

ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY
FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR - FRPG 188M
BIRDS OF NORTHERN NEW YORK
Spring, 2007
Dr. Michael R. Greenwald

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Class time: T - 10:10-11:40; Th - 8:30(or earlier)-11:40
Richardson 202

Mentor: Todd Loffredo
Hours:

This is not a class in ornithology; it is a class in birding, the amateur version of bird observation. Why do this as a college course? There are two reasons: 1.) this is one area of science where amateurs can still contribute significant amounts of knowledge. Many of the population studies of birds done by professional ornithologists require a considerable number of volunteer amateurs to gather the data. This requires a large supply of skilled amateurs. Fortunately, that number is growing. There are more birders in the United States than hunters and fisher-people combined. Reason 2.) It's fun.

Required texts:

The basics of bird identification: bird topography. 1998.
Birders journal. 34p.

Davis, James P. 2004. The Rowman & Littlefield guide to writing with sources. 2nd edition. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 58p.

Elphick, Chris; John B. Dunning, Jr.; and David Allen Sibley, eds. 2001. A Sibley guide to bird life & behavior. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 608p.

Field guide to the birds of North America. 2006. 5th edition. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society. 503p.

Hacker, Diana. 2004. A pocket style manual. 4th edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's. 251p.

Sibley, David Allen. 2002. Sibley's birding basics. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 154p.

First-year Program Spring Semester Commonality Statement

II. First-Year Seminars

A. First-Year Seminar must require that students:

- a) are given diverse and repeated opportunities to write and speak, including opportunities to benefit from detailed formative feedback from instructors and peers
- b) are asked to assess adequately the research requirements of a particular assignment and to seek out efficiently the means of meeting those requirements
- c) are given diverse opportunities to incorporate appropriate illustrative or persuasive detail in oral and written communication
- d) are required to complete at least one and no more than two projects comprising some combination of formal and informal oral, written, and research activities that demonstrate a satisfactory grasp of the program's communication goals
- e) are instructed in and held responsible for the ethical use of sources
- f) are required to assemble all their work in a portfolio that includes a written assessment of that work, and to submit the completed portfolio to their faculty for review.

Recommendations

In addition, it is strongly recommended:

1. that students engage in oral and written assignments that address a variety of audiences, ranging from instructors and peers to other imagined or real audiences.
2. that students write and speak for a variety of purposes: to explore, to express, to inform, and to persuade
3. that students be encouraged to respond to texts via creative projects
4. that students engage in a variety of research tasks that encourage critical use of sources

5. that colleges include assignments that require the production and analysis of visual images, so as to improve visual literacy

Thus the purpose of the second semester of the First-year program is to help you develop the techniques of doing research. To this end, you will be asked to do one of two research projects. The first option has two components: one primary (field research) and one secondary (a study of other people's field research). The second option is entirely secondary research but is much more technical and may require some biology background. To a large extent, this part of the course builds on the writing skills that you learned during the first semester, but it will also take you step-by-step through the processes of research. As the subject matter of the course last semester served as a vehicle for the primary goals of acquiring skill in writing, oral presentation, and argumentation, so this semester the subject matter serves to teach you the skills of research writing and presenting your research to an audience.

Style Requirements

Style for all written work: All written work except the field journal, which may be hand-written, should be typed double-spaced or done on a word-processor with 1.5" margins on the left and top and 1" margins on the right and bottom. Please include a typed cover-page and fasten the pages together with a paper clip. All pages except the cover page should be numbered. The grammar and style must be standard formal English; papers must be properly punctuated and should be proofread before they are turned in. Papers that have numerous spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors will be penalized **at least .25 points** and should in no case expect a grade higher than **2.75**. The only acceptable notation format will be the natural science format as shown in Council of science editors. 2006. Scientific style and format: the CSE manual for authors, editors, and publishers. 7th edition. New York: Cambridge University Press. Hacker does not show the natural science format, but Davis, Writing with sources does and identifies it as "CSE." Citations are made in-text in a manner similar but not identical to the MLA system. The differences will be discussed in class (notice, for example, the absence of capital letters in the titles). Nota bene: Extensions will be given only in the most extenuated circumstances. It is also expected that the paper will reflect your own work. Papers that are improperly cited or that are written by someone else will be considered intentionally plagiarized and in violation of the university's policy on academic honesty (See the St.

Lawrence university student handbook, 2006-2007, pp. 148-153). Papers must be handed to me only.

