

Primate Behavior & Ecology (Ometepe)

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Course Description:

This course is designed to be an extensive look at how primates adapt to their ecosystems both by physical characteristics and by various means of behavior. This course will also give students experience and training doing primate ethology in the field.

We have the unique ability in this course to experience the ecosystem these animals live in. Through this, we can better understand both the structural and behavioral adaptations made by the primates we study. We will learn rain forest ecology and see how the ecosystem is delicately balanced with each species carving out a special niche. In this course, we will be covering the basic tenants of primatology in lectures and combining this with field research. Students will learn field research techniques as they relate to studying primates in the wild. Students will also create their own research projects which they will complete by the end of class.

Students will leave this course as experienced field researchers of primatology.

Texts (required):

These two texts will serve as your handbook as you are here. The readings will be covered in the lectures.

Strier, K. (2003). Primate Behavioral Ecology, 2nd edition. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
ISBN: 0205352367

Smuts, B.B. D. L. Cheney, R. M. Seyfarth, R. Wrangham, T. T. Struhsaker (eds.) (1987).
Primate Societies. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN:0226767167

Field Research:

You are required to do design your own research project related to the primates in the area. The project must be behavioral in nature and focus on the ethology techniques you have learned in class. You may work in groups or do individual projects, provided in groups everyone takes an active participation. You will present your findings at the end of the session.

Exam:

There will be one brief exam covering the lectures in this course. The exam will be in essay form.

Grading:

Exam – 30%

Field exercises – 25%

Written report of your project – 30%

Oral presentation of the project – 10%

Participation – 5%

Tentative Course Agenda:

The following is a very loose schedule of what to expect in this course. The schedule is subject to change.

Day 1: Arrive in Nicaragua. Orientation.

Day 2: Tour of facilities. Break up into small groups. Using a compass and field technologies. Afternoon lecture.

Day 3: Morning field research / field techniques. Afternoon lecture. Readings

Day 4: Morning field research / field techniques. Afternoon lecture. Readings. Begin working on your ethogram

Day 5: Morning field research / field techniques. Afternoon lecture. Readings

Day 6: Morning field research / field techniques. Afternoon lecture. Readings

Day 7: Morning field research / field techniques. Afternoon lecture. Readings

Day 8: Morning field research / field techniques. Afternoon lecture. Readings. Present ethogram to the group with a description of what you are trying to assert with the ethogram.

Day 9: Morning field research / field techniques. Practice data collection techniques. Afternoon lecture.

Day 10: Morning field research / field techniques. Work on proposal. Exam.

Day 11: Morning field research / field techniques. Proposal defenses.

Day 12: Morning field research / field techniques. Meet individually with professor to discuss your project

Day 13-22: Collect data for your project.

Day 23: Hand in written paper. Oral presentations

Day 24: Oral presentations. Goodbye party.

Day 25: Leave Ometepe and spend night near airport

Day 26: Fly home.