



**ECOSYSTEMS AND CONSERVATION:  
THE NEW ZEALAND PROJECT**

**October 21 – December 4, 2017**

**Meeting Place: Auckland, New Zealand  
15 quarter credits/10 semester credits**

**FULL PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Thank you for your interest in our New Zealand Project. Our course will take place on the North and South islands of New Zealand, an isolated island nation almost 1,000 miles east of Australia across the Tasman Sea. Because of their isolation in the South Pacific, these islands support an incredible array of unique flora and fauna. More than 80% of New Zealand's 2,500 native plants species and 70% of its 250 breeding birds are found nowhere else on Earth. In addition to its fascinating biodiversity, New Zealand is home to breathtaking landscapes sculpted throughout millennia by volcanoes and glaciers. Our field studies will take us to remarkable alpine fields, magnificent rainforests, and remote shorelines. Throughout the program we will investigate important ecological concepts and current environmental concerns, such as island biogeography, endemism, evolution, invasive species, eradication and wildlife reintroduction. We will also examine firsthand how New Zealand is addressing these environmental challenges by working with governmental and non-governmental organizations on a number of conservation projects. So come join us this fall in our exploration of one of the most awe-inspiring places on Earth, New Zealand.

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**I. Background Information**

New Zealand provides an excellent setting for interdisciplinary field studies. The island's unique geologic and tectonic history provide a window into a world in which the Age of Mammals never happened: birds and invertebrates fill their niches, and plants have evolved in the absence of mammalian herbivores. Sub-tropical rainforests give way to majestic alp-like peaks, steaming volcanoes, and miles of wild coastal beaches. The New Zealanders themselves are as diverse as their landscapes; with a rare mix of English, Scottish and Polynesian backgrounds, they have developed their own dynamic relationship with the isles and the natural resources they contain.

This is an exciting time to study conservation in New Zealand, as the country is on the brink of social, political, and environmental change. Much like people elsewhere in the world, New Zealanders are coming to recognize the fragility of their environment. An island nation carries with it particular obstacles and advantages to conservation efforts, and the magnitude of both its peril and recovery is greater than its continental counterparts. Our students will gain hands-on experience as we study invasive species, indigenous wildlife, and help restore ecosystems alongside governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Our program objectives include providing team members with a firsthand introduction to the culture and natural history of New Zealand, conducting on-site examinations of current environmental issues such as invasive species and wildlife reintroduction, and gaining hands-on experience implementing conservation management and ecosystem restoration.

## II. Project Goals and Activities

Our New Zealand project will examine island ecology through firsthand investigations of the region's flora, fauna and geography. As a team we will participate in important conservation and restoration projects, investigate current environmental concerns, and talk with local conservation organizations on issues concerning animal reintroduction and invasive species management. Cultural and natural history field studies are an integral part of each program phase. **All field methods and data gathering techniques will be taught in New Zealand. No prior research experience is required.**

### Ecosystems, Flora and Fauna

Through hiking, backpacking and canoeing field studies we will explore a variety of ecosystems in both the North and South Islands. Here we will develop plant and animal identification skills as well as gain experience conducting scientific observations and recording a field journal.

### Island Ecology

Throughout our exploration across New Zealand, we will examine general concepts of island ecology, such as island biogeography, endemism, insular evolution, gigantism, dwarfism, and niche shifts. We will read seminal scientific articles on these topics and explore how these concepts pertain to New Zealand through discussion, guest lectures and our personal field study experience.

### Exotic Species Management

Throughout the course we will examine how and why exotic and introduced species have had such an impact on New Zealand's ecology. We will review the history of introductions and the resulting ecological damage wrought by the many species of plants and animals accidentally and intentionally brought to these remote islands. We will gain hands-on field experience through projects devoted to dealing with the problems of exotics and the conservation of the native flora and fauna.

### Habitat Restoration and Conservation Studies

Our island field studies will take us to key wildland habitats supporting the nation's unique wildlife populations. In these settings, the team will investigate the threats and impacts on these populations as well as management policies for endangered species. We will learn about varying wildlife research techniques. We will also examine the rich evolutionary history leading to New Zealand's present day flora and fauna. These explorations will take us from sub-tropical rainforest and coasts to high alpine ecosystems.

## The New Zealand People

Together we will explore New Zealand's rich human history, from first human settlement, the dramatic changes wrought by both Polynesian and European pioneers, and the effects of this rich human heritage on the status of natural resource management today. Through team interactions with different New Zealand cultural groups we will discover diverse perspectives on the role of scientific research, private conservation organizations, land ownership, and governmental politics in natural resource management.

