

How much should the services of a bryologist cost?

The business of ecological consultancy in the UK has blossomed over the past couple of decades as public concern for the environment has grown and new legislation has emerged. The Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM), the standard professional body in the UK for ecological consultants, came into existence in 1991 and now boasts a membership of over 4,000. Some of the bigger consultancy companies in the UK employ 50 or more full-time ecologists, from graduates to Company Directors. Indeed, many young people are now choosing a career as a consultant ecologist, which was simply not a choice in the very recent past.

Although the portion is tiny, some of the ecological services provided by consultants are bryological, largely comprising field surveys to inform Environmental Impact Assessments, the condition of designated sites and the status of species of conservation concern. Consultancy allows a small number of people to make a full-time living out of bryophytes in the UK, plus a fair few others who do it alongside other work and those who do the occasional contract in their retirement. I can think of about 20 people that have provided a bryological consultancy service in the UK recently, and I suspect the real total is around twice that figure. The online IEEM 'Find an Expert' database (www.ieem.net/ieemdirectory.asp), aimed to help clients locate potential consultants in the UK, returns a list of 35 people when searched with the keyword 'bryophytes'.

There are a number of questions that may be asked about the bryological consultancy profession, for example related to quality control and tests of surveyor competence. I shall confine my present opinion to one query: how much should the services of a bryologist cost? The reason I raise this issue is because of a concern that some bryologists are under-valuing their skills and are being paid less than their market value (sometimes a lot less). There are a number of ways to tackle the question, some of which could delve into business costs, sales forecasts and other matter that would make dull reading. I shall look at it from two angles, first by considering the cost of a similar consultancy service that I know reasonably well, and

second by looking at guidance available from IEEM.

The world of bat consultancy is far bigger, though only slightly older, than that of bryophyte consultancy in the UK (this is largely because of the over-protection of common bat species by strong legislation). Bat surveying is, in general, relatively easy. The knowledge and skill required for the average bat survey in the UK is a lot less than needed for the average bryophyte survey, mainly because the number of bat species that may be encountered is much smaller (there are more species of *Fissidens* in the UK than there are bats!). Thus, large numbers of consultants, many with relatively little knowledge and experience, are set to work on bat surveys each season within the consultancy business, and usually do a perfectly adequate job. The services of a bat surveyor cost anything from £20/h up to about £90/h (plus expenses), with an average of something like £45/h across the UK. I can see no reason why the average bryologist would be worth any less than the average bat surveyor, especially when considering the former is a much scarcer resource.

Another indication of how much a bryologist should cost comes from guidance provided by the professional body IEEM. The second publication in their '*Professional Issues Series*' is titled '*Guidance for costing of project work*'. It contains a table from which the following minimum hourly rates were suggested for consultancy work in 2004: Ecologist (£30–33/h); Senior Ecologist (£37–47/h); Principal Ecologist (£53–80/h); and Director (£67–93/h). The level of 'Ecologist' equates to a recent graduate with less than 3 years of professional experience and 'Director' rates are reserved for large-scale project management, high-level quality control and similar tasks. I would say that a bryologist falls into the 'Senior Ecologist' or 'Principal Ecologist' categories. Allowing for a little inflation since 2004, this implies a cost of around £40–60/h for a bryologist. When considered alongside the charge-out rates of bat surveyors, this appears to be a reasonable ballpark figure for the average bryological contract in the UK.

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