocational college course, or by working and studying at the same time. The websites listed at the bottom, provide some great additional links and information on how to start your career as an ecologist.

To research local education and training opportunities that could lead to a career as an ecologist, visit our partner website www.logonmoveon.co.uk

Other useful websites to find out more about a career as an ecologist:

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, I Want to be an Ecologist

<https://cieem.net/i-want-to-be/>

Green Careers Hub, Ecologist <https://www.greencareershub.com/find-your-green-role/job-profiles/ecologist/>

Lantra, Ecologist <https://www.lantra.co.uk/careers/JobProfile/JobProfileDetails/50>

National Careers Service, Ecologist <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/job-profiles/ecologist>

Prospects, Ecologist <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/ecologist>

