



A FOCUS ON NATURE CAREERS HUB

TELEVISION RESEARCHER

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RUSSELL BARNETT – NATURAL HISTORY TV RESEARCHER, BBC



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is your role, and how long have you been doing it?

Natural History Television Researcher. I got my first paid job in the beginning of 2019.

What are your main responsibilities?

This changes from production to production. In general, the researcher's role is to gather information and present it in a condensed form to the producer. The researcher is often the main point of contact between the production and a contributor or filming location, so being able to maintain those relationships is very important. On shoots the main responsibilities are logistics and keeping the team fed and watered.

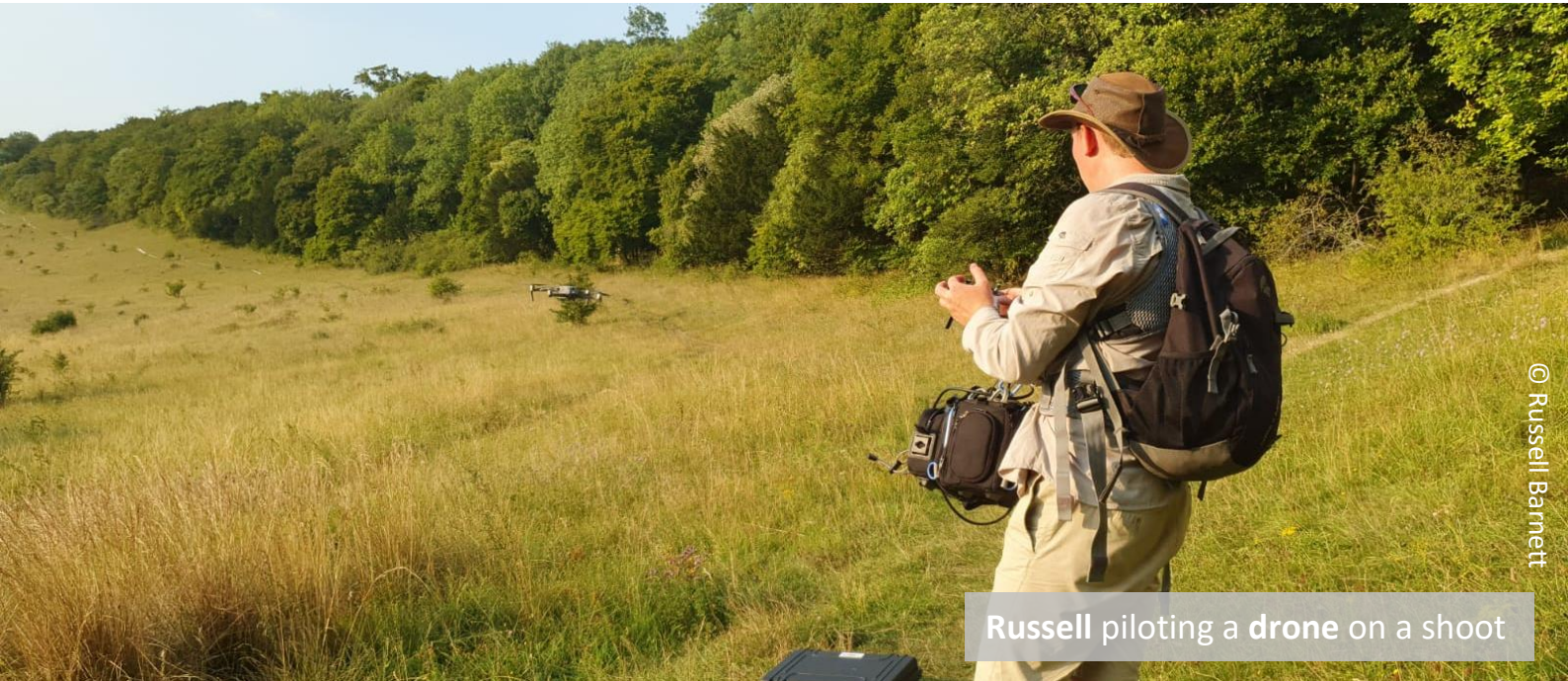
Who are the main people you have to work with?

