



national science week 2014

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As a kid, I loved animals and the outdoors. My favourite colour was always green, because that's the colour of leaves and the bush. Maybe it's not surprising, then, that when I went to university I fell in love with plants!

I planned to study science and languages at uni, because I didn't really know what I wanted to do. Once I started, though, I had some inspiring teachers who got me hooked on Australia's amazing trees, like Bunya pines, which are plant dinosaurs that haven't changed much in hundreds of millions of years!

The more I studied, the more I became interested in how plants and animals evolve. This led me to an Honours year studying the evolution of several closely related rainforest tree species. When I finished my degree, I got a job with a conservation organisation, which really opened my eyes to the dangers facing our native species. I became determined to help protect Australia's wildlife.

My current PhD project combines studying genetics and evolution with practical conservation. I've switched from plants to animals for now, and I'm investigating the genetic relationships between populations of Tasmanian bettongs, which are native marsupials. This involves catching wild bettongs and taking small samples of their DNA. I can then use this to work out how closely related different animals are. This provides information about the past and future evolution of this species. It will also help conservation groups decide where to plant and protect habitat patches, to allow bettongs to move across the landscape and find food and mates.

I'm so glad I studied science, because it takes me on adventures to amazing places, working with interesting plants and animals: anything from counting koalas in Sydney, to catching lizards in the outback and now chasing bettongs in Tassie. I want to spend my career working on the conservation of native animals and plants. One of the biggest challenges facing humanity is protecting the environment and wildlife, and to do this we need young people who are passionate about nature to get involved in science and conservation!

For more information: www.utas.edu.au/zoology

www.YoungTassieScientists.com