Assignments:

1. Field Journal: You should keep a field journal of all of your observations. The two emphases for the grading of this journal will be accurate, precise, and thorough descriptions and secondarily, accurate identification. A well-described bird that is misidentified is more valuable (in all respects) than a poorly described bird that is correctly identified. You obviously do not have time to describe thoroughly every bird that you see, neither are you expected to be able to identify every bird that you see. You are therefore asked to write a description of at least three new species of birds each week. All other species of birds may be listed together with the number of that species observed. A species whose description has been checked by me as acceptable (●) need not (indeed, may not) be described again. The journal should also include observations of bird behavior, and each entry should include the date and time that the observations were made together with sky conditions and, if possible, temperature, wind speed, and wind direction. You may carry a notebook with you into the field that you then transcribe into your journal (this is what I do), but you must then be careful to do your transcriptions accurately (many field surveys do not permit transcription; others insist that the observer turn in both the transcribed data and the original field notes). These journals should be turned in every Tuesday; they will be returned to you on Thursday. You may notice that there is very little specifically assigned reading for this course. That is because I expect that you will spend **at least 3 hours per week** in the field in addition to class fieldwork. Your observations may be either a record of all of the birds that you see and hear along a specific route that you follow each time into the field (this is probably the most interesting) or a record of all of the birds that you see and hear at a single site that you observe each time in the field (this may seem to be the easiest, but may, in the long-run, be the most tedious). Identification must use the nomenclature specified by the American ornithologists' union. 1998. Check-list of North American birds. 7th Edition. American Ornithologists' Union. Washington, D.C. and its supplements. This component of the course is worth **30%** of your final grade.

2. Research paper.

Option A - Life history/field research project:

This project has both a library and a field research component.

- i. Library component: A 5-7 page life history of a bird that begins nesting close to campus during the spring semester (a list will be provided). You will be expected to present a current bibliography with sources derived largely from professional or sophisticated popular journals. If monographs or co-authored books are available for your species, these too should be on your bibliography as should the relevant article in *Birds of North America*, preferably updating the article in *Birds of North America*. It is also possible that there are useful sites on the internet for your species, so this too needs to be checked thoroughly. Web sources will be judged by their appropriateness to a project of this type, so be sure to choose your websites carefully.
- ii. Field research component: You will also be expected to locate your species in the field and observe those elements of its life history that can be observed in Canton from February through April. In the final paper, you will be expected to compare the data from your library research with your own observations. This assignment is worth **35%** of your final grade broken down according to the schedule below. The due dates for each sub-component may also be found in that schedule.

Option B - Avian taxonomy project

Choose a species of bird that spends part of its life history in northern New York and that has undergone taxonomic changes since 1900. Do a thorough review of the literature on the taxonomy of the species, and based on that research, offer your own conclusions on its putative taxonomic status. This will of necessity involve a discussion of the different taxonomic systems currently under discussion and the underlying philosophical assumptions of each.

3. A final exam. As in the journal, emphasis will be on accurate, precise, and thorough description, both **visual and auditory**. This component of the course is worth **10%** of your final grade.
4. In-class description exercises. On selected Tuesdays starting on January 23, you will be asked to write a description of a projected image of a bird. These will increase in difficulty and diminish in time allowed as the semester progresses. This component of the course will be worth **10%** of your final grade.
5. Each Tuesday in class, you will be asked to present your weekly observations to the class. At any and all times, you should be prepared to defend your identifications with a thorough description of what you saw or heard. Such quizzing may come from me or any other member of the seminar. Grading will be based on your response **AND** on your participation in the questioning process. This component of the course will be worth **15%** of your final grade.
6. Bring your binoculars to class every Thursday and on all field trips.
7. Bring your field guide to class every day.

