The Scientists

Lisa Cawthen

What interested you in science as a child?

When I was younger I dreamed of doing something that would make a difference, maybe discover a new species, save a rare tiger from extinction or go to a hidden jungle where no one had ever walked before. I then studied environmental studies in year 11 which dealt with how humans and the environment interacted and the types of impacts we as humans have on the environment. I became really interested in environmental management, particularly the management of natural resources. I wanted to work out how humans, animals and the environment could be managed sustainably. Science ended up being the path to make this dream a reality.

What did you study at university?

I did a Bachelor of Science because it allowed me to study from a variety of broad areas. Sure I knew I was interested in the environment, but that is a huge field so I chose a lot of different areas to study from. First year is like a taste test, you can try any subject area you want and then decide which areas interest you most. I knew I wanted to major in environmental studies but it was something about zoology, in particular ecology
(the study of how animals interact with the environment) that fascinated me and led me to do a double major in zoology and geography & environmental studies.

What is your current research/career?

After I finished by Bachelor of Science, I wanted to get more hands on experience and wasn't quite ready to leave the fun that really is university. So I combined my interest in both zoology and environmental management and decided to undertake an honours degree in the School of Zoology undertaking research in conjunction with UTAS and the Forest Practices Authority. I was really interested in sustainable forestry and so we developed a project looking at the denning requirements of the Tasmanian brushtail possum in logged and unlogged dry forest in south-east Tasmania using radio-telemetry. My study will provide forest managers with a greater understanding of the types of hollow-bearing trees occupied by fauna. Such information will then be used in revised strategies for the retention of 'valued' habitat for fauna!

What are your future aspirations?

I want to do a lot of things. I want to go to the himalayas, see an ice-berg, climb a volcano, snorkel in the great barrier reef and maybe along the way get my pHD! At the moment I really want to combine my interest in seeing the world with my passion for natural resource management and do volunteer conservation work. In the future I would really like to work with indigenous communities in managing natural resources. In particular I would love to work in regions such as Africa, South-America and Australia, workings with indigenous people to sustainabley manage the environment. Maybe set up an animal sanctuary in Thailand or come up with an innovative approach to a management issue like turning people away from over harvesting rainforest to sustinabley hunting giant rats to sell overseas(I saw that in a documentary once from South America!) I think in the end though, I will come back to Australia and hopefully do more work in relation to forest management and tree hollows – because a lot needs to be done, particularly in Tasmania.

What do you love about science?

Science is full of unanswered questions and new things waiting to be discovered. It doesn't matter what you are interested in, each day you can find out an answer that no one knew the day before. That's what I love about science, constantly finding out new things. Today I am in Tasmania studying brushtail possums, but tomorrow I could be anywhere, the world is a large place and science is a career that enables you to travel the world because your field will span the globe and your never restricted, I have met so many people that have gone from studyomg mammals to sharks, from forestry coupes to the southern ocean!