A scientist just like me

Dr Kelsey Byers

Evolutionary Biologist

why & how?
PRIMARY SCIENCE TEACHING TRUST

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Hi there! I am Dr Kelsey Byers – an evolutionary biologist

Where do I work?

I work at the John Innes Centre in Norwich where I study how the smells of flowers (both nice and not so nice!) affect plant evolution and pollination.

What did I like doing when I was at school?

I have wanted to do something with nature my whole life. I originally wanted to be a vet, but realized I liked biology a lot and now I study it.

What do I like doing in my spare time?

I love birdwatching, looking at insects, trees, and flowers, cooking and baking, and reading books. Anything where I can explore the outdoors is fun for me!

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What do I do as an evolutionary biologist?

I collect smells from different flower species and try to understand them: what kinds of smells are there, how they are made in the flower, and how insects can smell them. I also try to understand how related groups of flowers are related in their smells.

How does what I do make the world a better place?

Understanding how flowers smell is important for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it can help understand how new species come to be. Secondly, many fruits and vegetables rely on pollinators like bees, and we want to help farmers by understanding why bees prefer certain flowers.

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What I like about my job

I love that I can come up with a cool idea and test it! I also get to be in a variety of places - my lab, the glasshouse, and outdoors in the field. I am a very curious and passionate person and I get to use these which is great.

Challenges I have faced

I am disabled (I use a wheelchair) and sometimes my co-workers think I can do less than I really can, for example they might think I can't do work outdoors. This isn’t true - everyone's abilities are different, and I can do a lot more than people sometimes think.

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If you want to be an evolutionary biologist, you need:

- **to be a very curious person -** someone who is constantly asking themselves questions about how things came to be like they are in nature and why.
- **to enjoy looking at plants and animals** and to think about how they fit into their environment.
- **to be interested in nature** and the natural world.
- to enjoy **coming up with new ideas.**

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Discussion time

- Would you like to be an evolutionary biologist like Dr Kelsey Byers?

  Why? Why not?

- What skills and interests do you already have that would help you become an evolutionary biologist?
- What new skills and knowledge would you need to develop?

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Free supporting resources for evolutionary biology

The Big Jurassic Classroom - resources and information to support teachers with using their local environments to inspire interest in the UK's geological history. The resources include exciting activities for learning about rocks, fossils and evolution.

I bet you didn't know... articles use cutting-edge science research as a context for learning. Teacher Guides describing the research and activities and investigations for children can be used as classroom presentations. See:

- Some mammals have unusual backbones
- Bees and caterpillars can change the evolution of plants
- Evolution of life in cities
- Miracle healing could come from the axolotl

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