

# Primate Behavioural Ecology and Conservation La Suerte Biological Research Station Summer 2008

## Instructors

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## Introduction

Welcome to La Suerte! This course will combine a series of lectures and discussions on primate behaviour and ecology, with actual hands-on field experience in a tropical rainforest environment. Because this is an intensive course lasting just over three weeks, be prepared to immerse yourself completely into the study of primate behaviour, ecology and conservation. For the first few days, you will receive lectures on basic primatology. The next days will feature a methods course in the morning, and another primatology course in the evening, with practice of methods in the mid-day. This is designed to give you optimal use of the forest and its resources, and to prepare you for intensive data collection towards the end of the course. Naturally, there will be some time for breaks, and these will be incorporated into the programme based on the needs of the current cohort of students. The last week of the course will be spent undertaking intensive data collection under the guidance of the lecturer and the teaching assistant(s). Each day we will meet before the evening meal to discuss the day's experience and share any tips for good data collection, as well as ways to overcome difficulties in the field.

Throughout this course, the importance of the study of primates for the following themes will be emphasised:

- to recognise the role of primates within the ecosystem
- to emphasise the conservation status of primates, and their potential importance as flagship or keystone species in the preservation of human impacted environments to understand human behaviour
- to understand how primate form and anatomy relate to their environments, as well as an understanding of the evolutionary processes that shaped primate adaptations
- to interpret the behaviour of extinct primates, and the adaptations of extant primates in similar environments

## Assessment/ Grading

Your final mark will be based on the following:

- one exam– 20%
- maintenance of a field diary that will be checked by course staff regularly – 20%
- a written report of your project (100 points) – 50%
- an oral presentation of the project (25 points) – 10%
- co-operation, participation and ability to work with others will not be marked but may influence your overall result

Coursework marking can be moderated to accommodate the marking system of your native country.

## Assignment Descriptions

- *Exam*  
The exam will last two hours and will be a combination of essay questions and short answers.
- *Field diary*  
Your field diary will contain notes from each day. Early on in the course, this will include details of your tasks. It will also contain your data sheets, as well as an evening write up of your experience each day. Data should also be tallied as you go along, as you will be expected to complete your report *in the field*. One of the staff members will check your progress every few days, and mark your work on a graded ordinal scale.
- *Oral presentation*  
You are required to give a ten minute presentation of the results of your final project, with five minutes for question and answer. Your mark will not only be based on clarity of your presentation, but also on your participation in asking thoughtful questions to other students. All students will be expected to ask at least three questions. PowerPoint presentations are not necessary, but you are welcome to create props or handouts for your talk.
- *Final Report*  
A ten page hand-written report (in approximately 12-14 point legible handwriting), including tables and figures, must be submitted before you leave the field site. This may be a challenge to those of you used to typing your reports, but it is a very good experience to coherently present your ideas. An outline/ essay plan may greatly facilitate you in this process, and staff members can review these a few days before the final report is due.

## Required Textbooks

The following books are essential for supplementary understanding of primate behaviour and ecology. They should be accessible through your university bookshop, and also on amazon.com or amazon.co.uk. We will use some of the exercises in the Patterson book.

Strier, Karen B., *Primate Behavioral Ecology*, Allyn and Bacon Publishing, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 2006 (ISBN 978-0205444328; 0205444326)

Patterson, J.D., *Primate Behavior*, Second Edition, 2001 (ISBN 1-57766-165-6)

## Tentative Syllabus

Attendance is mandatory at all lectures.

- Day 1      **Lecture:** Orientation regarding safety, procedures and behaviour at La Suerte, course goals, and course requirements  
**Method:** orientation to the trail system  
**Introductory talks:** by students, TA and lecturer
- Day 2      **Lecture:** What is a primate? Why make primates the focus of a course in field ecology? Case study of the La Suerte Primates  
**Method:** Equipment used for the study of primate behaviour  
**Task:** compass and binocular use in the forest; use of safety devices
- Day 3      **Lecture:** Primate social organisation – why do primates live in groups?  
**Method:** What is an ethogram?  
**Task:** observe an animal species of your choice; construct an ethogram
- Day 4      **Lecture:** Primate locomotion and the study of positional behaviour  
**Method:** Conducting behavioural observations  
**Task:** Trial of behavioural sampling methods in the field  
**Evening Task:** group discussion of project titles and preparation of data sheets for data collection
- Day 5      **Lecture:** Non-human primate diet and primate community ecology  
**Method:** sampling primate diet; botanical sampling  
**Task:** phenological monitoring; vegetation sampling/ pilot project
- Day 6      **Lecture:** The natural history of the mammals and birds of Costa Rica  
**Method:** censusing primate and mammal populations  
**Task:** census walk and survey of the mammals of La Suerte/ pilot project
- Day 7      **Lecture:** The study of nocturnal primates; case studies of night monkeys and importance of the La Suerte nocturnal mammal community for understanding primate evolution and ecology  
**Method:** determining primate travel patterns and studying animals at night  
**Task:** pilot project
- Day 8      **Task:** prepare for exam! Continue project
- Day 9      Exam (late afternoon); studies can continue during the day
- Day 10-12      Data collection for project
- Day 13      Two day break to a site in Costa Rica
- Day 15-19      Intensive data collection for final project
- Day 19      Work with faculty and cooperate with students to write up final project
- Day 20      Oral presentation of the field project
- Day 21      Wrap up and hand in final project

Remember that staff are available to help you in your projects, and we will circulate through the field site during your data collection days. We will also make times in the evenings to have group discussions. Remember that your questions will likely be shared by others in the group so please take advantage of these discussions. Remember also that we all need some time off, so restrict detailed questions to the designated times.