

**ECOSYSTEMS AND CULTURES:
THE BELIZE WILDLANDS PROGRAM**

**Meeting Place: Los Angeles, CA
(Time & location determined later)**

June 24 – August 5, 2010

12 semester system units (equivalent to 18 quarter system units)

Program Fee \$2695 plus \$150 Application Fee

Thank you for your interest in our Belize Program. Team members will take part in a unique firsthand investigation of Belize's diverse tropical ecosystems, the remarkable animal and plant communities found there, and the human cultures they support. Here, in a dramatic cross section of landscapes, participants will gain a firsthand understanding of Belize's interwoven ecosystems and cultures while participating directly in field studies to help preserve Belize's ecological and cultural heritage.

Belize is a developing country but is unusual in its commitment to conservation. This gives us the opportunity to explore intact tropical ecosystems in relatively pristine condition. In addition we will examine how the various cultural groups hope to balance economic development with conservation and cultural survival.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Lodged just below Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula on the Caribbean, and formerly known as British Honduras, Belize's relatively unknown and distinctly exotic lands stir the imagination. Far removed from other Central American countries in history, culture, ethnic makeup, and language, Belize stands apart as a politically stable ex-British colony whose official tongue is English. From barrier reef to towns of rebel African slave descendants; from lowland neo-tropical jungle to Mayan Indian villages; from mountainous hardwood rainforest to isolated Mennonite settlements, Belize offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to explore a truly wild place, not yet overwhelmed by the pressures of late-twentieth century global expansionism.

A quiet and peaceful English speaking land, Belize is an ideal destination for North American student travelers. Belize possesses some of Earth's most extraordinary environmental and cultural diversity, as well as one of the most environmentally oriented governments in the world today. Because of Belize's rich biodiversity and its relative isolation, little is known about much of the nation's flora/fauna, and that which is known is incompletely understood. The opportunity for discovery awaits us on many levels.

Nearly a full third of Belize's lands have been set aside as protected in one form or other, raising a variety of intriguing questions for the scientific community and our Wildlands Studies team. As we shall discover firsthand, the Belize government has encouraged a variety of methods for wildland environmental protection. Such methods often have several consequences, and in Belize, a struggle exists between those who traditionally live a subsistence lifestyle and the re-categorization of homelands and hunting grounds as wildlife preserves. In addition, as the government courts eco-tourism as a major business and economic blessing, it too has a double

edge: the introduction of outsiders and human presence in remote and uninhabited areas alters the environment and disrupts animal behavior; and as displaced native peoples struggle to find new economic balance, traditional cultures can begin to erode and become reshaped under the pressure.

PROJECT GOALS & ACTIVITIES

During the Belize program, team members will become acquainted with principles of tropical ecology and conservation, acquire new field method skills, be introduced firsthand to the fascinating ecosystems of Belize, and examine both the government's role in protecting wildlands and the various roles that cultural groups hold within Belize. Students will have the opportunity to engage with members of the different ethnic groups on a personal level, observing local conservation ideals, learning individual's personal histories, and collecting language and dialect dictionaries. Lectures and discussions on the cultural histories of Belize will serve to enhance our understanding of modern Belize, and give team members the chance to develop a relationship with the people.

In Belize wildlands, team members will be introduced to key ecological research/wildlife monitoring techniques including wildlife transect establishment, camera station monitoring and sign identification. Then traveling from mountain to coast, we will learn about the ecology of Belize's principle terrestrial ecosystems: rainforests, coastal mangroves, lagoons, riparian zones; and assess the effectiveness/long-range sustainability of resource management strategies for Belize's protected nature reserves.

Off the Belize coast exists the second largest barrier reef in the world. Studded with mangrove and coconut palmed cayes, and guarded by atolls to the east, the 180 mile long reef is ecologically complex and intimately tied to the rainforests through its many water courses delivering nutrients to the sea. In this system, dazzling numbers and varieties of plants and animals are supported: 30-50 coral species, sea turtles, rays, eel, and over 250 varieties of fish living in and along the reef system. Snorkeling through the reef environment, we will study the ecology of the system, collect evidence of human disturbance, and assess the impact of increased human use.