### **III. Academic Credit**

Students will receive 15 quarter credits/10 semester credits from Western Washington University. Our staff will be happy to explain the program in further detail to the applicant's advisor, if necessary. This field studies program gives credit in three courses:

ESCI 497T, Environmental Wildlands Studies (5 quarter credits/3.35 semester credits)

ESCI 497U, Environmental Field Survey (5 quarter credits/3.35 semester credits)

ESCI 497V, Wildlands Environment and Culture (5 quarter credits/3.35 semester credits)

Students will be evaluated on the basis of: 1) active participation in all scheduled class and field activities; 2) examinations; 3) extent and quality of field journals, scientific observations, and species identification; 4) taxonomic flora and fauna presentations; 5) proficiency and participation in group discussions; and 6) paper and presentation concerning environmental and cultural issues of New Zealand.

Team members are expected to conduct themselves in a mature and responsible manner. Wildlands Studies reserves the right to require any student to withdraw from the program if their conduct is detrimental to or incompatible with the interests, safety, or welfare of any course participants. We ask all students to read the Student Program Manual before joining the project on-site.

### **IV. Team Logistics**

Participants will fly into Auckland, New Zealand, and depart from Queenstown, New Zealand. Participants can decide whether to fly home on the scheduled date or remain in New Zealand to travel on your own. We will be in New Zealand in our autumn (New Zealand's spring) and weather can be unpredictable. We could easily encounter winter-like conditions as we hike in the Southern Alps, as well as many warm, sunny days on the North Island. We must be prepared for almost any type of condition, especially as wilderness travelers. In addition, New Zealand wilderness has an infamous reputation for its "sand flies" (biting black flies).

All reasonable efforts will be made to follow the activities outlined above. However, please understand that on our New Zealand program, travel arrangements can remain tentative until the traveling actually takes place. Weather conditions, road closures, volcanic activity, as well as bureaucratic considerations may affect our plans. Wildlands Studies has put together an innovative, unique program in New Zealand, and team members need to be flexible, patient, and prepared to adapt to unexpected situations. Being flexible also allows us to take advantage of unique opportunities that inadvertently arise during our journeys, often producing some of the program's most memorable moments. Participants are required to bring their own camping and backpacking equipment (tent, sleeping bag, backpack, water filter, etc.).

### **V. Accommodations**

Primarily camping and, backpacking, with occasional youth hostels or rural lodges. Most of our nights will be spent in our tents or in primitive huts situated in the high mountains, dense temperate forests, or coastal beaches.

## **VI. Official Documents/Visa**

You will need a current passport that does not expire until six months after the end of the program. U.S. citizens who wish to visit New Zealand for a period not exceeding 90 days do not require visas, providing they hold tickets for the journey out of New Zealand (either open or confirmed). U.S. citizens who wish to go to New Zealand for periods exceeding 90 days must obtain New Zealand visas. New Zealand visa applications take 2-3 months to process, so plan ahead. If you are not a U.S. citizen, check with your consular office for visa information.

## **VII. Language**

This program is taught in English.

## **VIII. Pre-Program Mailings**

Detailed information regarding travel/flight and visa information, equipment/gear requirements, food costs, meeting plans, group expenses payment, medical and vaccination recommendations, and academic preparations will be sent to all team members in a logistics letter emailed about 8-10 weeks before the project initiates.

## **IX. Project Leader**

ADAM DILLON: M.S in Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation, Virginia Tech, 2005; Ph.D. Candidate in Ecology, Colorado State University. Adam is a wildlife ecologist and conservation scientist whose research interests lie in carnivore conservation, island ecology, population dynamics, and invasive species. His Master's research focused on the population trends and density of ocelots in the rainforests of Belize, and his Ph.D. research focuses on the population ecology of Island foxes and Island spotted skunks on the California Channel Islands. Adam has been teaching for Wildlands Studies since 2003 and has taught in Belize, New Zealand, the Pacific Northwest, and on Santa Cruz Island. He currently leads our New Zealand and California Channel Islands Projects.

## **X. Project Costs**

Program Fee:	\$4150 plus \$150 Application Fee. Program fee due August 1, 2017. Enrollment on a space-available basis after the fee due date until the program is full.
Estimated In-country Expenses:	\$2750 per person This covers land/sea transportation and fuel in New Zealand, lodging, field activities/permits, group supplies, readings.
Food:	\$1000
Estimated Airfare:	\$1800
Personal Spending Money:	\$500 (this varies according to taste - but don't be caught short)

Students should inquire at the financial aid office of their home campus regarding the use of their loans or grants for this program. Wildlands Studies is not responsible for non-refundable airline or other tickets or payments or any similar penalties that may be incurred as a result of any course cancellation or changes.

## **XI. Contact Information**

Email: [wildlands@wildlandsstudies.com](mailto:wildlands@wildlandsstudies.com)

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