



ACE Advice



Practical Experience | Expert Insight

A Virtual Chat with Lauren Gilhooly



MSc Primate Conservation
PhD Biological Anthropology



Oxford Brookes University
Western University



Specialty/Research Focus:
Primates, Human-Animal
Disease Transmission

I graduated from Oxford Brookes University with an MSc in Primate Conservation in 2013. My research involved conducting a density assessment of Muller's gibbons in Sungai Wain Protection Forest in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. From there, I worked in Malaysia from 2013-2014 as a researcher on a multidisciplinary public health project exploring the spread of zoonotic malaria from wild long-tailed macaques. This project really sparked my interest in disease transmission between nonhuman primates and humans, so I ended up beginning my PhD at Western University's Anthropology department in 2014 with the aim of exploring the risks of disease transmission between humans and macaques at tourist locations in Malaysia. I studied a hybrid group of long-tailed and pig-tailed macaques at the Sepilok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre in Sabah and defended my dissertation in January 2020.

Currently, I am working as a researcher at a company called MotivBase, which combines big data and anthropological theory to help companies understand the meaning behind their consumers' behaviours. Every few days I'm given a batch of quantitative data mined from product reviews, blogs, and forums and my job is to turn that fragmented data into a concise summary of consumer beliefs and behaviour. For example, I might answer questions like "What does sustainability mean to consumers who eat a plant-based diet?". Some of my more interesting topics have included gender expression, neuropathy, gut bacteria, and flatulence. I consider myself very fortunate to have stumbled across my job through a LinkedIn post that was explicitly looking for social science PhDs. I stood a chance at getting my job, however, because of the mountain of advice that I received from both academics and non-academics about what makes a good cover letter and CV.

I use my anthropological expertise every single day, as my primary role is to try to understand why people make certain decisions, especially when it comes to what they believe to be true about science, health, and beauty. Rather than making a value judgment about what is correct, I have to put aside my own beliefs and biases and report on the data I'm given. I don't think I would be able to be a quiet observer who can also keep in mind the cultural context of the people I'm writing about without my background in anthropology.

Online
Office Hrs



See our list of
events to register
for Lauren's
upcoming office
hours.