

Biology 14 - Course Syllabus

California Plants and Animals

[The syllabus contains all pertinent information about the class. It is written to make your life easier and to give you an idea about the format of the course. Keep it accessible in your binder and refer to it if you have questions about the class. Make sure to **read it** before the next class.]

Peter Svensson

Office Hours: Tue and Thu between 215-345pm in room SM55 I.

Messages: The best way to contact me is via e-mail. My voice mail is (408) 741-2558. I have a mailbox in the main science/math division office in case you need to drop something off.

E-mail: Peter_Svensson@westvalley.edu

Web Sites: <http://instruct.westvalley.edu/svensson> [follow the link to Biology 14 (California P&A)].

The Class: The class takes place on Mondays 2:05-4:10pm **and** on Wednesdays between 2:05-5:15pm in SM56 or in the field. The class meets in SM56.

Biology 14 is three unit GE course acceptable for credit at the California State University

California Plants and Animals: The course will focus on the natural history of California with an emphasis on local plants and animals (especially the Bay Area with its local plant and animal communities). Over the course of the semester you will study the ecology and natural history of different communities and habitats which exist in California. The most common inhabitants of these communities will be introduced to you with the help of lectures, labs, films and field trips. At the end of the course you should be able to recognize these communities, and be somewhat familiar with the life histories of these organisms. A major theme of the course is to understand the complexity and fragility of these communities. Important environmental aspects will also be introduced. The rich biodiversity of California is under great stress due to development and an increasing population. Natural history is an exciting discipline and it is my hope that you will have a lot of fun as you learn a fair amount of the life forms that have been around you throughout your whole life.



Required Materials:

Texts:

- Schoenherr: "*A Natural History of California*" (1992), University of California Press. A major resource as well as your core text in the class. Dry but very informative (a keeper)..
- Barbour et al: "*California's Changing Landscapes*" (1993), California Native Plant Society. Great descriptions and overviews of the plant communities in California.

Field Guides:

- Alden: "*National Audubon Society Field Guide to California*" (1998), Knopf.
- Watts: "*Pacific Coast Treefinder*" as well as "*Redwood Region Flower Finder*"
- Russo: Pacific Coast Mammals

Misc.:

- A notebook [preferably somewhat sturdy that you can bring with you in the field]
- Scantrons (4) – Form # 882-ES [they have 50 questions on each side].
- Pencils (#2), pens, erasers, a ruler, and a binder.

Recommended (but not required) Materials:

- Lyons: "*Plants of the Coast Redwood Region*", (1988), Looking Press. A wonderful book with great pictures of many of the plants you will see locally! Highly Recommended!
- Storrer: "*Sierra Nevada Natural History*" (2004). University of California Press..

M 2:05-4:10; W 2:05-5:15pm in SM56

- Bakker: "*An Island Called California: An Ecological Introduction to its Natural Communities*" (1984), UC Press. A somewhat more poetic and factual survey of the biodiversity of California.
- Sibley: "The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America" (2003), Knopf.
- Rosso/Ulhausen: "*Pacific Intertidal Life*". A treasure with lots of information about the invertebrates that live in the intertidal zone. One cannot beat the price (\$3.50).
- The University of California Press has a series of books focusing on the natural history of California. Check them out at the local library or buy them to enhance your studies this semester. www.ucpress.edu/books/CNHG.ser.html
 - Stienstra: "*California Wildlife*" (2000), Avalon Travel Publishing.
 - "*A Natural History of the Monterey Bay*" (1999), Monterey Bay Aquarium.
 - Binoculars: These will be useful on our fieldtrips (especially for birds) as well as animal studies overall. There is really no need to go and buy a pair (unless you really want to). Ask your friends and family and I am sure that binoculars will materialize. Make sure that they are in some kind of waterproof container.
 - Rain Gear: It is likely to rain on at least one of our field trips, and I guarantee that a rain poncho will come in handy. A pair of good boots and/or old sneakers may come in handy (mud mud mud).
 - A Map of California: a topographic map would be the best, but a regular road map would be handy as well.
 - Internet Access and e-mail: Most of you have access at home nowadays, but the Library and the Technology Center at West Valley provide such services (see below). The access will be quite useful as you research your presentations and projects throughout the semester.
 - Field Guides: Any field guide will come in handy. Alden's book is a gold mine of information but you will quickly realize that it barely touches on all the species that actually live in the state of California. Peterson's, as well as Audobon's Field guides, are quite useful, and are commonly found on bookshelves among family and friends. I do not expect you to buy these, but they come highly recommended. If there is a special group of animals or plants that you would like to focus on during the semester, then I would like you to come and talk to me. E.g., Borror's Book on Insects in the Peterson's Field Guide series is an outstanding introduction to insects (both visually and factually).
 - I do recommend a binder for your notes, as well as color pencils.



