

**ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION  
AND CULTURE:  
THE PERUVIAN AMAZON PROJECT**

**Meeting Place: Los Angeles, CA**  
(time and location to be determined)

**January 4 – February 21, 2011**  
**12 semester system units (equivalent to 18 quarter system units)**  
**Program Fee \$ 2695 plus \$150 Application Fee**

Thank you for your interest in our Peruvian Amazon field study. This is a rare opportunity to gain hands-on experience in tropical biology and ethnobotany, while exploring fascinating Amazonian cultures. With the guidance of Native Amazonian experts and research biologists we will investigate wild rivers and forests, become familiar with remarkable creatures and plants found there, participate in ongoing conservation-oriented biological research, reside in a Shipibo village, visit the indigenous Asháninka, and learn about efforts for ecosystem and cultural sustainability. Our study sites include the vibrant zone where the Amazon Basin meets the Andes, as well as the complex aquatic habitats and rich forests of the Ucayali River in the middle Amazon. On this field study you will be immersed in one of the most biodiverse regions of the planet, meet knowledgeable, skillful people who live there, learn of threats to habitat and cultural integrity, examine firsthand key research and conservation efforts, and gain insight into complex environmental and cultural survival challenges.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Our Peru Amazon project introduces team members to environments, biota, and conservation issues as well as Native Amazonian history, culture, and contemporary cultural survival issues in the western Amazon. In the company of conservation biologists and indigenous Shipibo/ Asháninka experts we will encounter extraordinary biodiversity and complexity, address questions of sustainable resource use, and investigate conservation strategies. We will learn biological field methods by participating in ongoing research and monitoring projects at Los Amigos Research Station on the Madre de Dios River. We will be introduced to diverse lifeforms, landforms, and aquatic environments at several regions of the Peruvian Amazon by local biologists. We will gain an understanding of Amazonian societies' culture, environmental knowledge, resource management practices, sustainability issues, and political activism with regard to natural resources during field study activities in several communities. And finally, we will learn firsthand about indigenous peoples' use and stewardship of environmental resources in national and transnational conservation programs.

Most of our time will be spent in Peru's spectacular Amazon forest. Typically we will travel by boat to remote research stations and villages from which we will conduct our field studies. **Please note that prior field research experience is not required. All necessary skills of data acquisition will be taught on-site in Peru.** The ability to speak Spanish is also not a course prerequisite, although it will come in handy throughout the project.

**PROGRAM GOALS AND ACTIVITIES**

Participants will gain experience, skills, and understanding in three inter-related academic domains. These include 1) Field research methods through a hands-on introduction to field methods for biological and

ethnological research regarding conservation, resource use, and culture in the upper Amazon; 2) Conservation and resource management skills through firsthand studies of the history, issues, and methods of conservation and natural resource management in the upper Amazon; and 3) Culture and environment research including an exploration of Native Amazonian history, culture, and current issues with particular attention to relationships between society and natural environment.

Our learning methods will be experiential and academic. We will learn through direct engagement with people, places, plants, and animals as well as through academic means such as lectures, readings, and discussions. Our learning will be both traditional and communal, with each team member striving to bring new insights to the group based on discussions with biologists and Amazonian people, and analysis of wide-ranging experiences. Our guest speakers will include Native Amazonian experts with sophisticated knowledge of the major environments of the upper Amazon, biologists engaged in studies of Amazonian forest and aquatic ecosystems, and activists working with Peruvian and international non-governmental organizations on behalf of environmental conservation and social justice.

Our field study will begin with a flight to the remote Madre de Dios watershed where we spend about two weeks at Los Amigos Research Center, one of the most active biological stations in the upper Amazon. Los Amigos is situated within a 20 million-acre conservation reserve adjacent to Manu National Park, surrounded by flooded forest, upland forest, palm wetlands, bamboo thicket, and oxbow lakes. Abundant wildlife includes giant otter, harpy eagle, tapir, anaconda, jaguar, and a dozen species of monkeys. Los Amigos staff biologists and visiting researchers will introduce us to commonly used field methods and integrate us into their ongoing research and monitoring projects. Current monitoring projects may include boat-based river transects to track reptile, bird, and mammal populations, forest transects to track mammal, macaw, and oropendola populations, and tree studies within permanent plots. Research projects here have studied primates, frugivorous bats, giant otters, tapirs, tortoises, fish, frogs, birds, beetles, ants, and trees. Staff biologists will provide support and coaching as we undertake individual student projects.

We then travel by boat to Bahuaja Sonene National Park and adjacent Tambopata National Reserve where we spend about ten days examining and participating in ongoing biological research and monitoring projects in the company of biologists with the Peruvian NGO responsible for management of this huge tract of protected forest and rivers. Research here includes radio-tracking studies of giant otters and jaguars.

