



**PRESERVING WILDLIFE AND ECOSYSTEMS:
THE ARGENTINA PROJECT**

October 3 – November 16, 2017

**Meeting Place: Trelew, Argentina
15 quarter credits/10 semester credits**

FULL PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Thank you for your interest in our Argentina fall project. As we will discover, the Patagonia region in Argentina remains one of the most remarkable landscapes on Earth. In this program, students will take part in unique firsthand investigations of Patagonia's diverse flora and fauna, the ecosystems that support them, and the human communities that interact with them. We will gain personal familiarity with the ecological diversity of Argentinean Patagonia from its wildlife-rich coastal environment, to the dry Patagonian grassland steppe, to the temperate forests in the glaciated Andes. Together we will immerse ourselves in these landscapes, study their ecology and learn about methods of conservation, management, and restoration.

During this program we will study general ecological and climatological principles associated with mountain ranges, and how it influences Patagonian ecosystems. We will also learn the fundamentals of environmental field sampling through extensive hands-on activities and research projects. We will interact and engage with local researchers and communities and discuss the importance of conservation and management of wildlands and wildlife in both wilderness settings and areas that have a long history of anthropogenic manipulation.

Contents of the Full Project Description:

- I. Background Information
- II. Project Goals and Activities
- III. Academic Credit
- IV. Team Logistics
- V. Accommodations
- VI. Official Documents/Visa
- VII. Language
- VIII. Pre-Program Mailings
- IX. Project Leader
- X. Project Costs
- XI. Contact Information

I. Background Information

This course is focused on field-based, hands-on environmental studies. We will explore several of Argentina's diverse ecosystems while traveling from the Atlantic coast to the Andes. We will conduct our studies in national and private parks, where students will become familiar with the diversity of endemic plants and animals that make these places so special. We will learn about ecological research and conservation from local scientists and conservationists, through readings and discussions, and by conducting independent field research projects. We will also interact and learn from local people to better understand the societies, politics, and cultures that shape the implementation of local conservation policies and management practices.

II. Project Goals and Activities

Our field studies will begin at the Peninsula Valdes on the Atlantic coast, a UNESCO World Heritage site and globally significant wildlife reserve home to sea birds, sea lions, elephant seals, penguins, dolphins, and the endangered southern right whale. We will conduct natural history observations on these animals and discuss current conservation strategies with local researchers. During this first part of the program we will learn and implement a wide array of field techniques in environmental ecology. We will conduct our field studies both in the wildlife-rich coastal area and the Patagonian steppe, home to abundant guanacos (a relative of the llama), rheas (a relative of the ostrich), leaf-cutter ants, succulents, and a wide array of plants and animals adapted to arid environments. Sheep ranching has had a powerful impact in Patagonian grasslands so our studies will examine this and other ways humans have influenced the landscape. We will also investigate innovative management strategies being used to reverse these impacts and strike a balance between human societies and wildlands.

Next we will travel to the foothills of the Andes where we will immerse ourselves in an amazing wilderness setting: the fabled temperate rainforest surrounding the Andes' glaciated peaks. The pronounced moisture gradient here gives rise to a diversity of highly endemic plants and animals. Here we will be surrounded by *Nothofagus* (beech tree) forests where we will become familiar with native Andean species such as the cryptic and melodic *chucaco* (a bird), the Magellanic woodpecker, the elusive *pudú* (a miniature deer), and the imposing Alerce (the largest tree species in South America). We will investigate firsthand the role of conservation in maintaining healthy populations of these and other species. During this portion of the program we will also observe and identify introduced species such as scotch-broom, rabbits, wild boar, beavers, and deer. Non-native species have had long-lasting influences on this habitat and we will evaluate their history, impacts, and current management.

As we will see, the people who make their homes here are often as vibrant and unique as the flora and fauna. There will be ample opportunities for engaging conversations and sharing *mates* with locals, which will make us keenly aware that any effective conservation plan must also consider the local people's ways of life. Personal experiences like these will give us deeper insight and inform our perspective as we investigate important controversies in environmental conservation today: What should we conserve? For whom are we conserving? Does nature have intrinsic value or should we consider ecosystems in terms of the economic services they provide to humanity?

