

Developing skills for biological recording

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Since 2009, BRISC (Biological Recording in Scotland) and GNHS (Glasgow Natural History Society) have offered bursaries to improve skills related to biological recording in Scotland. Awards are for £200 or 75% of the course cost, whichever is lower. As part of the bursary project each person is asked to write an article for BRISC/GNHS newsletters; newsletters containing previous articles can be downloaded from www.briscc.org.uk/Newsletters.php.

Applications are currently assessed based on the following criteria:

- Contribution of records to recording schemes or other databases
- Sharing of skills and knowledge with others
- Whether the species or group is under-recorded, and records are sparse for the geographical area
- Whether the bursary is giving the applicant an opportunity they would not otherwise have

BRISC have provided two bursaries each year since 2009, and an anonymous donor has funded an additional course since 2012. GNHS (funded by the

Blodwen Lloyd Binns Bequest) provided two courses until 2014; they now fund four each year. In 2011 and 2013 we provided an additional two bursaries of £100 to The Conservation Volunteer (TCV) apprentices. In 2017, SNH (Scottish Natural Heritage) made a contribution specifically aimed at those aged 25 or under; the remaining bursaries are open to any age. We have awarded a total of 57 bursaries over the last nine years. In some cases, bursaries were carried over to the following year due to cancellation of courses or the recipient being unable to attend.

Courses are generally provided by the Field Studies Council but are encouraged from any institution offering professional development courses. The following information summarises the applications from 2009 – 2017:

- More females than males applied for bursaries: an average of 18 per year compared to eight.
- The highest number of applications came from age class 26-40; followed by 18-25; 41-60; 60+
- The majority of applications came from both Edinburgh & Lothians and Strathclyde & Argyll (total 64 each). Following on, the highest number of applicants was from: Highland (33); Stirling & Perth (26); North East (21); Fife (10); Islands (7); Ayrshire (5); Dumfries and Galloway (4); Borders (3).

The profession of applicants is varied ranging from student/trainee, volunteers, unemployed or retired through to professional ecological consultant (Fig. 1).

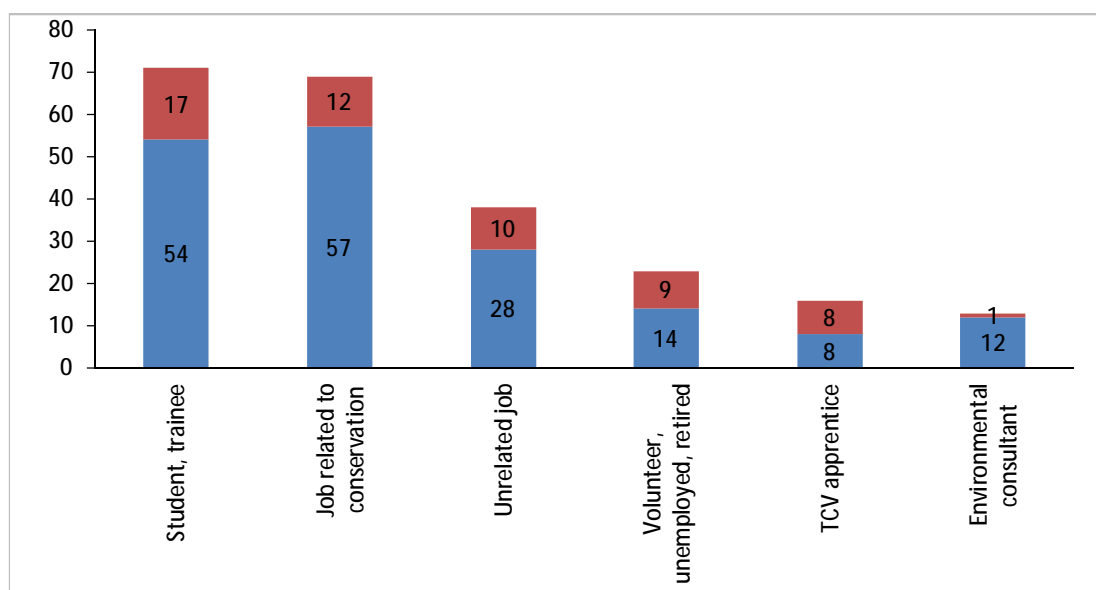


Fig. 1. Profession of applicants and those awarded a bursary (the full bar shows the total number of applicants with the top section showing number of bursaries awarded).

