This field course entails a substantial amount of walking on sometimes rough trails over uneven terrain. Participants must be capable of moderate but prolonged physical exertion and tolerant of a lack of comfort facilities during field trips lasting several hours.

Schedule:

To be arranged.

Field trip equipment/supplies:

Small notebook; pencil/pen; binoculars (essential); food (lunch, snacks); water; insect repellent (optional); camera (optional). Field trips will proceed regardless of weather, so please be prepared with appropriate clothing (assume it will be colder/wetter than you think it will be) and footwear for wet/muddy conditions.

Texts:


Readings:

Page numbers in Hammerson (2004): 9-10 (climate); 82-85 (vernal pools); 102-104 (color change and leaf fall); 106-110 (acorn ecology); 178-180 (autumn wildflowers); 222-225 (autumn insect chorus); 227-228 (ambush bugs); 253-256 (life of the monarch); 267-271 (galls and gall makers); 364-367 (fruits and fruit-eating birds); 370-371 (autumn migration of birds); 421-429 (naturalist's calendar for autumn).

Additionally, please read appropriate sections of the texts that directly pertain to habitats and organisms observed during our field trips (use book index to locate this material).

Course assignments:

1. **Field trip reports** for class field trips (2/3 of final grade). Reports are due two weeks after the field trip. Please submit your reports as email attachments (as Word files, i.e., report.doc, or in PDF format). Please carefully read the guidelines for information on required content and organization.

2. **Written summary and brief online presentation of individual field project** (1/3 of grade). Project must be pre-approved by the instructor; please contact the instructor by email for feedback on your potential project ideas. Written summary is due November 30. Online presentations to be arranged. Select a habitat that is convenient for you to visit on a weekly basis. Using written descriptions (and data as appropriate), plus photographs or drawings, document the changes that occur in this area during the fall semester (begin by mid-September and continue into early or mid-November if possible and appropriate). You may focus on one or a few species or on a few specific features that you will watch closely over time (choose things that are likely to change), or you may choose a broader approach that encompasses all the changes you observe in your study area. Examples of suitable projects include: singing behavior of snowy tree crickets in relation to temperature and time of day; pattern of color change and leaf fall in two tree species; timing of flowering and seed ejection in witch-hazel; insect and spider activity on goldenrods or other autumn wildflowers; changes in a vernal pool basin in autumn; changing bird populations in a marsh, shore, or backyard. Don’t be limited by these examples; feel free to suggest other ideas for approval by the instructor.
Evaluation and Grading Procedures:

Grading is subjective, based on the instructor’s evaluation of the substance, organization, and written quality of the student’s work. All work will be returned with a grade (A, B+, etc.) and specific suggestions for improvement. Evaluation of the individual research project will also be based on the effectiveness of the online presentation. Additionally, students must participate in and complete all online components of this course.

Moodle website:

It is your responsibility to check the course Moodle website prior to and after each class. This is where you will find important announcements, follow-up information, maps of field trip sites, and details about upcoming field trips.

FIELD TRIP REPORT GUIDELINES

I suggest that you record in a small notebook as many observations as possible while you are in the field; strive to be neat, complete (biologically relevant details are important), and organized. At the conclusion of the field trip use these notes (and other mental impressions gained during the trip) to write a final permanent record of your field observations. Memory is often imperfect; it is best if you put together at least a quick rough draft of your report immediately after the field trip.

Please structure your notes according to the following sequence. Do not use a simple chronological format (“first we saw this, then we walked around the bend and saw that”). Prepare a separate account for each site visited.

1. Your name
2. Site name (e.g., Higganum Creek, Town of Haddam, Connecticut)
3. Date and hours at the site (e.g., 11 October 2015, 0900-1630 EDT)
4. Brief but precise description of habitat (topography, elevation, vegetation, soil conditions, water, etc., as appropriate).
5. List of plant species discussed by instructor. Indicate abundance, flowering, presence of fruits or nuts, leaf color, leaf fall, animal associates, etc., as appropriate.
6. List of animal species discussed by instructor (including those detected indirectly through tracks or other evidence, including galls) and approximate numbers of each species. Notes on behavior, microhabitat, ecology, etc., should be entered after the name of the species.

The lists of plant and animal species and your written notes based on your observations of these are the most important parts of the report. Lists should be organized according to major taxonomic groups (i.e., don't mix mammals with insects). You may organize the species lists by habitat if we visit distinctly different habitats, but this is not necessary if habitats are indicated in the notes for each species.

Your notes should be primarily or exclusively an account of your own field observations. However, you may include information obtained from the instructor or from other sources as long as you state the source of that information. Be sure to describe clearly what you actually observed rather than make generalized statements. For example, record that three spotted turtles basked on a single small log at the edge of a pond rather than simply generalizing that spotted turtles bask on logs. Be sure to describe any particular behaviors you observed rather than simply your interpretation of them. For example, record that a spotted turtle plunged into the water when you approached on foot to within 50 feet rather than that spotted turtles seem to be wary. In the field the instructor may attempt to explain what we see or put it in the broader life history context, but your notes should focus on precise and accurate description of what we actually observed.