

the call, they asked me what kind of salary I wanted. I suggested a number, and they immediately accepted," he says. "I realized later that if people aren't saying 'no' to you, you aren't asking for enough."

### SELF CONFIDENCE

Meghan Duffy, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, is a self-assured, widely acclaimed authority on aquatic ecology. But as a graduate student, she had many of the same doubts that plague other young researchers. Was she really cut out for this business? How could she live up to the standards of the senior scientists around her? And, most pressingly, would she ever catch up on the maths?

She started her graduate work with just one university maths course and no programming under her belt. "My undergraduate self didn't realize that those skills would be useful," she says. Duffy checked out a book on calculus, did a theoretical-ecology course to get a better grasp of the mathematical side of aquatic science and taught herself how to program.

More importantly, however, she learned that she was not the only one to doubt herself — and that there was usually no need. "So many people have impostor syndrome," she says. "You can't compare the turmoil inside you to someone else's confident exterior."

Hendry, too, advises an upbeat outlook. "Being a professor is probably the best job in existence," he says. "The research, the day-to-day life, it's all up to you. I can't imagine a job with more freedom than I have."

Groundbreaking research at the top of a field is a hyper-competitive arena,

he says, but a scientist can do great work without a huge level of stress. "I'm not a global high-roller," he says. "You can have a more relaxed and fun life."

He now also has a take on science that would have come as a surprise to his younger self — and a lot of other junior researchers. "If you really want to be a professor, and you have a half-decent research record, and you aren't picky about where you want to work, you will eventually get a job," he says. "Don't give up."

So getting ahead in science is easier than many people think. Junior researchers often try to work things out for themselves, but if they seek out advice, they will find that people are willing and eager to share what it takes to succeed. They just need to ask. ■

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## TURNING POINT

# Mike Runge

*US Geological Survey (USGS) wildlife ecologist Mike Runge co-chairs a team that released a species-recovery plan on 6 July for the polar bear — one of the first high-profile mammals to be listed as threatened in connection with climate-change projections. He explains how he learned to balance science with policy.*

### What best prepared you to work in science policy?

I taught secondary school for five years after getting my undergraduate degree in molecular biology and philosophy. You can't teach calculus to 17-year-olds at 8 a.m. unless you think about their motivations and what will engage them. It was an extraordinarily valuable job that taught me how to listen, be fair-minded and communicate effectively with people in different settings — skills that are crucial for me today.

### How did you get into the field?

In my PhD programme in wildlife science, my project was to develop quantitative models of beaver-population dynamics. I combined population models with factors that affect trapping efforts, such as pelt price and cost of gas, which New York wildlife managers could use to help to regulate beaver trapping. I use that approach to integrate quantitative scientific methods into real-world settings.

### When did you begin to work on polar bears?

After I started a postdoc with the USGS, I got a call to work on predictive population models of manatees. They are protected under both the US Endangered Species Act and the US Marine Mammal Protection Act, so I learned about the legal frameworks under which science is used. In 2007, when the US Fish and Wildlife Service was petitioned to list polar bears as threatened, the USGS was tapped to study the bears' current and projected population numbers in the face of climate change. Thanks to my manatee experience, I was asked to join the polar-bear population-modelling team and, later, the recovery-plan team.

### What was the biggest challenge in writing the recovery plan?

Polar bears are an icon of the Arctic. Everybody cares about them. And there are diverse groups of people — from Alaska's natives to its oil-and-gas industry to Polar Bears International, an advocacy organization — that are passionate about different aspects of the Arctic. It was a challenge to identify and bring together such a broad array of voices so that each one can be heard. But it is also an opportunity to create



something enduring — a shared vision for how polar bears should be managed.

### Were negotiations tense?

The hard part was getting everyone to lay their cards on the table so that we could work out a solution together. I've tried to create a template for facing contentious issues and trade-offs straight on and with respect. At first, I thought that the politicians at the top would be the worst when it came to cooperation. But I've found that many lawmakers — those who work on the big, highly visible issues every day — know how to disagree respectfully and seek solutions through compromise.

### What advice would you give to scientists who work in politically sensitive areas?

To be fair-minded. I've had the privilege to meet with different groups and to learn how aspects of wildlife management affect their lives. Lots of these situations are political and tense and require a non-judgemental understanding of multifaceted interests in the natural world.

### Are you writing the rules for how climate-change-related recovery plans should proceed?

We didn't set out to create the template. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration fisheries service released a recovery plan for coral species early this year, which was the first to address species-level impacts and mitigation strategies in the face of climate change. We want to do the best that we can for polar bears. I think that a number of other recovery teams will have to go through a similar process. ■

### INTERVIEW BY VIRGINIA GEWIN

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.