

How did you get into pest control?



In May this year we posted a story on the **Pest** website which detailed the background of 100 candidates on RSPH Level 2 Award in Pest Control training courses in 2013/14. In it we posed the question how did you find your way into professional pest management? This request seems to have hit a chord as the number of replies has been impressive. We have selected the most interesting ones and reproduce them here, as we felt confident others would enjoy reading them too.

From the accounts we have gathered it is clear that there are many ways into this industry.

One thing which stands out is just how much all those who replied enjoy their jobs. Positive comments which were made, time and time again, include: being your own boss; working outside; the variety of challenges faced and the feeling that you are genuinely helping customer, making a difference to their lives and that they are grateful for what you do.

With one exception, all those who got in

touch were individuals who had taken up pest control relatively recently and started their own companies. There was not a single reply from technicians, field biologists or managers from any of the larger regional or national pest control companies. Maybe they were too busy to even read our web news, never mind respond detailing their own experiences? Nor were there any replies from those currently working in local authorities, manufacturer or distributor companies.

Read on and enjoy...

Nigel Caves, Pest Doctor NW, Warrington, Cheshire



I was a market trader for 16 years. One day, my wife and I had a great idea of feeding the wild birds in winter after seeing a nature programme on TV. So, we bought bird feeders and fat-balls etc and sat back. We attracted finches and blue tits and everything was beautiful. Then my wife said there was a noise in the loft, which I assured her was magpies on the guttering. This was happening most mornings, but certainly not magpies at one o'clock in the morning!!!!!! So, after consulting an expensive pest control company, I never forgot the experience.

At the time, I was looking for a new career direction as I could see the retail trade and markets dying. I was looking for a career where people needed me as much as I needed them. I initially took a franchise with one of the companies, then, a year ago, I spread my wings and have now gone solo. A good move? Well certainly a good start.

**Louise Chapman,
Lady Mole Catcher, Norwich**

Like most people I got into pest control by accident – but then I don't consider myself a pest controller, as I specialise in moles and regard myself as a mole detective.

Having spent six years as a school teacher, which was fairly stressful, I was looking for a job working outside. I went and trained as a garden designer at Easton College and saw a mole catching course, which I thought would be interesting. Having completed the course, I worked as a gardener but found it was a lot of hard work for little reward. It was then I spotted there was a gap in the market for catching moles. That was over three years ago and I haven't looked back – I love it! I pride myself on the service I offer and now even use my teaching skills running Lantra mole catching courses for the British Mole Catchers, which I took over from Brian Alderton in April 2015.

There have certainly been some great spin-offs. Like, for example, being selected to take part in the *Deadliest Pest Down Under* TV show. I'm a pretty gutsy person, but having faced those crocodiles I've now got even 'bigger balls of steel'!



Nick Woodroffe, Peak Pest Control, Buxton, Derbyshire

Thought I'd put pen to paper to give you a little insight into my pest control career decision. Now, firstly, I'll be honest and say that at school I never wanted to be a pest controller, that position was filled by a desire to be a Peak District Park warden...which, incidentally, never happened.

My head was turned at the age of 19 by Derbyshire Fire and Rescue and, 23 years later, I'm at Buxton Fire Station as a crew manager. However in 2010, aged 36, I decided I needed a trade to move into – one I could develop as a family business, for the day, if and when, I decided to retire, or leave the fire service.

In my immediate area only the council offered a pest control service and, having watched a Notts-based company clear pigeons from my station's drill tower, I thought... I could do that!

In 2011, still with a full time job but with a shift pattern that gave me time to start, we began our pest control business – Peak Pest Control. That involved flying to Newbury in Northern Ireland to do my RSPH Level 2 award in pest control (it was the next exam venue on the list). My initial thoughts were for me to run the technician side and Sharon, my wife, to run the paperwork side.

Now, five years later, however, Sharon has recently passed her Level 2 examination and we are both out on the road sharing the contracts, admin and call-outs between us. It has taken us this long to get established as, obviously, we started with from scratch with absolutely no idea of how to run, or market, a business.

I now have a good number of contracts, regular repeat custom from local people plus I work all over the county controlling rabbits. I'm still full-time in the fire service, but it's now getting in the way of my business!

I wouldn't change it for the world and love working for myself. As a career, pest control was never offered by my career's adviser, but I would definitely recommend it. One word of advice though, I'd look to complete an apprenticeship with an established pest control company to get a good grounding in the business first. It's tough to start from cold.



Dave Evans, Pestend, Sandhurst, Berkshire

Interesting to see how people get into this line of business, isn't it?

I come from a 20+ year career in cutting-edge IT, culminating as the operations director for the UK arm of a multinational software company.

So, why pest control?

It offered me the chance to employ a range of skills, it's challenging and constantly changing. This is my third year now and I was in half a mind to write a short article about starting out, how I developed a marketable profile and perhaps some of the issues facing a new business in this sphere. Maybe one day – I'll just deal with this client first...!

As an aside, compared to IT, the biggest differences I see are a vastly better quality of life and clients who are genuinely grateful for the services performed.

FEATURE

Becoming a pestie

Kelly Farrant, Pest-Tech, Maidstone, Kent

Prior to becoming a pest controller I did 25 years in the Royal Engineers. I went from Private to Regimental Sergeant Major, then took a commission and became a Captain but then decided it was time for a change.

