



## **Natural Histories: Human Culture and Conservation of Birds around the World First-Year Seminar, Fall 2012**

FRS 002.14 2 credits  
Mondays 2:10-3:30  
1064 Academic Surge

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### **Course Description**

Birds are beautiful and visible examples of the biological diversity that exists on Earth. Human cultures across the globe have incorporated birds into their artwork and belief-systems for thousands of years, and continue to do so today. Yet human cultures also pose numerous threats to birds, and many of the world's species are threatened with extinction.

The conservation of biological diversity is a global challenge, and relies on more than just science. In this class, we will investigate how different human cultures – local patterns of human knowledge, belief, and behavior – affect the conservation of birds around the world.

### **Format**

Each week, we will examine the human and natural history of a different part of the world. We will explore how different facets of human culture – history, politics, religion, food, literature, and economics – intersect with different facets of bird conservation – evolution, ecology, threats, and behavior. We will do this primarily through diverse readings, short videos, group discussion, individual research, and communication of findings via blog posts and presentations.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is required.

### **Grading**

This is a participatory, discussion-based class. There are no tests or final exams, as our goal is not to memorize facts, but to practice thinking, writing, and communicating. Thus your grade will be based on your effort in those three areas.

- 40% Thinking (Participation)
  - 10% online quizzes beforehand
  - 10% discussion questions
  - 10% showing up to class, saying something thoughtful
  - 10% end-of-class reflections
- 30% Writing (Blog Posts)
  - 2 posts, 15% each
- 30% Communicating (Group Presentations)

### **Principles of Community**

Discussion of social and ethical elements of conservation issues can provoke strong feelings. We will respect each others' opinions and values at all times, and adhere to the UC Davis principles of community. <http://occr.ucdavis.edu/poc/>

### **Assignments**

**On-line quizzes.** Discussion works best when everyone has read the material before class meets. Each week, there will be a mini-quiz on Smartsite, covering terms and content from the reading(s). These quizzes are "open-book": you are allowed (and encouraged!) to refer back to the readings, look definitions up online, research topics you don't understand, et cetera. The quiz will be available from Wednesday morning at 8am until Sunday night at 12pm for the next Monday's class. Quizzes will be worth 2 pts each (for a total of 12 pts), and the lowest grade will be dropped.

**Discussion questions.** Discussion works best when everyone has thought about the material before class meets. Each week, everyone will submit a discussion question to the Smartsite chat-room by Sunday night at 12pm for the next day's class. Two students will lead discussion each week, using their own questions and those submitted by their classmates. We will sign up for this during our first meeting. Questions will be worth 1 pt each (for a total of 6 pts), and leading discussion will be worth 6pts.

**End-of-class reflections.** Each week, following group discussion, we will spend the last 5-10 minutes of class writing personal reflections on the topic. You be given a prompt and have that time to write a response to turn in. These written reflections will be graded for evidence of thoughtfulness, not factual content. Reflections will be worth 2 pts each (for a total of 12 pts), and the lowest grade will be dropped.

**Blog posts.** We will have a course blog highlighting bird conservation efforts around the world. The blog will consist of brief summaries (~250-500 words) of recent and innovative conservation efforts, including the species involved and the human cultural context. Each student is required to post two summaries, one before November 1<sup>st</sup>, and one before December 1<sup>st</sup>, but more are encouraged! Blog posts are worth 15 pts each (for a total of 30 pts).

A detailed guideline and grading rubric for this assignment will follow.

**Group presentation.** With a partner, choose one of the biodiversity hotspots (that we will not discuss in the first 8 weeks of class) identified by Conservation International. You will be in charge of researching the human and avian natural histories in that area and sharing your findings with the class in a 10 minute presentation. The final two meetings of the quarter will be

devoted to these presentations. Power-point is allowed, but only for pictures (no more than 15 words per slide!); other forms of show-and-tell (books, artwork, props) are encouraged. Presentations are worth 30 pts.

A detailed guideline and grading rubric for this assignment will follow.

## **Schedule**

Week 1 – October 1, 2012

### **Central Valley, California**

- What are American cultural attitudes toward birds and wildlife?
- What birds are on campus? Arboretum, tour of Wildlife Museum collections

Week 2 – October 8, 2012

### **The Caucauses & Irano-Anatolia – Turkey**

Readings: “Natural Histories” by Elif Bautman

Sekercioglu et al. (2004) – Consequences of bird declines.  
just Figure 1 and Table 1

- What do birds do? How do they help humans?
- Where are birds endangered, and why?
- How does human conflict affect birds?