There has been a total of 241 applications to the bursary scheme with the most in 2015 (69) and the fewest in 2010 (4). Overall, 57 bursaries have been awarded: a success rate of 24% for applicants. To summarise information relating to bursaries that have been awarded:

- A total of 38 bursaries have been awarded to women: 19 to men.
- The majority of bursaries were provided to those aged 26-40, followed by 41-60; 18-25; 60+
- Most bursaries were awarded to those living in Strathclyde & Argyll, followed by: Edinburgh & Lothians; Stirling & Perth; Highland; Islands; North East; Fife; Ayrshire; Dumfries and Galloway; none have been given in the Borders.

A variety of courses have been taken by bursary holders including mammal, plant, fungi and invertebrate identification and survey skills (Fig. 2).

In 2016, BRISC invited those who had been awarded a bursary to give a short talk at their conference. This was very successful, so the offer to speak has become part of the standard application process, along with offering free memberships for a year to BRISC and GNHS. BRISC and GNHS aim to continue this project into the future, as we consider it invaluable to improving the taxonomic skills of people in Scotland, particularly in geographic areas that are under-recorded, and focussing on species groups that are lacking in records and/or recorders. The application form is available on the BRISC website, with close of applications on 31 January each year: <http://www.brisec.org.uk/Bursaries.php> .

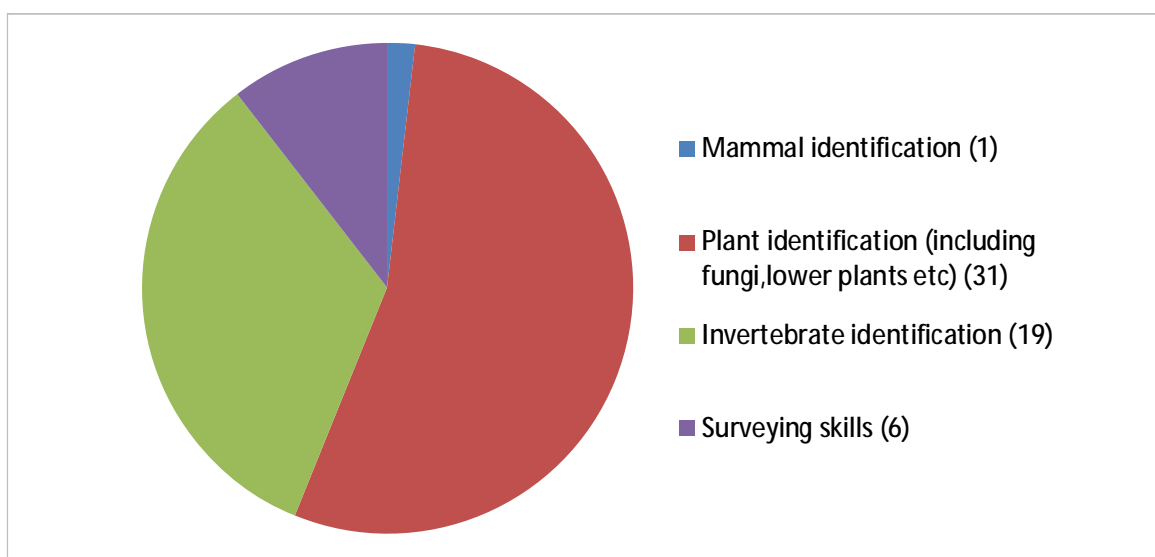


Fig. 2. Types of courses that 57 bursary holders have studied from 2009-2017.