Environmental Philosophy: Modern Naturalism
Is it okay to kill endangered animals to preserve their bodies in museums?

Should layers of plastic in landfills be classified as geologic strata?

Do writers who imbue plants and animals with human attributes like emotions help us connect to nature, or just lead us to misunderstand it?

How should we credit the citizen scientists who help collect electronic databases about nature?

In this course we cover the ethics, science, and aesthetics of human interaction with nature, through the lens of these sorts of questions about observing and classifying nature—naturalism.

This is an advanced, interdisciplinary course, and while it has no particular prerequisite, it will be helpful to have some background (academic or personal) in thinking about nature.

A major goal of the class is to help all of us become more fluent in communicating about nature to people with a different background and perspective.

Our secondary goal is to help each of you produce work that will be to your academic and professional advantage: a project that makes a good resume line, a writing sample for grad or professional school, etc.

All texts will be shared on Canvas.

But look ahead on the syllabus; you might want to check out or buy a hard copy of some of texts we’re covering.
PART 1: Weekly writeups [25%]

Starting the second week of class, you’ll write up a ~2 page (doublespaced) response to one of the week’s readings. Full details on Canvas.

This needs to be done before class, because these responses will help structure our discussion and ensure that classmembers are prepared to contribute.

PART 2: Choose your own assignment structure [75%]

You get to pick your remaining graded work buffet style. You’ll need to do three of the following, at least one of which needs to be done by October 22th. Full details on Canvas.

- Science communication analysis of a museum, book, or documentary
- Keep a field journal about a place
- Lead a discussion and an activity in class
- Field experience with a hobby naturalist
- Write a short piece (academic, creative, or polemical), ~5 pgs. [may do twice]
- Write a full term paper, 7+ pages [counts as two assignments]

PART 3: Participation

If your attendance is good and you’re an active contributor in class, I’ll bump your grade up half a point (e.g. an A- will become an A).

If your attendance is poor and/or you’re present but not really present in class, I’ll drop your grade at my discretion.

Please talk to me if you have good reasons for missing class or not being participative. I’ll work with you to make sure you can still get as much out of the class as your peers, and leave your grade intact.

Grading will occur on a standard scale
Flexibility: The schedule and assignment structure might change.

Honesty:
You are encouraged to use any available resources, including your peers, to understand readings and prepare for assignments, but submitted work must be your own, and follow appropriate citation practices.

It is your responsibility to be familiar with university policy on academic honesty: http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.php

Environment:

I aim to make our classroom a safe, welcoming environment for you, and require that you do the same for your peers. While disagreement and debate is encouraged, hostility and aggression will not be tolerated.

Student life can be challenging and stressful, and for some of you that will include participating in this course. I encourage you to chat with me if you begin to feel overwhelmed by this course.

Support:

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, (801) 581-5020. CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS)
Schedule

24 Aug—Naturalism, historical and contemporary

No readings, just show up bright-eyed and bushy-tailed

31Aug—Collections, colonies, classifications

Yaya: “Wonders of America”
Bewell: “Romanticism and colonial natural history”
Guelke and Morin: “Gender, nature, empire: women naturalists”

7 Sep—Rocks and minerals / Natural kinds

Hazen: “An evolutionary system of mineralogy: Proposal for a classification of planetary materials based on natural kind clustering.”
Santana: “Mineral Misbehavior”
Hatert et al.: “A comment on ‘An evolutionary system of mineralogy’”

14 Sep—Birds

Guest: Lizzie Callaway
Callaway: “A bird in hand: species encounters in competitive birding”
Havstad: “Let me tell you ‘bout the birds and the bee-mimicking flies and Bambiraptor”
Rocha et al.: “Specimen collection, an essential tool”
Lanham: “9 Rules for the Black Birdwatcher”
McDonald: “The Things I Tell Myself When I’m Writing About Nature”

21 Sep—Novel ecosystems

On campus field trip: Meet at landscape lab
Heger et al.: “Towards an Integrative, Eco-Evolutionary Understanding of Ecological Novelty”
Marris et al.: “Is everything a novel ecosystem?”
CEPD: Red Butte Creek Strategic Vision
28 Sep—Anthropocene

Guest: Drew Dittmer
On campus field trip (second half only): GCSC Seminar
Santana: “Waiting for the Anthropocene”
Haraway: “Anthropocene, capitalocene, plantationocene, chthulucene: Making kin”
Waters et al.: “The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically distinct from the Holocene”

12 Oct—Fall Break

No class or readings

19 Oct—Museums

On campus field trip: Natural History Museum of Utah
Aldrich: “Colonial Museums in Postcolonial Europe”
Wade: “The Ghosts in the Museum”
Alberti: “Objects and the Museum”

26 Oct—Indigenous and local knowledge

Greenlee: “How Black Foragers Find Freedom in the Natural World”
Whyte: “On the role of traditional ecological knowledge as a collaborative concept: a philosophical study”
Ludwig: “Overlapping ontologies and Indigenous knowledge”

2 Nov—Citizen science

Elliot and Rosenberg: “Philosophical foundations for Citizen Science”
Ceccaroni et al.: “Opportunities and Risks for Citizen Science in the Age of Artificial Intelligence”
Samuel: “Citizen science is booming during the pandemic”
Blake et al.: “The Demographics of Citizen Science Participation and Its Implications for Data Quality and Environmental Justice”
Schedule

9 Nov—What are ecosystems?
Odenbaugh: “Seeing the Forest and the Trees”
Lean: “Indexically Structured Ecological Communities”

16 Nov—Human kinds
Mitchell—The fault in his seeds
Tabb—Philosophy of psychiatry after diagnostic kinds
Nowak—Multiculturalism, autonomy, and language preservation

23 Nov—Thanksgiving
No class or readings, but get started on next week’s, since they’re 2x longer than normal

30 Nov—Art and science
Larsen: “The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet”
Houser: “Classifications”

7 Dec—Student choice
You’ll pick the readings