

EDITORIAL

Conversation moves on: revisiting early-career researchers and a new focus on fieldwork

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Since launching the Conversation series in 2017, we have covered the lives and careers of 20 inspirational early-career researchers with an extraordinary range of personal experiences. Each story was unique, from tales of setbacks and tragedies to tough decisions and triumphs over adversity. Our interviewees came from a wide range of backgrounds and several had not considered a career in research until one exceptional teacher inspired them and turned their career paths around. Many of the young faculty members and postdocs talked about the challenges of raising families while searching for their next position and all credited dedicated mentors for guiding them through the pitfalls and challenges of securing their first faculty role.

The interviews are also packed with fantastic advice; from guidance on the best way to approach those all-important faculty interviews to encouraging early independence and the recommendation that early-career researchers learn the ropes of grant applications by serving on proposal panels. During their conversations, many of the researchers talked about their experiences of public outreach, including working with the media, the power of social media and inviting high school teachers into their labs to expose them to genuine research. Others talked about their experiences of teaching and assembling their first courses while setting up their lab and recruiting new team members.

In addition to reading the individual interviews online, many of you have picked up our Conversation compilation booklets at conferences such as the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology and Society for Experimental Biology annual meetings. If you were not fortunate enough to get your hands on one of these inspirational reads, you can access the entire collection at <https://jeb.biologists.org/content/conversation-early-career-researchers>. We have been delighted with the enthusiastic response of our readers to the articles; some PIs tell us that they have even pinned interviews to their office doors for careers guidance while others have distributed the booklet to younger colleagues. The reaction on social media has also ranged from amazement at some of the interviewees' revelations to support from colleagues learning of challenges overcome on the pathway to success. While we hope that the themes and lessons that have been highlighted in these early-

career conversations will help to guide and encourage the current generation of postdocs as they consider their next career move, we have now decided to develop the series by introducing a new Conversation theme.

Every research paper tells a story; whether it is how animals manoeuvre, how they deal with rapid changes in their environment, or how species perceive and negotiate their surroundings. Yet behind every piece of great research, there is another more personal story that never makes it into the published article. Working with animals in their natural surroundings is often full of surprises and unexpected challenges, yet many of these anecdotes remain untold. Have you ever wondered what it is like to approach a blue whale in a tiny zodiac boat? How would you go about tagging a saltwater crocodile? Is it possible to catch an adult grebe?

This is why we are expanding the Conversation series to focus on the experiences of researchers out in the field working with some of the most intriguing species on the planet. We aim to go behind the scenes of the Materials and Methods section, as researchers tell us about their experiences on trawlers, in deserts, up mountains and in the remotest regions of the poles. In the first Conversation of our new series (jeb226399), Craig Franklin talks about his childhood rock pooling in New Zealand and how this eventually led him to work in Antarctica on metabolic cold adaptation in fish. Franklin also recalls how his fascination with the largest reptile on the planet, the saltwater crocodile, took him to Australia and led him to work with the conservationist Steve Irwin to learn more about the physiology of these enigmatic creatures.

Even though the current Covid-19 pandemic has restricted travel for many researchers, we aim – over the coming months – to bring you more of the fieldwork background stories that would normally go untold; the ups and downs, the highs and lows. We hope that they will encourage and guide upcoming explorers as they set out on their first field trips – whenever that may be – whether it's to a local stream collecting sticklebacks or the rolling planes of Mongolia to watch bar-headed geese embark on their epic trans-Himalayan migration.