Grading percentages:

Field journal (to be handed each Tuesday) -----	30%
Weekly in-class oral presentations of observations -	15%
Weekly in-class written descriptions -----	10%
Final Exam - Exam day -----	10%

Research Project Option A

Selection of species due Tuesday, January 30	
Categories of a life history (due Tuesday, Feb. 6) -	2%
Bibliography of life history (due Tuesday, Feb. 13) -	5%
First draft of life history (due Tuesday, Feb. 27) -	9%
Final draft of life history (due Tuesday, March 13) -	9%
Observation component of life history (due exam day)	10%

Research Project Option B

Selection of species due Tuesday, January 30	
List of various taxa under discussion (due Tuesday, Feb. 6) -----	3%
Bibliography of literature on the taxonomy of your species (due Tuesday, Feb. 13) -----	8%
First draft of research paper (due Tuesday, Mar. 13)	12%
Final draft of research paper (due Tuesday, May 1) --	12%

Grading criteria:

4.0 - (A) This grade is reserved to reward clearly superior work. Simply doing your assignments does not warrant this grade. Papers with this grade have a point of view that is well researched and well written. They demonstrate an integrated understanding of the literature and, if applicable, the relationship between the literature and the field research. Descriptions will be of such clarity that any knowledgeable reader will be able to identify your bird to species, and if applicable, to sub-species, age, and sex from your written description alone.

3.0 - (B) Papers with this grade are also well researched and well written, but rather less thoroughly than an "A" (4.0) type of paper. They nevertheless show a competent understanding of the subject matter. Descriptions and observations are also less thorough but should nevertheless be sufficient to identify the species that you are observing.

2.0 - (C) Shows a satisfactory knowledge of the subject matter. Descriptions and observations will still include only those points characteristic of the species in question, but not sufficient to definitively identify the bird. If you try to get by with the minimum amount of work, this is the grade that you should expect.

1.0 - (D) Marginal awareness of the subject matter. Papers that are merely restructured quotations of secondary literature should expect this grade. Grades of 1.0 reflect work that is generally unsatisfactory.

0.0 - (F) Reflects work that does not warrant receiving credit for the assignment.

Intermediate grades are given in the following manner: A- = 3.75, B+ = 3.25, **B- = 2.75**, etc. The grade type is determined by the categories given above. Pluses and minuses reflect gradations within the grade type. Grades of 3.5, 2.5, etc. are borderline between two grade types.

N.B. Now that we grade on a quarter-point scale, it will be very difficult to earn a grade of 4.0 because there is nothing higher than 4.0 to bring your average up to that point. Normally, the only way to finish the course with a 4.0 average is to be incredibly consistent. To rectify this, I have instituted a new grade of **4.25** (effectively, an A+). This will be used for internal purposes only. I expect that this grade will be

incredibly rare, but sometimes I see a paper, an exam essay, journal, or description that is spectacular (near-professional quality). This quality of work deserves to be rewarded, and this is how I will do it.

Late work will be penalized **0.5** points per day (including weekends). Extensions will be granted only in the most extenuated circumstances. Late journals will not be accepted. Journals not turned in on time will receive a grade of **0.0** for that week. Since the final draft of the completed research project is due on the day of the final exam, it may not be turned in late.

Attendance - You will be allowed one field-trip absence and one classroom absence without penalty during the semester. Any absences in excess of these will result in **.5 points** for a field trip and **.25 points** for a single-session (usually Tuesday) class **to be deducted from your final grade** for each absence. Lateness of more than five minutes for a field trip constitutes an absence because we will leave without you. Lateness for a class will count as half an absence **if** we have not yet finished the presentation of observations and a **full absence** if the presentations have been concluded. Showing up for a field trip without binoculars will also constitute half an absence.

Class schedule

We will be in the field nearly every Thursday, weather permitting. Until the beginning of March, field trips will begin at 8:30 A.M. From March 8 onward, Thursday classes will begin earlier each week. Time will be announced the previous Tuesday. Meet in the Facilities Operations parking lot. In addition, there will be field trips on Sunday, **February 4**, Sunday, **April 1**, and Sunday, **April 22**. We will **NOT** meet on Thursday, February 8; Thursday, March 29; or Thursday, April 19.

Each Tuesday class will consist of the following components, time permitting:

1. Oral presentation of field observations (graded)
2. Description writing (graded)
3. Bird biology
4. Writing/research issues (January-March)
5. Identification problems

If a Thursday field trip has been cancelled because of bad weather, Thursday classes will follow Tuesday schedule #'s 2-5.

Under the rubric "bird biology," we will attempt to cover 10 topics in the 12 middle weeks of the course. These will progress in order as class time permits.

