

University of Waterloo
Ontario Universities Program in Field Biology

Course Title:	Belize : Rainforest and Reef
Instructor(s):	Hugh Broders (hbroders@uwaterloo.ca)
Dates:	May 4- 16 2026 (13 days). Arrival midday of 4 th , departure morning of 16th
Location:	Belize. Main location will be at the Toucan Ridge Ecology and Education Society (https://www.treesociety.org/). Other locations include Cockscomb Jaguar Preserve, Lamanai Archaeological Reserve, Belize Zoo and a Caye.
Cost:	Estimated \$3,500 (\$350 to home university; \$3,150 balance). Includes: meals, accommodation, surface transportation, most activities. Excludes: airfare, trip interruption insurance, travel medical insurance. There will be 2 optional for-the-group activities in 2026, dependent on local conditions (i.e., water levels). Individual students will not be able to opt in or out of these outings. The decision on whether we do these outings will be made while in Belize by instructors and local guides following consultation with students. Rather than including these costs in the course fees, we will only collect the cash payments (perhaps \$50-100 USD for each of the activities) from each student while in Belize if conditions are permissible for the activity. Payment: required by 19 march 2026 ; payment can be made electronically through shop.uwaterloo.ca under Field Trips & Course Fees. **Students are strongly encouraged to purchase the most comprehensive available travel interruption and travel medical insurance to avoid potential charges if sickness were to occur in a foreign country.
Prerequisites:	Completion of second year biology program and a credit in an introductory course in ecology. NOTE: You must be physically fit- the days are long (late evenings and early mornings) and the activities are strenuous (including significant hills) in hot and humid conditions. Students must be prepared, willing and capable of participating in outdoor physical activities including ocean snorkelling and hiking in rainforest and mountains. Adaptability and resilience are a must.
Enrolment*:	15 (4 reserved for University of Waterloo students); minimum 12
Course Description (brief):	An introduction to neotropical ecology in Belize. The main purpose is to provide an opportunity for students to gain familiarity with major neotropical terrestrial and marine ecosystems, evaluate conservation efforts to preserve habitats and biodiversity, and learn field ecology techniques. Upon arriving in Belize, we transfer to the Toucan Ridge Ecology & Education Society (TREES) where we will learn techniques in bird-banding, insect collecting, and mist-netting, and explore the jungle trails. We will also: (1) visit Cockscomb Jaguar Preserve for 1-night where we will learn about the history, mission and biodiversity of the reserve through a guided day- and night- jungle hike and, water levels permitting, a river tubing; (2) visit a marine station on a caye where we will snorkel on barrier and patch reefs; (3) explore the impacts of ecotourism and learn about the cultural history of the region at Lamanai Archaeological Reserve; and (4) see and learn about much of the wildlife of the region at the Belize Zoo. Travel will be by minibus with accommodation in well-run (though basic) field stations. Throughout the course we will be accompanied by local guides. At T.R.E.E.S. students will conduct mini-research projects on terrestrial ecology and biota for which they will prepare a written report and deliver an oral presentation. The itinerary details above are approximate and subject to change **NOTES: (1) Air travel is the responsibility of each student. Students are <u>required</u> to be at the Philip Goldson International Airport in Belize City on 7 May 2025 to meet the instructor for the start of the course – arrival time requirements will be communicated to registered students so please do not book flights until you have heard from the instructor. Course fee includes all program transportation costs from the airport on the 7 th May until the return to the airport on 19 th May. (2) Students are strongly encouraged to purchase the most comprehensive available travel interruption and travel medical insurance to avoid potential charges if sickness were to occur in a foreign country.
Evaluation:	Tentative evaluation plan: Pre-departure assignment & presentation (20%), Natural History Journal (25%), Group research project & presentation (25%), Essay on neotropical ecology (due 20 June 2025; 20%), Participation (10%). Reports need to be prepared wholly by yourself: AI or other tools are not permitted.

