



Aude Benhemma-Le Gall

PhD candidate • 2017 - present

What did you do before the Lighthouse ?

During my studies, I first specialised in environmental engineering with a focus on conservation and management of natural terrestrial areas. I then had the opportunity to do a gap year and take part in research projects in marine ecology! I worked as a fieldwork assistant, in Iceland, on the humpback whale photo-ID catalogue and in New Zealand to study the impacts of tourism on the Bay of Islands bottlenose dolphin population. After these amazing experiences, I decided to change my career path and do an International MSc in Marine Biodiversity and Conservation, which a few years later led me to the Lighthouse Field Station.

What do you do at the Lighthouse ?

I am currently finishing my PhD at the Lighthouse on assessing responses of marine top predators to offshore windfarm development. My research project focuses on investigating variation in harbour porpoise occurrence and foraging activity in relation to construction and vessel activities and studying the distribution of seabirds around jacket foundations and turbines at different stages of the windfarm construction. My last PhD challenge is to identify prey-predator interactions at an operational windfarm. As well as my PhD, I have had the opportunity to be involved in other research projects at the Lighthouse working with colleagues, students, and collaborators.

What advice would you give someone who wants to follow in your footsteps ?

The best thing I did in my life was to do a gap year and take some time to myself to process my achievements and failures, and decide what I really wanted in life. In my opinion, once you know and have set up your life goals, it is easier to pursue them, one achievable step at a time. Here are some other peoples advice that has helped me get where I am today: Think outside the box, embrace opportunities, don't be afraid to leave your comfort zone you'll be rewarded, challenge yourself, stay focussed but don't forget to step back, be resilient by looking after yourself. Hopefully, this cocktail of advice will help you too!