The topics for bird biology with their corresponding reading assignments are as follows:

1. Introduction to the course. Where to go birding. Field etiquette. Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 5-53.
2. Systematics & Taxonomy - What is a bird? What is a species? Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 54-59; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 39-50.
3. Bird topology (or how to tell your bird's vent from its carpal joint) - The Basics of Bird Identification: Bird Topography; Field Guide to the Birds of North America, pp. 6-19; Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 82-122.
4. Observing bird behavior - Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 60-65; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 51-59, 79, 36-38.
5. Feathers and molt (moult for Canadians) - Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 76-82, 123-147; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 15-32.
6. Learning bird vocalization/function of bird vocalization - Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 66-75; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 33-36.
7. Migration - Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 60-66.
8. Mating and nesting - Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 66-79.
9. Finding birds: habitat and the relationship between form and function - Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 80-106.
10. Population and Conservation - Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 148-149; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 107-131.

Should we get behind in our classroom topics, you should follow the above order for your reading.

CALENDAR

Week 1 - January 23 - meet in Richardson 202.

January 25 - Systematics and Taxonomy and start Bird Topology

Read: Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 5-59; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 39-50; The Basics of Bird Identification: Bird Topography; Field Guide to the Birds of North America, pp. 6-19; Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 82-122. Note that this is the longest reading assignment of the semester. Prepare accordingly.

Week 2 - January 30 - Begin bird topography. Discussion of need for citation and bibliographic formats.

February 1 - First field trip at 8:30 A.M. Meet at FacOps. We will then meet with Joan Larsen in the computer classroom in ODY and conclude the class in the Lauenders Science Library in Madill. **WEAR WARM CLOTHING!**

Species selection for either research project is due on **January 30**.

Week 3 - February 4 - **Sunday** field trip to the power dam in Massena. Be at the FacOps parking lot at 8:00 A.M. We will return at about 1:30.

February 6 - Tuesday will be the first class to follow the schedule outlined above. The topic for bird biology will be observing bird behavior **if** we have finished bird topography.

Read: Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 60-65; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 51-59, 79, 36-38.

Categories of a life history for research project option A and **list of various taxa** under discussion for research option B due on **February 6**.

February 8 - No Class

Week 4 - February 13 - Topic for bird biology will be feathers and molt.

Read: Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 76-82, 123-147; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 15-32.

Bibliographies due for both research projects on **February 13**

February 15 - Field trip

Week 5 - February 20 - Topic for bird biology will be bird vocalization.

Read: Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 66-75; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 33-36.

February 22 - Field trip

Week 6 - February 27 - Topic for bird biology will be migration. By now, a few species of passerines should have begun to sing. Listen for Black-capped Chickadees, Northern Cardinals, and House Finches on campus.

Read: Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 60-66.

First draft of life history (research option A) due on **February 27**

March 1 - Field trip

Week 7 - March 6 - Topic for bird biology will be mating and nesting.

Read: Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 66-79.

March 8 - Field trip

Week 8 - March 13 is a catch-up date. I presume that by now, we will be behind in our bird biology topics so that I am scheduling no new topics for this week.

Final draft of life history or **First draft** of the avian taxonomy project is due on **March 13**.

March 15 - Field trip, time to be announced.

March 20-22 is **Spring Break**. Go birding someplace else.

Week 9 - March 27 - Topic for bird biology will be the relationship between habitat, form, and function.

Read: Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 80-106.

March 29 - No class

Week 10 - April 1 - **SUNDAY field trip** to Wilson Hill and power dam in Massena.

April 3 - Topic for bird biology is populations and conservation.

Read: Sibley, Birding Basics, pp. 148-149; Elphick, Dunning, Sibley, eds., Sibley Guide, pp. 107-131.

April 8 - Field trip

Week 11 - April 10 - I am working with the assumption that we will be far behind in our bird biology at this point. There will therefore be no new readings for the remainder of the semester.

April 12 - Field trip, 6:30 A.M.

Week 12 - April 17 - Tuesday routine

April 19 - No class.

Week 13 - April 22 - **SUNDAY field trip** to Derby Hill to watch hawk migration. Meet at FacOps parking lot at 6:00 A.M.

April 24 - Tuesday routine

April 26 - field trip, 6:30 AM. (Optional 5:00 A.M. trip for Virginia Rail)

Week 14 - May 1 - Review for final exam

May 3 - Final field trip of the semester at 6:30 A.M.

Final draft of Avian taxonomy research project due on **May 3**.

May 9 - **FINAL EXAM - 1:30-4:30 P.M.**

Final draft of **field research** project due.

NOTA BENE: The instructor reserves the right to make changes in this syllabus as the need arises. This may include handing out additional readings in class. Any element of this class may be changed at any time if the weather or the birds warrant.