

Biology has been taught at Bristol – as Botany and Zoology – since before the University was founded in 1909. Bristol has made significant contributions to many fields, from animal cognition and medicinal plants to entomology, evolutionary Game Theory and bird flight – and the BBC Natural History Unit's proximity to the University has led to television careers for a number of graduates!

In 1876, University College, the precursor to the University, appointed Dr. Frederick Adolph Leipner as Lecturer in Botany, Zoology and, amusingly, German. Leipner had trained at the Bristol Medical School, but taught botany and natural philosophy, later combining this with teaching in Vegetable Physiology at the Medical School. He became Professor of Botany in 1884 and was a founding member of the Bristol Naturalists' Society, becoming its President in 1893.

Bristol today is proud of its interdisciplinary strengths and, among others, offers Joint Honours Degrees in Geology and Biology, and in Psychology and Zoology. A portent of these modern links is seen in one of the University's most notable early appointments, Conwy Lloyd Morgan, appointed as Professor of Zoology and Geology in 1884 and then – somehow fitting in service as Vice-Chancellor – becoming the first Chair in Psychology (and Ethics).

Lloyd Morgan is most famous as a pioneer of the study of comparative animal cognition. He was a highly influential figure for the North American Behaviourist movement: “Lloyd Morgan's cannon” is a comparative psychologist's version of Occam's Razor whereby no behaviour should be ascribed to more complex cognitive mechanisms than strictly necessary. He was the first Fellow of the Royal Society to be elected for psychological work.

Otto Darbishire was appointed head of the Botany Department in 1911, in 1919 promoted to the newly created Chair of Botany, designated the Melville Wills Chair in 1930. Darbishire introduced different ecological regions in the Botanic Gardens and set up an experimental greenhouse with laboratories funded by avid plant collector Hiatt Baker. It was here that the Botany Department raised seeds from medicinal plants as part of the war effort in the Second World War.

Another notable botany professor during the 1930's was Eric Ashby, subsequently Baron Ashby, famous as an educator as well as a scientist. He became Secretary of the Society for Experimental Biology while at Bristol, subsequently going on to become President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast.

The current School of Biological Sciences was founded in 1990 from the fusion of the Departments of Zoology - with its particular strengths in animal physiology - and Botany, where both plant taxonomy and agricultural research had long been at the forefront. Among many influential figures Howard Hinton stands out: world-renowned entomologist and Head of Zoology in the 1970's, he published 17 papers before receiving his B.Sc. Hinton founded and edited the Journal of Insect Physiology and the journal Insect Biochemistry.

Geoff Parker, a PhD student of Hinton's, is, many would argue, one of the greatest living evolutionary theorists. His doctoral research on the humble dung-fly led to seminal papers on evolutionary Game Theory, the Marginal Value Theorem and sperm competition, his writings on the latter effectively creating a whole new field of post-Darwinian evolutionary biology.

Another notable graduate in the 1960s was Dr Una Ryan OBE, former president and chief executive officer of Avant Immunotherapeutics Inc. and winner of the Albert Einstein Award in June 2007 for her leadership in the development of vaccines for major infectious diseases.

During the 1980s, the School pioneered the field of visual ecology, whose agenda was laid down in a series of papers and a classic textbook by John Lythgoe and in which Bristol still excels. At the same

time, the School came to the forefront in the mechanisms and mathematical theory of animal locomotion, particularly bird flight, largely through the work of Colin Pennycuick, Jeremy Rayner and Geoff Spedding.

The School has produced several figures who have commanded political as well as scientific influence. Sir David Smith, who held the Chair in Botany from 1970-1980, became successively Biological Secretary of the Royal Society, Principal of Edinburgh University and President of Wolfson College, Oxford. Sir Brian Follett, Head of Zoology and then the combined School of Biology in the late 1980's and early 1990's, also became Biological Secretary of the Royal Society, then Vice-Chancellor of Warwick University (1993-2001). Sir John Beringer, Head of Botany during the same period, became Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University and chaired several high profile Research Council and government advisory committees, the most significant being that on the potential effects of releasing genetically modified organisms into the environment.

Influential figures have come not only from the academic staff: a graduate in the early 1980s was Tony Juniper, former executive director of Friends of the Earth and, for his tireless and prescient environmental campaigning, named by the Environment Agency in 2006 as one of the 'all time eco-heroes'.

That public influence is also seen in the large number of graduates who have gone on to work in the science media, notably the BBC Natural History Unit just down the road from the School. Among those whose work can be seen regularly on television are Nigel Marven (producer: *The Land of the Russian Bear*, presenter: *Walking with Dinosaurs*, *Sea Monsters*), Charlotte Uhlenbroek (pictured; presenter: *Chimpanzee Diary*, *Cousins*, *Talking with Animals*) and Pete McCowen (cameraman: *Springwatch*, *Autumnwatch*, *Big Cat Diary*, *The Meerkats*; Editor: *A Lemur's Tale*).