

Real Geographers series



Meet Emily van de Geer, Education Manager at Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) and real-world Geographer! We asked Emily a series of questions about her work:



Why does *Surfers Against Sewage* exist?

Surfers Against Sewage is a national marine conservation and campaigning charity. We work to create ocean activists everywhere to achieve our vision for a thriving ocean and thriving people.

Why do you think geography matters in the world?

The more we understand the environments on our blue planet and the impacts of humanity, the better equipped we will be to protect our world and ensure our future as a species.

Where is your favourite destination in the world from the point of view of a geographer?

I find the ever-changing salt marshes of North Norfolk absolutely fascinating. The shift in the shape of these incredible ecosystems as sediment builds up and moves, creating a place for vegetation and wildlife, always has something new to offer on every visit whether you look at it every day or over a longer period of several years. Also the fact that salt marshes are 10 times more effective at capturing carbon than terrestrial ecosystems just goes to show just how important this often overlooked habitat really is.

Salt marshes of North Norfolk





What are your most pressing environmental concerns and why?

The ocean and climate crisis. A healthy ocean is vital for the survival of all life on earth, providing food, habitats and acting as a natural defence to climate change. Not only does the ocean produce half of the oxygen we breathe, but it also absorbs the majority of the atmospheric heat and carbon emissions produced by human activities. The ocean, however, is struggling to cope with the immense demands human activity is putting on it. The temperature of the ocean has been increasing rapidly in the last decade and this is having a huge impact on migratory species as well as crucial marine habitats such as corals reefs, which are extremely sensitive to even small changes in temperature.

Climate change is causing sea levels to rise by melting ice caps and expanding water molecules. This sea level rise causes the destruction of coastal habitats such as estuaries and salt marshes; increases the likelihood of coastal communities to be impacted by flooding; and increases risk of extreme weather events. These changes are already affecting communities in the UK. Also ocean acidification as a result of carbon dioxide emissions is making marine species such as plankton and shellfish increasingly vulnerable by hampering their ability to grow shells and reducing growth and survival rates during the early life stages of some species.



What impact do you think the people in the UK are having on the planet?

I think we are all contributing to the ocean and climate crisis in varying degrees, however, the more we understand this and how we are intrinsically linked to our environment, the more we can reduce this impact. We need our government to put in place more ambitious targets to reach net zero carbon by 2030. The government's current target to reach net zero by 2050 does not reflect the urgency at which we need to address the climate crisis.



What is the most concerning thing you have seen as a result of plastic pollution and climate change?

I've seen first-hand the devastating effects that humanity can have on the marine environment including sea turtles dying from plastic ingestion and pollution induced disease, tonnes of rubbish washing up on beaches and people who depend on the ocean's valuable resources struggling to survive because these resources are dwindling. Sounds scary right? That's because the way we are treating our oceans is scary! But I strongly believe that it's not too late to do something about it.



What tips do you have for schools, teachers and pupils on being more sustainable / eco-friendly?

First of all, it's time to ditch that unnecessary single-use plastic! Our Plastic Free Schools programme equips and empowers young activists with the tools to create positive, lasting environmental change. Secondly, never underestimate the power of your voice and make yourself heard. Signing our ocean and climate emergency petition is a great place to start!

To find out more about Emily van de Geer and Surfers Against Sewage visit: [Surfers Against Sewage](#)

For more inspiration on why Geography matters in the world, and our Real Geographers series, go to: [Historians and Geographers of the future](#)