An Average Day – What to Expect

(a) Daily timeline	<p>Daily schedules will fluctuate, and students must be flexible in their daily routines. All activities occur regardless of weather, and students should be prepared for rain and some cooler early morning or late evening temperatures. Early morning (5 am) activities may occur on several days - there is a possibility of a very early morning snorkelling opportunity. Generally breakfast is between 7-8am. Activities or fieldwork typically follows until lunch (typically ~12 pm), and often continues after lunch. Late afternoon activities may be scheduled. Dinner times fluctuate between ~5:30-6:30pm). Activities, work on field books, or work on projects may continue into the evening. Particularly when designing group projects, it can be a late night and students may become frustrated as they tire. Near the end of the trip, student groups will present their projects orally. Instructors are on hand to assist, but students are responsible for their projects. All activities are considered compulsory, unless arrangements have been made with instructors. Throughout the course, two instructors (1 female and 1 male) accompany the students.</p>
(b) Work habitat & Physical exertion	<p>Conditions will be rustic in the field station, but otherwise comfortable. Expect to encounter hot/humid temperatures. WiFi availability may fluctuate. At our main station, WiFi bandwidth is limited and students should consider it for essential services and contact with home using voice, primarily. Video/Skype/FaceTime or similar might not be permitted.</p> <p>Strenuous physical activity can be expected most days, including snorkelling and hiking on steep hills in hot and humid conditions. Students should have water containers to remain hydrated, and dress appropriately (i.e., light daypack, rain jacket, water bottle, etc.). Hikes are often at steep inclines or at high elevation, with water breaks. Insects are common and students will encounter them. Sunscreen is required. In-water activities are guided and students must be diligent to listen to instructions and follow them, as conditions will vary depending on such things as weather and animals present in the area.</p>
(c) Common activities	<p>Expect to walk/hike at different times of day, light and dark conditions, at various inclines, in fluctuating temperatures, and on paved and unpaved trails/footpaths. Good hiking shoes are strongly recommended. Students will encounter mud, tripping hazards, etc.</p> <p>We will be visiting an island, which will require open-ocean travel by boat, and we may travel on a river by boat. Students may wish to have sea sickness medication. Snorkelling occurs in the ocean – life preservers available. Lycra skinsuits may be desired to avoid sun and small stinging animals, but is not required.</p> <p>Travel between destinations will require hours-long drives via bus, with occasional bio-breaks. Often, local stores may be available to purchase personal snacks as required.</p>

(d) Weather, dehydration, & biting insects	<p>Expect warm/hot/humid/rainy conditions. Intense sun at times. Sunscreen and regular drinks of water recommended. Monitor international weather reports for average temperatures.</p> <p>As we are in the neotropics, insects, spiders, scorpions or other invertebrates, birds, bats, snakes, etc. may be encountered from time to time. At times when insects (mosquitos, etc.) are particularly bad, thin clothing that covers arms and legs (i.e. light pants and shirts) may be advisable. Bug repellent with DEET is highly recommended. Local guides are well versed in local fauna and capable of insuring our safety during our stay.</p>
(e) Toxic/poisonous, wildlife/ plants	<p>Along with the usual mosquitos, "no-see-ums" and ticks, Belize is host to a wide range of animals that require your attention and respect. Both on land and in the sea, care must be taken to be alert, listen to the instructions of the guides and instructors, and travel only where instructed. Staying on marked trails is a requirement to avoid potentially dangerous encounters. In the sea, fire coral is a nuisance but easily avoided, while Scorpionfish, Stonefish and Portuguese man-of-war also require diligence. A more complete list is available at: http://www.guidetobelize.info/en_dangerous.html</p>
(f) Sleeping, washroom & laundry facilities	<p>Accommodations are rustic lodgings and hotels, where students can expect to share a room (2-4 per room) of the same gender. Bathrooms may be communal. Showers will have warm-hot water, but supply may be limited, and short showers may be necessary. In more rustic settings, mosquito nets may be necessary. At times, insects may enter the room. Linens/sheets are provided at accommodations and cleaned regularly.</p>
(g) Meal plans & food allergies	<p>Meals are typical of local cuisine, although instructors and providers will work to accommodate food allergies or preferences. Water will at times need to be purchased locally. Instructors/guides will be always ready to answer student concerns over meals/water.</p>
(h) Non-academic responsibilities	<p>Food is provided, but clearing of tables may be required at some destinations. Students are expected to keep their living spaces tidy. Travel between destinations may require bags of communal gear to be packed for travel.</p>
(i) Degree of isolation	<p>T.R.E.E.S., Cockscomb Jaguar Preserve, Lamanai Archaeological Reserve and the marine stations are regularly attended by staff and researchers. T.R.E.E.S. is not far off of the main highway, but is located in the jungle. Lamanai is well travelled by tourists. Electricity is mostly available. Internet/WiFi is typical of Central America, and not regularly available in some places. Low bandwidth caps at T.R.E.E.S. and our stay at the marine station will likely result in poor internet/cellular service during these times.</p> <p>Students making use of software (e.g., Office 360), where an internet connection is always required, may choose to download offline office software to continue group work while away from internet access.</p>
(j) Alcohol & drugs	<p>Students are expected to follow all local drug and alcohol laws and remain responsible throughout the duration of the trip.</p>

(k) Vaccinations/ Insurances	The Government of Canada travel advice for Belize should be consulted and is available at: https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/belize Travel Medical Insurance is strongly encouraged.
(l) Social Situations	Students will routinely share a room with other students of the same gender. Students will work in groups throughout the duration of the course.
(m) Final comments	Despite the advisories above, this course offers the opportunity to explore the neotropical ecology of one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. Seeing the flora and fauna of the neotropics in their natural setting has been a transformative experience for past students.