The World Wide Web: You can access my instructional web pages at <http://instruct.westvalley.edu/svensson>

Follow the link to Biology 14 (California P&A). These pages are updated continuously throughout the semester (i.e., it is a work in progress). These pages will contain information about the class, assignments, links to resources and other pertinent material.

Computers: This class takes advantage of the outstanding resources provided by the internet. You will access resources on the web. You can access campus computers in the library or in our technology center. A low fee of about \$5/semester gives you access to all the resources at our technology center (computers, printers, scanners etc). Make sure to bring your student ID card as you sign up in the center. It is highly recommended that you take advantage of these resources to help you succeed at WVC.

Angel & Computers: Please get familiar with the Angel interface at http://www.westvalley.edu/dl/angel_login.html and login at

<http://wvmccd.angellearning.com/>

In my own experience I prefer the Firefox browser is fast and powerful (and free).

<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/personal.html>

M 2:05-4:10; W 2:05-5:15pm in SM56

West Valley College recommends the use of the Firefox as well as the Internet Explorer browsers. I will communicate with you via Angel throughout the semester. You have an individual mailbox within the Angel system. I will also send you copies of these e-mails to the e-mail you have registered with the college. Make sure it is current. Be aware of that AOL accounts have issues with e-mails received from West Valley College. I would recommend that you use a different mail account (e.g. gmail) in case you use aol.

The Class Room: Please follow these rules to enrich your lecture experience:

- Be an **active participant** in the class. Natural history will come to you much more easily if you prepare for class.
- **Arrive and leave on time.** It is disruptive for all the students in the class to have other students arriving late or leaving early.
- **Our lecture halls are cell phone free environments. Turn off the ringers on cell phones. Do not** take or make calls in lecture nor lab (**and definitely not on the field trips**).
- **Do not talk in class** unless you are participating in an instructor initiated discussion or are asking direct questions about the material.

The Lectures: The lecture introduces and covers an array of topics related to the natural history of California. Take good lecture notes and read the accompanying chapters from the assigned reading to master this aspect of the course. It is important that you are an active note taker. The process of note taking keeps you alert and focused on the main components of the lecture. A student that just sits back and "enjoys"/ "absorbs" the lecture is likely to not remember much of the material when the exam is coming up a few weeks later. Even if you do not study your notes at a later date the activity of taking them helps you to learn the material. Personally I find notes to be a useful tool to actively learn material as I am making them and an excellent review in preparation for the exams.

The Labs: On some of the class days focused on organisms (Wednesdays) the class will start with a lecture followed by a lab. In the lab we will participate in activities that will enhance your understanding of California communities and the organisms that live within them. Some of these labs will be in the form of field trips or outdoor activities (see below).

Field Trips: There will be several field trips throughout the semester (see schedule). Information and maps related to these trips will be distributed well in advance of the scheduled date. The field trips begin and end at the field trip site. You are responsible for your own transportation to the site. Carpooling is highly recommended. Most of these field trips are very local (i.e., the transportation time is negligible [10-15mins] and will take place on Wednesday afternoons. One or two of the field trips require longer transport [30-60mins] (see schedule). It is highly recommended that you are an active participant in all the field trips (i.e. a listener, observer, note taker). The specimens you observe in the field will be a visual component on your exams.

Presentations: Towards the end of the semester you and a partner will be required to make a presentation on some aspect of the rich biodiversity found in California (more information will follow). These presentations should be presented with the help of PowerPoint. If you already have some experience in using PowerPoint this will be an opportunity to further enhance your skills. The criteria for a successful presentation will be given to you in advance.

Assignments: You will need to complete a few assignments linked to California natural history throughout the semester. These assignments are due on a given date and time. **Late assignments will not be accepted for credit.** Follow the deadlines for the assignments.

M 2:05-4:10; W 2:05-5:15pm in SM56

Important Dates: It is your responsibility to keep up with the class, turn in assignments as well as to take the exams on the specific dates. **Exam dates are not negotiable.** Record the following dates in your schedule:

Exam 1	Wednesday Sep 21
Exam 2	Monday Oct 17
Exam 3	Monday Nov 14
Final Exam (150 pts)	Wednesday Dec 14 2-4pm

Last Day to add is September 9. After that day you will not be able to add a class. Last day to drop without a 'W' is September 16. Last day to drop with a 'W' is November 18. It is **your responsibility** to follow the deadlines posted by West Valley College. If you do not notify admissions/records you will end up with an 'F' as a final grade.

