



Biology 362: Ecology and Natural History of Costa Rica

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About the Class

Bio-362 is an ecology and field biology-based course. There are no pre-requisites, so it is possible for a student of any major to enroll. Before traveling to Costa Rica, students spend two months learning about the unique features of the tropical climate of Costa Rica, the main characteristics of tropical rain forests, indicator organisms found in the communities we will visit, adaptations of organisms and their relation to the environment, and important problems that accompany the economic development of the tropics. Students also take several pre-trip species quizzes to learn some of the common organisms found in Costa Rica. In early March, students left the United States to spend ten days in three different forests of Costa Rica: tropical wet forest, tropical dry forest, and cloud forest. Throughout the trip, students are required to keep a daily field journal, detailing the flora, fauna, and biological relationships they observe. Eight students went to Costa Rica in the spring of 2009: Heidi Bartlett, Alisha Clubb, Aarin Fellows, Jordan Hinrichs, Kyle Kapels, Ashton Mueller, James Refenes, and Brenda Schmidt.

Trip Highlights



One of the more rigorous activities of the trip included hiking around Mt. Arenal, the most active volcano in Costa Rica. It was presumed to be extinct until it erupted in 1968 after 400 years of dormancy.



(Above) The first day in Costa Rica began with a visit to INBioparque, a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization dedicated to studying and conserving biodiversity in Costa Rica. (Above left) Meals always included rice and beans, which were typically flavored with Lizano Salsa. Chocolate cheese was an interesting discovery in Monteverde (bottom left).

La Selva

La Selva Biological Station comprises 1,600 hectares (3,900 acres) of tropical wet forests and disturbed lands. In 1968, it was purchased by the Organization for Tropical Studies and became a private biological reserve and station. Over time, it has become a world-renowned site for research on tropical rain forest. While at La Selva, students enjoyed extreme amounts of rainfall and an abundance of wildlife that was active both day and night.



La Selva Biological Station contained an amazing variety of flora, with (left) hummingbird-shaped orchids like *Gongora leucodilia* to immense, liana-covered trees.



(Above) One of the most exciting sightings at La Selva included the discovery of a red-eyed leaf frog on the first night's hike. Their striking coloring makes them a must-see while traveling in Costa Rica!



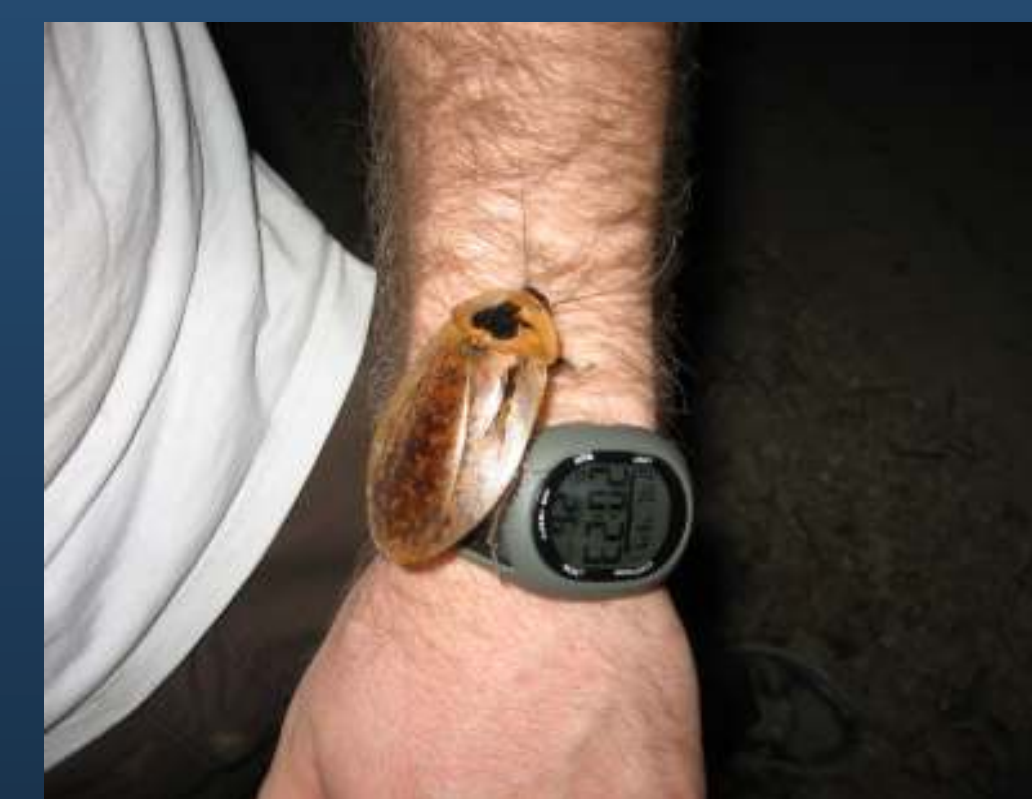
(Left) A cat-eyed snake was one of the few snakes seen at La Selva. (Above) A two-toed sloth is seen on one of its rare visits to the forest floor.

Palo Verde

The biological station at Palo Verde is located in the Guanacaste Province in northwestern Costa Rica, consisting of 19,000 hectares of seasonal dry forest, limestone outcrops, and wetland vegetation. The marshlands are extremely important feeding grounds for resident and migratory water birds, as well as mammals such as peccaries, jaguarundis, coatis, and monkeys.



A pre-sunrise hike revealed a beautiful view of the marsh and surrounding mountains.



Arthropods abounded in the dry forest of Palo Verde. Giant cockroaches (above) venomous scorpions (right), tail-less whip scorpions (below) were commonly encountered when hiking in the vicinity of the research station.



Watering holes also supported vast amounts of wildlife, such as an immense marine toad (above).

Monteverde

The final days in Costa Rica were spent at Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. After its establishment in 1975 by members of the Quaker community, the preserve has grown to reach 10,500 hectares. Canopy walkways abound, allowing visitors coveted views of the uppermost layers of the cloud forest.



(Above) One of the many canopy walks at Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. (Bottom left) Yellow-throated Euphonias slept peacefully in a tree outside our bungalows at the University of Georgia-Costa Rica. (Bottom right) A view of UGA-Costa Rica from one of the surrounding trails.



(Left) American crocodiles bask in the sun at Rio Tarcones. Along that same river, our study tour group took a Jungle Crocodile Safari where we had wonderful views of Costa Rican birds and different types of mangrove forests (bottom right).

