A scientist just like me

Ryan Coombes

Marine Taxonomist

Primary Science
Teaching Trust

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Hi there! I am Ryan Coombes— a marine taxonomist

Where do I work?

I work for Fugro, a global company providing data about our planet. My role is in a marine biology laboratory. We identify small sea creatures collected from marine surveys.

What did I like doing when I was at school?

I always enjoyed natural history and biology, especially when relating to animals and the marine environment.

What do I like doing in my spare time?

I enjoy reading science fiction and plenty of history. I enjoy PC games, Dungeons and Dragons, swimming, writing and reading.

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What do I do as a marine taxonomist?

I oversee a team of scientists working to find out what species are present in seabed samples. I identify things like crabs, shells and starfish. As a supervisor I am responsible for the safety of my colleagues, the quality of the results we generate and meeting client deadlines.

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

Becoming more familiar with marine ecosystems means we can take steps to protect them as much as possible from human impact. We can also monitor how they change over time, perhaps because of climate change or pollution. I like to think my work will positively benefit ocean health.

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What I like about my job

I get to see creatures most other people never will, from places like the deep sea and from all over the world. I work with a great team which makes the job even better. I like the variety of my role, mixing scientific analysis with leading a team of people.
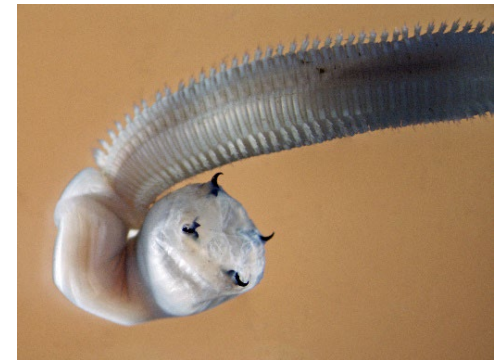

Challenges I have faced

Some of the samples we receive are from poorly studied areas. Identifying these species can be very challenging and normally requires a lot of research. I lead a team of people, which perhaps isn't my natural strength, but I've worked hard to develop the skills required over the years.

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If you want to be a marine taxonomist, you need:

✳ a **passion and interest** for the natural world

✳ **a keen eye** for detail and an enquiring mind

✳ **to be patient** and willing to undertake repetitive analysis

✳ to be able to **work in a team**, learning from and sharing skills with colleagues

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Discussion time

✸ Would you like to be a marine taxonomist like Ryan Coombes?

   Why? Why not?

✸ What skills and interests do you already have that would help you become a marine taxonomist?

✸ What new skills and knowledge would you need to develop?

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Ryan Coombe is a STEM ambassador. Click here to access free STEM Ambassador support and resources.

Free supporting resources for marine science

Why & How Magazine (Autumn 2019) – see 'Microplastics in our seas'

Did you know? articles use cutting-edge science research as a context for learning. Teacher Guides can be used a classroom presentations. They explain what scientists have done and suggest practical activities for children. Children interested in marine science might also be interested in these projects. See:
- Whale song is changing
- Soundscapes can help restore coral reefs

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