On the last portion of the program we will transect the Andes to explore one of the few remnants of Araucaria (monkey puzzle tree) forests. Here we will work directly with local scientists in ongoing research and management projects on the region's flora and fauna. We will conduct our studies on land that is co-managed by the Argentinian National Park Service and the Mapuche community (one of the native peoples originally inhabiting Patagonia). We will talk with park rangers and community leaders to learn about their conjoined efforts to sustainably use and conserve these resource-rich, yet extremely endangered Araucaria forests.

Our time will be spent in Argentina's spectacular mountainous habitat during October and November (springtime in Argentina). We will establish front country camps as well as backpack to remote sites, from which we will conduct our field studies. **Please note that prior backpacking and field research experience is not required. All necessary skills of data acquisition will be taught on-site in Argentina.** Our students typically range from extremely experienced backpackers to those who have never camped. In our experience, the students with less outdoor experience come away with a feeling of empowerment and a new passion for backcountry adventures!

Overall, our field studies will provide us with firsthand experience with the interactions among humans, wildlife, and the environment in a region which contains immense wilderness yet faces the pressures of a growing human population, a growing economy, and the associated increased demands on natural resources. By the end of this course, students will have a solid background in modern conservation and environmental management. They will have a realistic and pragmatic understanding of both the many challenges and the critical importance of effective environmental conservation and resource management. They will also have considerable specific knowledge about the flora, fauna, and ecological issues of Argentine Patagonia.

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 our learning process and activities; 2) examinations; and 3) implementation and presentation of group independent research projects.

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

If you are traveling in advance of the program, you can arrange to join the group in Trelew when the recommended flight arrives at the airport. We will end the project in Bariloche, where participants can decide whether to fly home on the scheduled date or remain in Argentina to travel on your own.

All reasonable efforts will be made to follow the activities outlined above. However, please understand that travel arrangements can remain tentative until the traveling actually takes place. Weather conditions, road closures, volcanic activity, as well as political and bureaucratic considerations may affect our plans. Group safety is always our first priority, and it necessitates we have the ability to adapt or cancel planned travel when warranted. Wildlands Studies has put together an innovative, unique program in Argentina, and students 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.

V. Accommodations

Rural lodge, camping, and backpacking. Occasional youth hostel.

VI. Official Documents/Visa

You will need a current passport. No visa is required for US citizens. All American travelers are given a tourist stamp in their passport which allows stays of up to 90 days in Argentina. Please note that Canadian and Australian passport holders need to pay an Entry Reciprocity Fee online prior to their arrival in Argentina.

Language

This program is taught in English, but for many of the places we'll visit, only Spanish is spoken. The ability to speak Spanish is not a course prerequisite. The instructors and other staff will translate as needed. That said, the ability to speak Spanish will enhance your experience immeasurably. If you have the chance, any effort devoted to learning the basics or brushing up your Spanish speaking skills before the project will be well worth the effort.

VII. Pre-Program Mailings

Detailed information regarding travel and visa information, equipment 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.

VIII. Project Leader

BEATRIZ NOBUA-BEHRMANN: Ph.D. in Biological Sciences, University of Buenos Aires, 2014. Beatriz is an ecologist from Argentina with research interests in species interactions, biodiversity, and conservation biology. Her Ph.D. research focused on the interactions of leafcutter ants and plants in a remote desert ecosystem of Argentina. She has taught several courses in ecology and conservation biology at Buenos Aires University and has led our Argentina Project since 2014.

IX. 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 Includes most in-country accommodations, travel in-country, camping costs/permits, logistical support, group supplies and materials/research costs.
Food Money:	\$700-800 (varies according to taste, dietary preferences and exchange rate)
Personal Spending Money:	\$400 (varies, but don't be caught short)
Estimated Airfare:	\$1600

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.

X. Contact Information

Email: wildlands@wildlandsstudies.com
Phone: 831-684-9999
Fax: 831-684-9998