



Helen Hiley

PhD candidate • 2020 - present



What did you do before the Lighthouse ?

Before I started my PhD, I was working as a research assistant at the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), University of St Andrews. Over the three years I spent there, I worked on testing and developing a device to deter harbour porpoise from areas of harm (e.g., as a mitigation tool during pile driving for offshore industry development). I also carried out harbour seal photo-ID work as part of the Harbour Seal Decline Project.

What do you do at the Lighthouse ?

I am currently in the first year of my PhD at the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) which is also in association with the Lighthouse team. This is focussing on harbour porpoise habitat use in Scotland and I will be bringing together passive acoustic datasets from around Scotland to look at spatiotemporal trends in porpoise presence.

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

Be persistent, make the most of opportunities that come your way and don't be too hard on yourself. I was sure I would do my PhD as soon as I finished my master's, but it ended up taking 7 years until I found the right project. In that time, I worked for a number of NGOs in the UK, as a field assistant in Shark Bay, and then as a Research Assistant at SMRU and everything that I gained from those experiences, both in my career and my personal life, have been invaluable. That time gave me the opportunity to meet and learn from some brilliant researchers and technicians (including lots of incredibly inspiring women), experience both failures and successes, and broaden my horizons in the field of marine mammal science and conservation. It might not have been the path I originally planned but I wouldn't change any of it. Don't be hard on yourself if things don't work out quite how you planned, keep learning, work hard, enjoy the ride and you will be rewarded for your perseverance.