We will next depart the Madre de Dios watershed by air and travel by land to an upper tributary of the Ucayali River situated in an intact upland tropical forest below the eastern flanks of the Andes. We will journey by road, boat, and foot for about two weeks to investigate how two key indigenous groups—the Asháninka and Shipibo—relate to the varied natural environments of the Ucayali Basin. We will make extended visits to their communities where our hosts will share their knowledge of flora, fauna, and ecological process as we visit their gardens, farms, streams, lakes, and forests. They will explain the roles of plants and animals in their culture and introduce us to traditional resource management methods to sustain cultural and environmental integrity. Their insights and instruction will be crucial to our grasp of the conservation challenges and solutions of the region, as they possess sophisticated environmental knowledge, manage much of the region, and have begun in a few places to co-manage resources with conservation organizations.

We will travel by boat to visit Asháninka families who live beside the headwaters of the Rio Pichis at the base of the Andes. A proposal to declare this vast, biologically diverse region as a Biosphere Reserve is currently before the Peruvian Environmental Ministry and we will discuss the status of this far reaching plan with our community contacts. Within this forest we will learn about the roles of trees, plants, and wildlife in subsistence, medicine, and ceremony. We then travel to Pucallpa, a port town on the Ucayali River, and from here by boat up a tributary river for an extended visit to a Shipibo village where we will reside with Shipibo families and learn about the ethnobotany of housegardens, farms, and forests. We will accompany Shipibo foresters to learn how the communities harvest trees and market wood, employing practices designed to maintain biodiversity and production.

We wrap up our field study in Pucallpa, beside Rio Ucayali, with reflection on lessons learned. The insights gained by immersing ourselves in the abundant life of the upper Amazon, rubbing elbows with scientists and locals, negotiating trails, traveling in dugout canoes, and grappling with questions of biological and cultural survival will help us address future human and environmental issues.

### **LANGUAGE**

This program is designed to afford participants the opportunity to learn directly from knowledgeable Amazonian people and Latin American biologists many of whom do not speak English. Some capacity in Spanish will make these conversations easier and more enlightening. Nonetheless, the ability to speak Spanish is not required for participation in the program. The instructor will translate all presentations delivered in Spanish by guest speakers. The instructor and those students who speak Spanish will also help non-speakers in conversation with locals when possible. If possible, it would be a good idea to start learning or brushing up your Spanish before the program.

### **ACADEMIC CREDIT**

Students will receive 12 semester units (18 quarter units) awarded through California State University Monterey Bay Extended Education. While students usually encounter no difficulties in transferring credit to their home campus, applicants should check with their advisors prior to enrolling. Our staff will be happy to explain the program in further detail to the applicant's advisor, if necessary. The Peru Amazon field studies program gives credit in three courses:

- ENVS 370, Environmental Wildlands Studies (4 semester system units)
- ENVS 371, Environmental Field Survey (4 units)
- ENVS 372, Wildlands Environment and Culture (4 units)

Letter grades are based upon: 1) active participation in our learning process and activities; 2) examinations; and 3) implementation and presentation of two independent research projects.

Team members are expected to conduct themselves in a mature and responsible manner. The Wildlands Studies Program 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.



## **PROJECT COSTS**

Program Fee:	\$2695 plus \$150 Application Fee due November 1, 2010 Enrollment on a space-available basis after the fee due date until the program is full.
Estimated in-country Expenses:	\$1950 per person includes most in-country accommodations, travel in-country, instructor travel, camping costs/permits, logistical support, group supplies and materials/research costs. Due November 29, 2010.
Food Money:	\$500-650 (this varies according to taste - but don't be caught short)
Personal Spending Money:	\$300
Airfare:	\$1500 (estimated)

Students should inquire at the financial aid office of their home campus regarding the use of their loans or grants for this course. CSU Monterey Bay Extended Education/ Wildlands Studies are 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.

## **OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS**

You will need a current passport that does not expire until after the end of the program. Visas are obtained upon arrival.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Arrangements will be available for team members to fly from Los Angeles, CA to Lima, Peru. You can arrange to join the group in Peru if that works better for you. In this case, you will need to meet the recommended flight when it arrives. At the end of the program, you can decide whether you want to fly home on the scheduled date or remain on your own in South America before using the return portion of your ticket.

All reasonable efforts will be made to follow the activities outlined above. However, please understand that in Peru travel arrangements can remain tentative until the traveling actually takes place. Weather conditions, road closures as well as political and bureaucratic considerations may affect our plans. Wildlands Studies has put together an innovative, unique program in Peru; 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 can produce some of the program's most memorable moments.

## **PRE-PROGRAM MAILINGS**

Detailed information regarding travel and visa information, gear/food, meeting plans, group expenses payment, medical recommendations and academic preparations will be sent to all team members in a subsequent logistics letter about 8-10 weeks before the project initiates.

## **PROGRAM LEADER**

BRET BLOSSER is an anthropologist and field biologist. He has designed and taught cultural and environmental fieldstudy programs in the wildlands of Belize, Guatemala, Hawaii and the American Southwest.