



**WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AND ECOLOGY:  
THE TASMANIA PROJECT**

**January 20 – March 4, 2017  
January 17 – March 2, 2018**

**Meeting Place: Hobart, Tasmania  
15 quarter credits/10 semester credits**

**FULL PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Thank you for your interest in our Tasmania project. Wildlands Studies team members will embark on a firsthand exploration of this exceptional and fascinating island. Because of its isolation in the Southern Pacific Ocean and its separation from mainland Australia, Tasmania supports a distinctive range of ecosystems, a wealth of biodiversity and wildlife found nowhere else in the world.

Throughout our field studies we will investigate many of the striking ecosystems of Tasmania: from alpine mountains and towering forests to pristine beaches, rivers and estuaries. We will trace ancient Aboriginal histories and visit colonial penal settlements, as well as investigate what defines a uniquely Tasmanian modern lifestyle. Similarly, we will research the controversies and innovations which define natural resource and wildlife management on the island. All the while, we will enhance our field skills through biodiversity surveys, assessments, and hands-on experience.

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**I. Background Information**

Mainland Australians have always considered Tasmania to be a little different; in fact, in some ways it is Australia's "Alaska". Tasmania has often been at the center of some of the most publicized controversies in Australian politics. For example, the Franklin River protests in the late 1970s and early 1980s are still regarded as one of the most significant environmental campaigns in Australian history, particularly since it led to the formation of the Australia Green Party, the world's first Green political party. Many Tasmanians aspire to live ecologically sustainable lifestyles, yet the island also has powerful pro-industry (e.g., forestry, mining) and pro-recreational lobbies (hunting, fishing) which perpetually polarize public sentiment and dictate political priorities.

This polarity extends to the ecological domain as well. Tasmania's natural diversity is as staggering as it is contrasting. The island offers glaciated alpine landscapes with volcanic dolerite peaks to deep limestone cave systems; towering ancient rainforests with the world's tallest flowering plants to native grasslands and heathlands; storm-battered mountains in the southwest to serene stretches of white sandy beaches in the northeast; pristine waters and wilderness to valleys ravaged by overzealous industry; and abundant wildlife ranging from penguins to the enigmatic, yet threatened, Tasmanian Devil. Tasmania's charismatic marsupials are found in densities unlike anywhere else in the country making it one of the premier locations for observing wildlife in Australia.

This diverse Tasmanian island provides an excellent setting for our interdisciplinary field studies where we will investigate both the relationship between the Tasmanian people and their natural environment and the interactions of wildlife species across various ecosystems and habitats.

## **II. Project Goals and Activities**

Our Tasmanian program gives students the opportunity for hands-on investigations of the ecology and conservation of its unique wildlife and protected areas. We will commence with an initial examination of the natural and cultural history and biogeography of Tasmania. We will then draw upon this knowledge as we delve deeper into the wild and spectacular places this area has to offer, familiarizing ourselves with current wildlife conservation/biology research, key stakeholders, environmental success stories, and persistent challenges and opportunities facing conservation on this island. **All field methods and data gathering techniques will be taught in Tasmania. No prior research experience is required.**

***Natural history of Tasmania - geology, ecology, climate and other processes that have shaped and characterize the landscape.*** Through a series of presentations, workshops, fieldwork and journal assignments students will learn about Tasmania's dynamic landscapes. Species identification is essential to managing and understanding the communities in this region and for identifying any change over time so techniques for keying out and confirming identification of plant and animal species using field guides will also be taught. Students will learn about relevant ecological concepts and be able to identify habitat types and the processes that underlie distinct ecological communities.

***Cultural, political and governance history of Tasmania from Indigenous and European settler perspectives.*** Following relevant introductory lectures, students will encounter various perspectives on local history firsthand. We will meet community groups and stakeholders who have varying ties and relationships to the Tasmanian landscape. Students will gain additional insight into relevant history through numerous discussions and readings.

***World Heritage, wildlands and wilderness – theory, management practice and contested perspectives.*** Students will gain insight into the important role that these concepts play in contemporary Tasmanian conservation. The implicit and explicit values of each will be discussed as well as conflicting perspectives on their merit for both ecology and society. Their relevance to conservation management will be revisited throughout the program.

***Field research project design and implementation (in the context of threatened wildlife management and conservation).*** Students will learn how to design a field research project and collect field data for monitoring and managing local wildlife populations. Students will be mentored through the research process, from receiving introductory presentations to working alongside local field biologists and fellow peers. The skills learned will be transferable to other fields and future careers: effective teamwork, project organization, time

management, utilizing feedback, managing, synthesizing and interpreting information and presenting results in oral and written formats.

