

Delphine Defforey

Data Scientist for Bloom & Wild



What is your current occupation?

I work as a data scientist for an online flower delivery platform in the UK called Bloom & Wild. My responsibilities mainly include building machine learning models to help automate processes in the business and optimize some of our marketing strategies. I also build data pipelines to transform raw data into data we can use for our model features.

What is your educational background?

My background is in natural sciences. I have a BS in Biology and a PhD in Earth science (with a focus on biogeochemistry). The latter predominantly involved lab work, so a couple of years after completing my PhD I enrolled in a coding bootcamp (General Assembly) to learn the coding skills I needed to transition into a data science career.

A key message for students is that the geoscience workforce is dynamic, and boundaries between sectors and occupations are fluid. How has this been true in your career?

When I was finishing my PhD, I knew I wanted to leave academia but my area of expertise wasn't something that could easily be transferred to the private sector. I gained an interest in editorial work and got a position as an editor at Nature Communications where I worked for a couple of years and handled biogeochemistry manuscripts. A lot of the written and verbal communication skills I had developed during my PhD were directly relevant, as was my domain expertise. Had I wanted to keep working as an editor, there would have been some fluidity in

terms of the companies I could work for.

Editorial work was not a good fit for my work-life balance, so I opted to change careers again. However, I quickly realized that switching sectors was going to be difficult given my niche skillset. That's when I decided to enroll in a 3-month full-time coding bootcamp to pick up the coding skills I needed to work as a data scientist. Acquiring those skills has opened a lot of doors and has given me the opportunity to change sectors more easily. I have worked for two online retail companies since, but could switch to a different sector without too much difficulty.

Where do you see your sector moving in future years? How would you advise students to prepare to be competitive job applicants and successful employees?

There is a strong interest in automation and machine learning, and I see this continuing in the future not only in online retail but in the private sector in general. My advice to students would be to learn how to code in a commonly used coding language (python or R), take statistics courses and apply that knowledge in some projects. I would also encourage thoroughly researching companies before applying for roles. Writing tailored CVs and cover letters for every role and reaching out to people who work for the company you're applying to work for before submitting job applications also makes a big difference. Making a genuine human connection helps to stand out among many job applicants.

What is the role of networking in your sector? Do you have advice for a student who is just beginning to build their network? What is the best way for students to get their foot in the door?

Networking is extremely important and has played a key role in me getting all my roles since graduating. I was very fortunate that my advisor helped me get in contact with editors she knew before I applied for my editor role. Being able to meet some in person to find out more about the job and building a rapport was very helpful. I would definitely recommend reaching out to people ahead of conferences and asking them to meet up for a quick coffee to ask them about their work.

Online networking is also very important and I recommend connecting with people on LinkedIn (writing a short note to introduce yourself and break the ice helps). Meetups and job fairs are also good venues for meeting people and networking. In a nutshell, I recommend putting yourself out there even if it is intimidating; it'll be worth it!

What does a "typical" day of work look like for you?

On a typical day, I'll start the day by having a quick meeting with my team (a "stand-up") where we discuss what we're all working on. I may have a couple more meetings throughout the day. For the majority of my time, I'll either work on data wrangling (a big portion of my time), improving a model, building the infrastructure around that model (how we feed data to the model and process model outputs), design a new system or review my teammates' code.

What is the best part of your job?

I really enjoy the variety of problems I get to solve, I get to learn something new every day. Part of that is thanks to the ever-changing problems I get to solve, but I also learn a lot from my teammates as I collaborate directly with others on a daily basis and continuously get constructive feedback on my work.

It's a very stimulating and at times challenging job, which makes it very rewarding. I also really appreciate the fact that my work has a direct impact on our customers.

Do you have any other comments or advice for students looking to enter your sector of the geoscience workforce?

The advice I would give based on my experience is to not be afraid to retrain and acquire new skills. I used to think that I couldn't work as a data scientist because I didn't do much coding during my PhD and that was completely wrong. It's never too late to learn something new.

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