

Tropical Conservation and Ecology in Costa Rica

ENV SCI 499

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Course Description:

This two credit course immerses students for approximately two weeks in the tropical ecosystems of Costa Rica. Student experience is centered on a living, working relationship with the staff at Carara National Park. Located on Costa Rica's Pacific Coast, Carara is characterized by high biological diversity resulting from its unique juxtaposition between the wetter forests of the south and the drier northern deciduous forests. Course topics take a system's approach, exposing students to a wide range of biological, geological, and socioeconomic issues related to Costa Rican ecology and conservation. Student interaction with park staff enhances group discussions by providing a Costa Rican perspective to Costa Rica's natural resource challenges. Two overnight excursions expose students to additional tropical ecosystems, geological processes, and land management approaches. The extensive student exposure to Carara's moist tropical forest provides a solid baseline from which students can build a systematic understanding of the similarities and differences among Costa Rica's varied tropical ecosystems. Required activities include attendance at a minimum of three pre-departure meetings, and while in Costa Rica, several off-site field trips, prolonged hiking on uneven trails, and an ability to conduct vigorous activities under tropical conditions. Spanish language skills are valuable, but not required for course participation.

Texts:

- Kricher, J. 1999. A Neotropical Companion, 2nd Edition. Princeton University Press, U.S.A. 540p.
- Assigned readings

Evaluation:

Assignment	Proportion of Course Grade
Pre-trip preparation, meetings, readings	10%
Pre-trip group presentation	10%
Participation during the trip	15%
Participation in Group Research Projects	15%
Travel journal (including responses to daily questions)	50%

Grading Scale:

Grades are based on a 90, (<90 to 88), 80, (<80 to 78), 70, 60, <60% scale, but may be modified at instructor discretion.

Course Prerequisites:

Completion of, or fall semester enrollment in, either BIO 203 or ENV SCI 102, or instructor permission.

Tentative Syllabus – January 2008:

Date	Activity
Dec. 31 st	Leave for Costa Rica, arrive in San Jose.
Jan 1 st	Depart to Carara, arrive around 2 PM. Clean biological station, grocery shop, meet the staff, introduction to Carara National Park; and settle in. Discuss locations for student research projects.
Jan 2 nd	Early morning hike, monitoring, etc. Begin work project, and work until noon. Afternoon, establish student research projects.
Jan 3 rd	Early morning Lagoon Trek hike. Continue work project (Start at 10 AM), and work until 2 PM. Afternoon: continue student research projects and tropical plant photo-scavenger hunt.
Jan 4 th	Ecotourism at Punta Leona
Jan 5 th	Early morning hike, monitoring, etc. Continue work project, and work until noon. Late afternoon: Turu-Bari Parque Tropical for zip line.
Jan 6 th	Early morning hike, monitoring, etc. Continue work project, and work until noon. Afternoon: continue student research projects. Very late afternoon leave for Santa Rosa.
Jan 7 th	Full day at Santa Rosa.
Jan 8 th	Very early morning return to Carara. Late morning to Viajuel school.
Jan 9 th	Early morning hike, monitoring, etc. Continue work project, and work until noon. Early afternoon: continue student research projects
Jan 10 th	Trip to Monteverde cloud forest, lunch in Santa Elena, and Skywalk
Jan 11 th	Guided hike at Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve, return to Carara by mid-afternoon. Late afternoon: water quality sampling.
Jan 12 th	Morning take Tino's waterfall hike. Clean biological station. Dinner with Carara staff.
Jan 13 th	Poás Volcano and return to San Jose.
Jan 14 th	Return to Green Bay

Participation in daily discussions is required.