Exams: Written exams will consist of multiple choice questions, figures as well as essay questions. Part of the test can also be visual where you will need to recognize plants and animals seen or discussed in the course or in the field. Some of the exams may contain stations with specimens from the laboratory. The first three exams (100 pts each) are not cumulative. The final exam is worth 150 pts. If you miss an exam **you will need to notify me within 24 hours** via e-mail. If you fail to do so you will not be able to make up the exam. There will be **no** make-up exams unless you have a valid documented reason (e.g. medical emergencies etc. [vacations do not qualify]). Do not make appointments or plans that conflict with your scheduled class hours. During your exams you are only allowed to use your pencil/pen unless instructed otherwise. You cannot use phones, dictionaries, calculators, walkmans etc. unless you have received special permission. Hats/caps need to be removed during the exams.

Keeping track of your grades: Approximately once per month I will post a score sheet on the web as well as on the bulletin board outside my office so you can have an idea about how you are doing in the class. I do highly recommend that you keep track of your own grade during the semester by recording the scores you receive as well as the highest score possible. With those figures you can easily calculate your percentage. The scale below will give you your current grade.

Point Distribution

Field Trips/ Films/Lab Activities (10x10)	100 points
Assignments	100 points
Presentation	60 points
Exams (3x100)	300 points
Final Exam	150 points
Total points possible:	710 points

Grades: The grade is based on the number of points you accumulate during the semester.
Grading Scale: A 90-100%; B 80-89%; C 65-79%; D 55-64%; F < 55%

Cheating: is **not tolerated** and is unfair to the other students in the class. Cheating includes plagiarism (copying material from a source, e.g. a book or the web), looking at another student's exam/scantion, using notes or talking/whispering during an exam. Plagiarism is a serious and common problem. **Do not copy any sentences or paragraphs from any source into the pages of your written assignments.** The copy/paste function of your word processor is a fantastic tool. However, write your own papers/assignments. The student will be reported to the chairman of the division, and the incident will be recorded in the student's permanent record. A student found cheating will immediately be dropped from the course and receive an 'F' as a final grade. Read this section one more time. It is essential that you understand the consequences of this class policy. **I will fail a student found cheating in my class or on any of the course assignments.**

Earning a Grade:

1. Focus on the fact that you are immersing yourself in the field of natural history for the next 15 weeks.
2. Attend all lectures and labs
3. Be an **active** participant [listen, observe, take notes and ask questions]
4. Plan your study time
5. Continuously review the material
6. Always turn in your assignments and projects on time.
7. Ask for help when you need help (each other, your instructor)

Study Techniques: One issue you will face is that there is no ideal textbook for this class (nobody has yet decided to write one). As a consequence it is very important that you take good notes during the lectures, the labs and the field trips. Needless to say you should keep all this material organized in one location (preferably a sturdy binder and/or a field notebook).

I will work hard to present the material in the class and serve as a resource to you. Unfortunately, I am not taking your exams ☹. You are expected to keep up with the assigned readings. It is a good idea to regard a class and its associated study time in the same way as you would a job [i.e. one shows up on time, leaves on time and do the work one is expected to do in and outside of class]. You will do poorly in the course if you fall behind. I strongly encourage looking over the assigned chapter/s before lecture, and reading it/them as soon as possible after lecture. It is important to take good lecture notes (i.e. to not only copy the board/screen but to actually record keywords, concepts and facts from the lecture). Try to make an outline of the concepts and terminology covered in lecture as you take notes. Make an effort to go over your notes within a day or two. The best setting for such a review is with one or two other students from the class. The students should preferably be at the same level as yourself (i.e. equally motivated and interested). Forming a **study group** is often a key to success in this course. Let me know if you are interested in forming such a group as soon as possible. Contact me in case you have questions about the material. According to college guide lines, **in order to earn a 'C'** in the class, one should study two hours for every hour one spends in class [3 hours of lectures per week is equivalent to **6 hours of active and focused studying per week**]. The laboratory component adds to the commitment. However, higher grades demand more of an effort. Gear your time based on the grade you hope to receive. I recommend a time allocation of 12 hours per week for an A. The following web site contains several useful links in regards to study skills:

http://www.mhhe.com/links/pages/General_Biology/Writing_Papers_and_Study_Tips/

Special Accommodations: West Valley College makes reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should notify DESP (Disability & Educational Support Program) located in the Learning Services building (408-741-2010) of any special needs.

Counseling: The college provides free initial counseling sessions for students in need of such services. Feel free to contact them in case you are having problems at school or at home.

Emergencies: Call 911 (9-911 on a campus phone) for life threatening emergencies. Other important phone numbers are:

- o Student health services x2222
- o Safety escort services x2092

In case of an emergency in which we need to evacuate the room you should do the following:

- o Leave the room through the backdoors
- o Move towards the parking lot
- o Meet at the other side of the village.

