

Royal Botanic Gardens

Kew

Inspiring futures



Dani Ballesteros

What is your job title?

Early career research fellow.

Why is science important in your career?

I work in science, I am a scientist. This is my career.

What is your average work day like?

There are no typical work days in science, that is what makes science so fun. Some days are busy in the lab running different types of experiments, other days I am focused analysing data and writing interesting papers. I could be travelling around the world to talk about my science and find collaborators for new projects, sometimes I am teaching, and from time to time I have boring days dealing with paperwork. My fieldwork collecting samples has been reduced over time, but I still enjoy some days in the outdoors harvesting seeds, pollen or spores that I use in my experiments.

Did you go to university? If so, what did you study? If not, what did you do after leaving school?

I studied my BSc and MSc degrees in Biology in the University of Valencia in Spain (the place where I am from). Then I completed a PhD in plant biology in the same university.

What do you most enjoy about your job?

New discoveries made in experiments are always exciting, so I really enjoy lab work. I also enjoy discussing science with different people. I like the practical aspects of my job, which can be used to preserve threatened plant species.

What sort of personality traits do you have that help you in your career?

I have pursued my scientific career in the research field that I liked since I graduated and worked with the researchers and institutions that I chose. In part this is because I am perseverant, (relatively) intelligent, and collaborative. But also, because I was lucky to be in the right place in the right moment.

What helped you get your role at Kew?

My knowledge in seed physiology and conservation, my skills in in vitro culture, cryobiology and structural biology, and my large international postdoctoral experience in Spain, United States, South Africa and Italy.

What advice would you give to someone considering a career like yours?

Get your degree and have fun at school, do some work as intern in a lab to see if you like it, select a good place and a great mentor for your PhD and get a lot of publications, and do not be afraid about moving abroad to enrich your experience. Work in the topic you like, not in the topics other people may think are the best for you. Science require a lot of sacrifices, so better if you do them for something you really like.

What do you want people to know about your work?

We (humans) are eradicating many plant, fungi and animal species in the world, and science is essential to help to preserve them, either by providing knowledge and tools for conservation measures or by providing evidences to convince politicians, industry and regular people that we need to improve our relationship with the Earth.

In my work I have learnt that nothing is eternal. For example, we cannot stop ageing, even by preserving samples in the ultra-low temperatures of liquid nitrogen. However, longevity of samples in liquid nitrogen is extraordinarily extended, and they can often persist for centuries or millennia in such conditions.

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