Week 3 – October 15, 2012

### **Polynesia and Micronesia – Hawaii**

Readings: “Honeycreepers in Hawaiian material culture” by Sheila Conant

Excerpts from “The Diversity of Life” – Ch.7 Adaptive Radiation (p. 94-104)  
and Ch.12 Biodiversity Threatened (p.245-254)- by E.O.Wilson

- How are human cultures and birds different on islands?
- How does tourism impact island ecosystems?

Week 4 – October 22, 2012

### **The Himalayas - Tibet**

Reading: “A Buddhist monk saves one of the world’s rarest birds” by Phil McKenna

Video: “The Bird Whisperer” by Lu Bin

- What does Buddhism say about conservation? Other religions and ethical systems?
- What role do community leaders have in local conservation efforts?
- How do bird life history traits make species vulnerable to extinction?

Week 5 – October 29, 2012

### **Cape Floristic Region – South Africa**

Reading: Allan et al. (1997) – Commercial afforestation of grasslands

Video: “The great penguin rescue” by Dyan DeNapoli

- How does human demand for resources directly and indirectly affect bird species?
- How does global warming threaten seabirds?

Week 6 – November 5, 2012

### **MesoAmerica – Panama**

Readings: “Did your shopping list kill a songbird?” by Brigit Stutchbury

Van Bael et al. (2007) – Bird diversity in cacao farms

- How do different agricultural practices affect bird conservation?
- How do you conserve migratory species?

Week 7 – November 12, 2012

**Mediterranean Basin – Malta**

Reading: “Emptying the Skies” by Jonathan Franzen

- How does human hunting impact bird populations?
- What is the balance between human traditions and bird conservation?

Week 8 – November 19, 2012

**Wallacea – Indonesia**

Reading: Jepson & Ladle (2005) – Bird keeping in Indonesia

Video: “The fight to end rare animal trafficking” by Juliana Machado Ferreira

- How does wildlife trade (and trafficking) affect bird populations?
- Are there ways to involve the market in conservation?
- How can we combat the “anthropogenic Allee effect”?

Weeks 9 & 10 – November 26 and December 3, 2012

**Group presentations**

**Reading and Resources List**

Allan, D.G., J.A. Harrison, R.A. Navarro, B. W. van Wilgen, and M.W. Thompson. 1997. The impact of commercial afforestation on bird populations in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa – insights from bird-atlas data. *Biological Conservation* 79: 173-185.

Bautman, E. Natural histories: A journey in the shadow of Ararat. *The New Yorker*, October 24, 2011, p.56-65.

Bin, L. The bird whisperer. Interview with Tashi Sange.

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/video/The-Bird-Whisperer.html> [Accessed 11-16-2011]

Conant, S. 2005. Honeycreepers in Hawaiian material culture. in *Hawaiian Honeycreepers: Drepanidinae*, by Pratt, H.D., Oxford, p.278-284.

Conservation International’s Map of Biodiversity Hotspots

<http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org/Pages/default.aspx> [Accessed 11-16-2011]

DeNapoli, D. The great penguin rescue. TED talk.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/dyan\\_denapoli\\_the\\_great\\_penguin\\_rescue.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/dyan_denapoli_the_great_penguin_rescue.html)

[Accessed 11-16-2011]

Franzen, J. Emptying the skies. *The New Yorker*, July 26, 2010, p. 48-61.

Jepson, P. and R. J. Ladle. 2005. Bird-keeping in Indonesia: conservation impacts and the potential for substitution-based conservation responses. *Oryx* 39: 1-6.

McKenna, P. A Buddhist monk saves one of the world's rarest birds. *Smithsonian*, October 2011  
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/A-Buddhist-Monk-Saves-One-of-the-Worlds-Rarest-Birds.html#> [Accessed 11-16-2011]

Machado Ferreira, J. The fight to end rare animal trafficking in Brazil. TED talk.  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/juliana\\_machado\\_ferreira.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/juliana_machado_ferreira.html) [Accessed 11-16-2011]

Sekercioglu, C.H., G.C. Dailey, and P.R. Ehrlich. 2004. Ecosystem consequences of bird declines. *PNAS* 101: 18042-18047.

Stutchbury, B. Did your shopping list kill a songbird? *New York Times*, March 30, 2008  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/30/opinion/30stutchbury.html> [Accessed 11-16-2011]

Van Bael, S.A., P. Bichier, I. Ochoa, R. Greenberg. 2007. Bird diversity in cacao farms and forest fragments of western Panama. *Biological Conservation* 16: 2245-2256.

Wilson, E.O. 1992. *The Diversity of Life*. W.W. Norton & Co.: New York, New York.