

All in a Day's Work

Caroline Plant – Office of Environmental Assessment



Caroline Plant works for the Environmental Protection Agency as a member of the Office of Environmental Assessment. She is currently based in Dublin but her work takes her all around the country.

Photo courtesy of Caroline Plant

What type of work do you do?

I sample lakes all around Ireland as part of a European wide monitoring programme which aims to ensure good ecological quality in all European lakes. The main part of my job is to sample and identify the animals and plants that live in lakes. When water quality is good in a lake different types and numbers of animals and plants will be found compared to a lake where the water quality is bad. So I can tell if the water in a lake is of good or bad quality by the animals and plants I find. I sample the lakes from April to September each year.

Have you always been interested in what you do?

I always wanted to be a zoologist as I always loved and was interested in animals. I used to bring stray animals home all the time when I was young – which drove my parents crazy! My first interest was animal behaviour but it is very difficult to get a job in that area. My interest in plants was awakened when I went to work for Sherkin Island Marine station!

What training did you do to get where you are today?

I completed a degree in Zoology in University College Cork. I also have a Masters in Environmental Science from Trinity College Dublin. I worked as a volunteer for six months for Sherkin Island Marine Station which provided me with plenty of scope for learning. I also do training courses in work every year.

What is a day in your life like?

During the Summer I sample plants in lakes. As boats are needed for this type of sampling I do field work with another colleague who also works for the EPA. We have a little zodiac inflatable which we launch once we arrive at

the lake shore. We then move around the lake and stop at sites that we have chosen in advance. We then take a 100m transect out from the shore and sample the plants at certain places along the transect. On a small lake we usually do four transects and on a larger lake we will do many more. A small lake usually takes about 4 hours to sample in this way, so, if there are no problems, we get two lakes done in a day. For a bigger lake it can take all day and for the very biggest lakes we might need up to four days! We sample on both sunny and rainy days but if it is very windy sometimes we cannot launch our inflatable as it can be too difficult and sometimes dangerous on the larger lakes.

What is the best thing about your job?



The best thing about the job is being away from the office, sometimes in a very beautiful part of the country. And if the sun is shining it is even better! I get to go many places that

other people have not seen and I see all sorts of wildlife. When I was sampling Lough Leane in Killarney one of the sea eagles flew right over my head when I was on the lake – it was amazing!



From the top: Caroline looking at samples in a tray. Hard at work on the shore. A nosy swan watches Caroline at work.



What is the worst thing about your job?

The worst thing about the job is having to eat sandwiches every day for lunch! It's hard to find anything else to eat that is so convenient for the boat but I usually don't

eat sandwiches during the winter! The rain is the next worst thing especially if it rains for the whole summer.

What advice would you give someone wanting to do your job?

To do my job you need to be good at identifying animals and plants. The best way to get good at this is to practice all the time. So if you see an animal – insect, mammal, bird or fish – or a plant that you don't recognise look it up in a book. The more you look up the more you will know and remember.