

The Scientists

Tracey Hollings  download



What does your current research involve?

Did you know that in some areas of Tasmania the population of Tasmanian devils has declined by almost 90% due to a fatal disease? What kind of effect do you think this would do to the Tasmanian ecosystem? I am currently doing a PhD at the University of Tasmania trying to find that out.

There is a real concern that the decrease in devil numbers will potentially lead to an increase in feral cats and possibly foxes. There are also likely to be other implications for the devils' competitors such as quolls, their prey species and countless and unknown flow-on effects. From the outcome of our study we can hopefully

introduce some management plans that will help to limit or control some of these impacts.

What interested you in science as a child?

I grew up in New Zealand surrounded by animals and did voluntary work from a young age working with animals have always been fascinated by the huge variety of creatures in the world and the amazing things they can do. This led me to choose science based subjects at school with some amazing teachers who further encouraged my curiosity and interest in science.

What did you study at university and why?

After finishing high school I went to Otago University in New Zealand unsure of what to study. I enrolled in science and commerce courses ranging from chemistry to accounting to biology. After a year I had found my passion in Zoology and knew that this would allow me to establish a career working with animals. I completed this degree still wanted to learn more so I went on to doing a Masters in Conservation Biology taught in New Zealand and Sydney. My major project of this course was looking at Toxoplasmosis, a disease spread by cats and in Australian wallabies. From here my fascination grew in wildlife diseases which has led me to work on the Tasmanian devil.

What are you hoping to do in the future?

There are many things I want to do once I have completed my PhD. I want to work with the tiger in India, the panda in China, the rhino in Africa, the giant otter in South America, the kakapo in New Zealand, the polar bear in the Arctic. I am hoping I can use my work to help endangered species throughout the world and contribute something to their conservation while at the same time travelling the world and experiencing amazing things.

What do you love about Science?

The thing I love about science is treading into unknown territory, and finding out new things. With my area of study I feel as though I am contributing to the conservation of some of the worlds most loved animals, and ensuring they can survive into the future for future generations to see and love. It's not about keeping animals alive in zoo, but about keeping their environments healthy to ensure that we can maintain them in the wild. Science is challenging but exciting, it is about being a pioneer in your field, and doing something no one has ever done before.