***Naturalist field skills, including methods for recording and sharing observations in multiple formats.***

Effective naturalist skills not only promote an intimate understanding of the biophysical world but are integral to robust field biology and good conservation science. Students will attune their awareness and observation skills by connecting with their surroundings in different ways so as to be able to identify ecological patterns and processes. Students will learn the Grinnell method for scientific field journaling, gaining experience in recording observations.

***Critical reading, reflection and discussion through evaluation of course literature in the natural and social sciences.*** Throughout this course, we rely on primary literature in lieu of a textbook; therefore, students gain a significant amount of experience reading and critically discussing primary literature. Students digest literature most days, learning over time and with practice where to focus their attention to be able to synthesize and evaluate the work. Most readings are debriefed with a group discussion, ensuring that students have understood the work and are able to comment on it. Students will eventually use these discussions to critically reflect on their own worldviews.

***Rewilding, reconnecting and regenerating.*** Students will encounter diverse perspectives on the natural world and different 'ways of knowing' and being across and within the social-ecological continuum. These will be discussed in the context of three increasingly popular and culturally relevant themes: rewilding of landscapes and self; reconnecting with nature and people and regenerating by leading from the emerging future.

### **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 all scheduled class and field activities; 2) examinations; 3) extent and quality of field journals; 4) papers and/or projects concerning environmental and cultural issues of Tasmania; and 5) the design, implementation and recording of a research project.

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**

Participants will fly into Hobart, Tasmania and meet at the Hobart Airport. If you are traveling in advance of the program, you can arrange to join the group in Hobart when the recommended flight arrives at the airport. At the end of the program, you can decide whether you wish to fly home on the scheduled date or remain in Tasmania to do some exploring of your own before using the return portion of your ticket.

We will be in Tasmania during summer, but the weather is known to be highly variable. We could easily encounter winter-like conditions as we hike in the southwest or other alpine areas. Equally, we can anticipate many warm, sunny days in the northeast. We must be prepared for all types of conditions, especially when entering wilderness areas. The variable weather remains the greatest risk in the region. Apart from the usual natural hazards and three types of poisonous snake, Tasmanian wildlife is fairly benign compared to mainland Australia. We will send enrolled participants a detailed equipment list when we email our logistics letter.

Reasonable efforts will be made to follow the program that Wildlands Studies has outlined above. However, experience indicates that weather conditions and environmental considerations may affect our plans. Wildlands Studies has put together an innovative program in Tasmania, and team members 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. By the end of the program, each of us will have gained both a new understanding of the diversity of environments in Tasmania, as well as a firsthand knowledge of a true wild land.

## **V. Accommodations**

During our time in Tasmania most of our nights will be spent in our tents, basic huts or dormitory style accommodations situated in the mountains, rainforests or on adjacent islands.

## **VI. Official Documents/Visa**

You will need a current passport. All USA and Canadian students will also need to apply for an Australian Electronic Travel Authority, which is equivalent to a visa (good for 90 days of travel within Australia), before your departure. You can obtain information and apply for the visa online at: <http://www.eta.immi.gov.au/index.html>.

## **VII. Language**

This program is taught in English.

## **VIII. 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.

## **IX. Project Leader**

MATTHEW ZYLSTRA: Ph.D. in Conservation Ecology/Transdisciplinary Doctoral Program in Sustainability, Stellenbosch University, 2014. Matt is a conservation ecologist with experience in facilitating action research approaches for collaborative landscape restoration and stewardship in South Africa and Australia. His research interests lie in coastal-marine ecosystems, naturalist mentoring and community-focused outreach. Matt's Ph.D. research drew on integral ecology, psychology and education to explore how meaningful nature experience supports transformative learning for sustainability. Matt has been teaching with Wildlands Studies since 2009 and has taught in Australia, South Africa and Tasmania. Matt currently leads our South Africa and Tasmania Projects.

## **X. Project Costs**

Program Fee:	<u>Winter 2017</u> : \$4000 plus \$150 Application Fee. Program fee due November 1, 2016.
	<u>Winter 2018</u> : \$4150 plus \$150 Application Fee. Program fee due November 1, 2017.
	Enrollment on a space-available basis after the fee due date until the program is full.
Estimated in-country Expenses:	<u>Winter 2017</u> : \$2650 per person.
	<u>Winter 2018</u> : \$2750 per person.
	Includes land/sea transportation and fuel in Tasmania, lodging, field activities/permits, group supplies, and readings.
Food Money:	\$500 (varies according to taste, dietary preferences and exchange rate)
Personal Spending Money:	\$400-500 (varies, but don't be caught short)
Visa:	\$20 AUS
Estimated Airfare:	\$1800

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.

## **XI. Contact Information**

Email: [wildlands@wildlandsstudies.com](mailto:wildlands@wildlandsstudies.com)  
Phone: 831-684-9999  
Fax: 831-684-9998