I wanted to start a business, but was not sure what to do. Whilst I was still in the army, I had a chat with a guy down the road who owned a pest control company about pest control as a job and the seed was planted.

There were a lot of transferable skills going from the armed forces to pest control.

Some are obvious, such as weapon safety, but also things such as high values and standards which are key to becoming a professional pest controller.

I already had a number of courses under my belt which was helpful, such as my NEBOSH General Certificate in Health & Safety and First Aid at Work and I quickly did my IPAF



Kelly's medals include: Afghanistan, United Nations Bosnia medal, NATO Bosnia and the Gulf War

and got my Fire Arms Certificate as well as my RSPH Level 2 in pest control.

In the 18 months I have been running my business, I have managed to attend a range of courses, but my engineering background helps when dealing with many situations and tasks, such as bird proofing where you often have to engineer a solution to a problem. I now have a second guy working with me, he is now trained and is booked on his RSPH Level 2 Award in October.

Liz Davies, Hinton Pest Control, Hinton on the Green, Worcestershire

Often people are brought into the industry by a keen interest in wildlife and it's management, but my introduction is actually a love story that resulted in a change of career.

At the time, I was a full-time working mother to a six-year-old child and I was going through a divorce. I was teaching at West Mercia Police headquarters and I remember telling my sister that the only way I would meet a chap would be if he turned up on my doorstep.

Quite a while later, I noticed the mice. Now I'm a practical rural lass and I had a cat that was a fearsome predator, but I did start to be concerned when the cat killed 30 mice, indoors,



Liz Davies with husband, Steven Blount (right) and technician Tim Cubberley



within a week. The final straw was when I opened my wardrobe and a mouse jumped out, landing in my cleavage.

I called the council, who referred me to their preferred contractor and that's when Mouse Man entered, stage left.

I instructed him to kill every single rodent in the property with the exception of my two pet rats. That was 12 years ago. We are now married and have a further two children. I became a qualified pest control technician in 2013, we have our own CEPA certified pest control company and I no longer keep bird seed in our garage!

Bit of a giggle really, but God bless all those mice!

Imogen Levenson, Tufnell Park Pest Control, London



Above:
Archie Levenson, aged 15, now officially taller than his mother!

Left:
Otto Levenson, aged 9, dressed as Willy Wonker for recent Roald Dahl celebrations



Right:
Kitty Levenson, aged 18, pictured winning the national cricket final with the Finchley Gunns. Currently in Australia playing for Melbourne ladies cricket club

Many readers will recognise Imogen Levenson as one of *The Ladykillers* from the BBC 2 series broadcast last year. This is how she got into pest control.

I was working as a marketing planner for IPC Magazines when a family friend suggested that I shouldn't waste my degrees but work for someone she knew who was looking for a field biologist.

From that first pest control company I moved to a second, then stopped to have and bring up my three children, Kitty (18), Archie (15) and Otto (9). When Otto started primary school I considered re-training, but realised I already knew a lot about a particular industry.

I toyed with the idea of becoming a sole trader which would fit in with family commitments so I visited PestTech, which I considered to be a good starting point.

I saw a few people there who I already knew, including one who was prepared to sell me rodenticides and insecticides and talked to the BPCA and BASIS Prompt among others.

From here I haven't looked back. But what I would say is, set up your own management and recording system before you begin trading!

Richard Bevan, NPAP member and ex Bristol City Council

My life in pest control started when I was still at school. My father was a pest technician for Insecta Laboratories then he moved to Ratsouris on Clerkenwell Road in London.

During the school holidays I would shadow Dad to a range of various sites which included Paignton Zoo, HMS Heron, RNAS Culdrose in Cornwall, the Royal Hotel in Guernsey, just to mention a few.

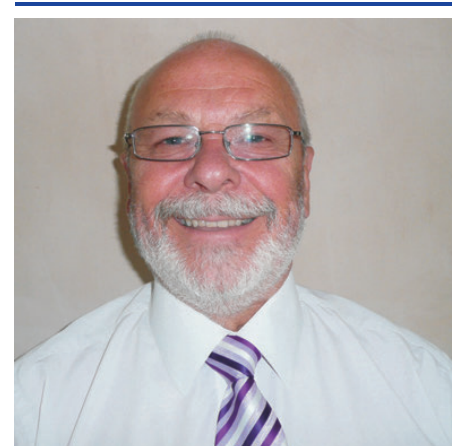
On leaving school in 1965 I joined a local pest control company, Vermin Services and looked after a range of contracts.

In 1970 I joined Bristol City Council as a rat catcher and enjoyed a change of focus in dealing with the public, rather than contracts, which could be challenging, but very satisfying. During 1978 I was promoted

to assistant manager and then, in 1984, to manager. This extended my skills base in promoting the services we could offer such as gull control and contracts. Then in 2014 I retired from Bristol City Council.

My life experience in working in the pest control industry included meeting some great and interesting people (and sometimes those that could be very challenging, if not downright difficult). I also dealt with plenty of other challenges including a wide range of pests, the management of a team of 20 staff, the running of a fleet of vehicles, the maintenance of buildings and, of course, all this had to be done within the budget.

All that said I could not have chosen a more satisfying job which, in truth, was more of a



vocation with its variety and challenges. I was never in a position where I dreaded Monday mornings. I was an inaugural member in the National Pest Advisory Panel (NPAP) and I'm still actively involved as I just can't seem to let go, well not yet anyway!