

Anna Portch, Eco-Schools Coordinator, Keep Britain Tidy



How did you get where you are today?

It's embarrassing to say but have always been in the field, and I have got to my current role by the most long winded way possible, totally loving the ride and with no direction. As a child I loved animals, and my first job was face painting at Bristol Zoo, (I could do a damn fine tiger in under three mins). I used to volunteer to show visitors the touch table of elephant's teeth and the snake skin. I worked

through my zoology degree as an explainer at the science museum where I was taught to present with some skill, on and on, I think my title was education officer for about a decade... When I was doing those terrible jobs we all have to do to live sometimes (early shift serving coffee to commuters at Temple meads station felt the worst) I was always volunteering, Bristol BTCV, Long Island US Fish and Wildlife Service were particularly rewarding. I did a MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation, developed a profound love of primates, especially monkeys... realised one bitter January morning in Cornwall the day after Ella a beautiful young female woolly monkey died that I loved talking about them more than picking up their poo and cremating their remains (it took me a surprisingly large number of years and dangerous adventures in Cameroon and Ecuador to work that out). Still wanted to help the furry fellows and I had realised we had to become more sustainable or there would be no forest for the monkeys to live in. Whilst trying to figure out how to I was going to contribute to the big change that needed to prevent mass extinctions I ran Paddington farm in Somerset for city children who needed a holiday. It was here that I experienced the alchemy of environmental education whilst working with some very tough and deprived people. I had a hunch that here was one of the keys to our current environmental crisis. So I came to London to explore urban sustainability education further, first job in the big city was with EcoActive, then LB Hackney Waste, then London Wildlife Trust, Croydon Council Sustainability... and somewhere along the way I picked up the joy and honour of coordinating LEEF for seven years, where I got to meet many of the best environmental educators in the capital.

What tips would you give someone starting out in your field? Go volunteer abroad, I have been really lucky with the opportunities I have had on different continents. I got to do things that I could never done in the UK.

What inspires you? Or who? The other environmental educators of London... a truly amazing and understated bunch.

What is a significant memory of being in nature as a child? Biblins Camp in the forest of Dean for a week at the end of primary school. The joy and fun of being in the woods with my class has stayed with me my whole life.

What project are you most proud of? LEEF.

What's your favourite game or activity? Sitting round a camp fire chatting.

What's your favourite eco-place in London, and why? Hampstead Heath, it is this large natural utopia in the middle of our city.

Do you have a recommendation to LEEF members? Read Keats poetry again, how he talks about nature is very romantic and life affirming.

What are you working on at the moment? Getting the hang of my job at Eco-Schools, a brilliant but massive project!

How would you like to see Environmental or Sustainability Education develop in the next 10 years? The great change has happened so society is now sustainable and environmental educators are over run with opportunities and interest in their work.



Profile of a LEEF Fellow

This fellowship was awarded on;

Tuesday 12 January 2016

At the Education Centre,
ZSL London Zoo, Regent's Park,
London NW1 4RY

LEEF fellowships are awarded to recognise excellence in Environmental and Sustainability Education

To find out more about LEEF;

www.leef.org.uk