There is a clear hierarchical structure of roles within TV Production teams and the job titles in Wildlife Television can be slightly different to those in other genres of TV. The most junior position is *Runner*, which involves assisting the team with general tasks either in the office or on shoots, or sometimes both. For each episode there may be a *Producer*, *Assistant Producer* and *Researcher* who work closely together to find stories and set up shoots. Freelance *Camera Operators* may be brought in just for the shooting part of the production. The *Series Producer* is in charge of the whole production and the *Executive Producer* may oversee several productions simultaneously. Rushes from a shoot are usually given to the team's *Edit Assistant* who then organises all the footage and gives it to a freelance *Editor* to create the finished film.

What does your day-to-day look like?

Television researching is an extremely varied career and tasks depend on what kind of production you're working on and what stage that production is in. One of my most common tasks is speaking to scientists, experts and contributors via email or phone to develop new stories, set up shoots or fact-

check information. Finding and checking copyright for archive footage can also be a big part of the job. There can be lots of paperwork to deal with, particularly before shoots and at the end of a production. Many researchers get the opportunity to go on shoots, mainly to help out with logistics, kit transfer and logging of rushes. Increasingly some researchers are able to help with filming on shoots, generally as a second camera, sound recordist, timelapse photographer or drone pilot.



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Russell piloting a drone on a shoot

What was your pathway into your role?

I did a degree in Conservation Biology and then work experience in several different places before being offered a paid job. I also taught myself camera and editing skills, allowing me to make several short films to create a portfolio of work.

What is the salary range for this type of role?

This varies greatly depending on several factors: the company, the type of production, the researcher's experience and whether the role is based in London or not. Yearly salaries could range from around £20,000 to £35,000.

Is a degree essential to your role?

No. Whilst the majority of people I know in the industry have a degree, it is definitely not essential. A strong knowledge of wildlife is the best tool to get into the industry, as long as you have ways to evidence your skills and knowledge.

If you are looking to go into higher education, a Zoological or Biological degree is most common and definitely very useful. However, I know many people in the industry with arts or humanity degrees, so a science background isn't essential.

What are the most useful skills to have for this role?

Communication skills are essential; not just for talking to your colleagues but primarily for speaking to scientists and contributors. Having the confidence and phone skills to cold-call multiple potential filming locations back-to-back is one of the things many people find most difficult.

Research skills themselves are quite specific and are therefore generally learnt on the job. A knowledge of how to read and analyse scientific papers is incredibly useful. If you don't have a science degree, this is potentially one of the most useful things you can teach yourself online.

Although you don't need to be an expert on a specific group of animals, a strong knowledge of wildlife behaviour and an ability to identify well-known species is very useful. But it's amazing how many different species of new animals and plants you learn about when being a researcher.

CAREER PATHWAYS

What GCSEs could someone study to help get into this career?

At this stage I believe it is best to take the subjects you enjoy the most. As well as having a better time, you're also more likely to do well in them. Alternatively, have a think about any A Levels you may want to do in the future and make sure you're taking those at GCSE level first.



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Russell watching the Aurora Borealis on location in Iceland

What A-Levels or BTECs could someone study to help get into this career?

If you're interested in going to do a higher education course, check the entry requirements first. Science courses are very useful but others like English and Photography may have equally useful transferable skills.

What could someone do after they leave school to help develop their skills for this career?

Biological degrees like Zoology are most common in the industry but not essential as long as you can prove an interest in and knowledge of wildlife. I know many people in the industry with arts or humanity degrees, so a science background isn't essential. Television is a very specific career and there are many skills which can only be learnt on the job. Starting out at the bottom as a Runner and working your way up is a great way to gain lots of experience and may even put you ahead of people with degrees.

If someone has graduated university, what next steps could they take to develop their skills for this career?

A masters or PhD can be useful if you want to prove yourself as an expert in a particular field. This is especially useful for people who want to work in wildlife television with a popular specialism, like marine science. However, it is definitely not essential to work in the industry. There are also several UK-based Wildlife Filmmaking Masters courses available that are a good way to get an in-depth introduction to the industry and come away with your own professional short film at the end.

When ready to apply for jobs, look online for listings on sites like 'Talent Manager', but paying for these websites is rarely beneficial. There are regional social media groups for jobs in television and a lot can be achieved through networking at specialist events. Candidates can also prospectively send emails to the Talent Managers at companies they wish to work for in order to enquire about upcoming roles. Make sure you send in a recent CV.

If applying without a scientific background, make sure you can evidence your interest in wildlife and knowledge of species and behaviour. Show off your transferable skills and any unique skills or qualifications that will make you stand out.