Jennifer McElwain, BA Plant Sciences

Plant Sciences was not an expected path on entering Trinity but Jenny very quickly became fascinated with all aspects of plant biology after being taught that vegetation history could be tracked over the past two million years by simply using plant pollen preserved in Irish bogs and lakes. Plant Sciences was a tremendously rewarding experience that provided the training and inspiration to pursue a career in science. She went on to graduate with a Ph.D. in Paleobotany (the study of ancient plants) in 1997 from Royal Holloway College, University of London and held two post doctoral positions at the University of Sheffield before becoming Associate Curator at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. She is currently a Lecturer in UCD’s School of Biology and Environmental Science.

Deirdre Lynn, BA Plant Sciences

Deirdre Lynn graduated in 1994 and stayed on in TCD to complete her PhD in ecophysiology. Deirdre continued as a post-doctoral researcher in conservation ecology and co-founded a successful ecological consultancy (BEC). She moved on to work for the National Parks and Wildlife Service taking on the responsibility of managing national biodiversity monitoring programmes and also representing Ireland on scientific working groups at EU and international levels. Deirdre was drawn to the variety of possibilities that specialising in Plant Sciences offered. Learning about plant genetics, physiology, biochemistry, ecology and conservation gave her an excellent scientific foundation. The combination of laboratory and field based research made studying Plant Sciences more fun, not many students can say they got to travel around Ireland, the Pyrenees and Guyana!

Kirk Donohoe, BA Plant Sciences

Kirk had a profound interest in nature and the environment and found the TCD Plant Sciences Course to be the perfect grounding to expand his knowledge and interest. After completing his degree, he diversified his education with a Pg. Diploma in Law and then a research Msc in Environmental Law - specifically researching the transposition of EU environmental legislation into national legal and policy frameworks. Having worked in one of the top environmental consultancies in Ireland, Kirk became a Regulatory Advisor and a Project Manager for one of Europe’s leading post-patent agrochemical companies based in Dublin (Barclay Crop Protection). He strongly accredits his professional and post-graduate success to his acquired skills such as; research, presenting presentations, project based work and field surveying – learnt throughout his undergraduate degree in Plant Sciences from TCD.

Ciara O’Connor, BA Plant Sciences

Ciara O’Connor graduated in 2005 and stayed on in TCD to complete her MSc in Environmental Science. Afterwards, Ciara moved to the UK where she worked for three years for the Carbon Trust on carbon reduction and legislative compliance issues. Ciara now works for Dublin based company, Ecocem, who manufacture environmentally friendly, low carbon cement. Ciara is also the Environmental Services Manager of a Carbon Consultancy run by Ecocem, called EmissionZero. Here Ciara engages with EmissionZero clients to assess their Carbon Footprints, develop bespoke Carbon Reduction Strategies and provide clients with the option of using Carbon Offsets in order to become Carbon Neutral organisations. Most recently, Ciara has been selected as one of 15 Climate Advocates that will represent Ireland in the Challenge Europe programme for the next year.

Una FitzPatrick, BA Plant Sciences

Early interests in conservation and how plants can be used meant that Plant Sciences was an ideal career choice for Una. Studying Plant Sciences was both an enjoyable experience and a ticket to travel and do field work in far flung places, from the tropical islands of the South Seas to the rainforests of South America. Una graduated with a Ph.D. in plant molecular biology from Trinity College Dublin in 2003. She has since used the skills learned through Plant Sciences to work outside the field, primarily on the conservation of insects. Since 2007 Una has been employed as an Ecologist at the National Biodiversity Data Centre where she manages a wide range of projects, including national plant and vegetation databases.
**Careers in Plant Sciences: graduate profiles...**

**Robert Fennelly, BA Plant Sciences**

Robert became fascinated by Plant Sciences after a lecture on the role of fire in vegetation succession. He undertook his undergraduate thesis on the phylogenetics of a small group of Thai plants in the genus Syzygium for which he travelled to Thailand. This field work led him to secure a job as a taxonomist in a research institute in northeast Thailand, working under the auspices of a renowned Thai botanist, who himself studied at TCD. Following graduation in 2000, Robert completed a Masters degree in Biodiversity & Conservation in the University of Exeter where his botanical background was invaluable amongst his peers whose experience was entirely ornithological or of mammals. He has since greatly expanded his ecological field of interest to include bird and amphibian survey, which he currently carries out as an ecologist working for RPS environmental consultancy in Belfast.

**Brian Harding, BA Plant Sciences**

Brian entered the botany degree having just spent time in the rainforests of Ecuador. Post Trinity College, he moved to Mexico and worked in an ethnobotanical garden in Cuernavaca. On return to Ireland, he worked in the Dublin Natural History Museum carrying out environmental education programmes. Afterwards, he travelled to the UK and obtained a masters degree in Ethnobotany at the University of Kent, in conjunction with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. His research dissertation project was based in Ecuador and focused on the harvesting and management practices of the San Pedro cactus (*Echinopsis pachanoi*). He then worked in the National Botanic Gardens Glasnevin, Ireland and subsequently obtained a position with the United Nations Development Programme in Kenya working in the environment section funded by Irish Aid. Afterwards he became an independent consultant working mostly in the climate change adaptation area on African and global projects. This allowed him to work in various sections of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and with NGO’s like the Stockholm Environment Institute and WWF. He is now in Nepal working on strategic policy engagement in the climate change sector with the UN and the Government.

**Rhian J Smith, PhD in Botany**

Rhian is currently the Postdoctoral Research Fellow of Professor Stephen Hopper, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. She was awarded her PhD at Trinity College, Dublin in 2004, having worked on the conservation biology of Irish threatened plant species, and then went on to carry out post-doctoral research on the biogeography and conservation genetics of a number of threatened UK and Irish species. She joined RBG Kew in June 2005, working on the digitisation of African type specimens in the herbarium for three months, before moving to the Jodrell Laboratory to supervise the conservation genetics section of the laboratory for eighteen months. From March 2007 until January 2009 she was research assistant to Professor Hopper and she has been in her current position as Director’s Postdoctoral Research Fellow since February 2009. Current research is focused on molecular phylogenetics of Haemodoraceae and the evolution, biogeography and conservation of the Southwest Australian and Greater Cape Floristic Regions, particularly the flora of granite outcrops. She also maintains her research activities in the field of plant conservation genetics and is on the editorial board of *Plant Genetic Resources: Characterization and Utilization*. She has also been on the editorial board of the journal *Restoration Ecology* since October 2009.

**Noeleen Smyth, BA Plant Sciences, PhD**

Noeleen arrived in TCD in 1998 with the intention of studying Plant Sciences after studying for a BSc in Horticulture. The undergraduate natural science programme in Trinity, with courses in geography, chemistry, geology and biology were very interesting and provided the necessary background information before she read Plant Sciences. She was completely taken with plant conservation and completed her PhD on invasive species control and restoring the native forest on Pitcairn Island in the South Central Pacific in 2008. Plant Sciences provided many opportunities for exotic adventures and she has been on plant collecting and recording expeditions to Belize, Guyana, China, Nepal, Bhutan and Jordan. Noeleen is currently a Conservation Botanist at the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin, Dublin where she continues her work in invasive species control, island endemic species recovery along with conservation research into Ireland’s rare and threatened fern and bryophyte species.