All field methods and data gathering techniques will be taught in Belize. No prior research experience is required, but we expect participants to arrive excited and prepared for a rewarding field study experience. Our backcountry activities will be supplemented by field seminars led by Wildlands Studies staff, Belize government officials and community/conservation organization leaders.

Although rainforest animals, secretive, elusive and mostly nocturnal, are very difficult to observe, we will learn how best to sight them. We will employ various field techniques in numerous ecosystems to census animals, such as line transects at dawn, dusk, and night for birds and mammals. Given the general lack of thorough knowledge of Central American wildlife populations, this research will add to this limited body of information and will be of interest to the Belize Audubon Society and to North American researchers currently studying Belizean neotropical ecosystems.



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Another focus will be a field assessment of management techniques for private (independently owned and operated, in some instances by foreign nationals and institutes), government (held in trust for the people of Belize by the central government), and communal (locally owned or overseen by the native peoples) conservation areas. We will consider the physical size and location of each, levels of diversity, ecosystem complexity, permitted uses and restrictions, degree of human impact, types of management plans employed and levels of efficiency, funding requirements and sources, and environmental and economic impacts on the local economies. Finally, we will consider the relationship of the conservation areas to the local cultures in terms of environmental and economic benefit or injury, and the enhancement or degradation of people's sense of history, place, and home.

We will also conduct informal non-invasive interviews with local people as we travel, and collect personal histories/perceptions of Belize from the various ethnic groups living within its borders. Our travels will take us through various cultures' lands, and at times we will find ourselves as their guests. We anticipate staying in Mayan Indian villages, Creole and Mestizos communities, and/or Garifuna towns. Our team will discover how the different cultures see themselves in relation to the land, and how the concept of conservation and stewardship vary across cultural lines. Topics we will consider include histories of ethnic diversity in Belize; ethnic harmony/tolerance, equality/access to advantages, isolation/assimilation; women's roles within the communities and government; and developing trends as Belize embraces eco-tourism as a major business.

During the program we anticipate taking a short excursion into northern Guatemala to visit the ancient Mayan ruins of Tikal. There we'll learn about the history and culture of ancient Mayan and how they interacted and lived with the land around them. Traveling to Guatemala will provide a glimpse into both the current life and historic Spanish culture of Central America. Traveling outside of Belize allows you to look back and more fully understand the historic and contemporary influences that have made Belize so unique.

Throughout the program, through writings and individual projects, we will monitor our evolving impressions of the tropics and our deepening relationship with the rainforest as first a concept, and second as a necessary component in the global ecosystem. We hope to provide each team member with an enriched sense of connection to the remote, and help him/her establish a sense of place within the foreign.

Belize offers our participants unique opportunities to hike through huge tracts of old-growth rainforest and along stunning mountain watersheds into isolated Mayan villages and abandoned ruins, attend local music gatherings in remote Garifuna and Creole settlements and tour mangrove forests by interlaced coastal waterways. The richness and diversity of the flora and fauna, and our ability to access it via low-impact traveling, provide an experience rarely available these days. Far from the cushioned eco-tourist travel packages offered by high-end companies, we shall experience Belize both intimately and practically. We look forward to you joining us this summer.

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 Belize field studies program gives credit in three courses:

ENVS 370, Environmental Wildlands Studies (4 semester system units)

ENVS 371, Wildlands Environmental Field Survey (4 units)

ENVS 372, Wildlands Environment and Culture (4 units)

Students will be evaluated on the basis of: 1) examinations; 2) extent and quality of fieldwork and participation in group field activities; 3) and the design, implementation, and written report to the group of an independent 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.

TEAM LOGISTICS

Arrangements will be available for the team to fly from Los Angeles, CA to Belize City. If this is out of the way for you or you are traveling through Central America prior to this program, you will need to meet us at the Belize Airport when the group flight lands on the first day of the program. At the end of the program, you can decide whether you want to fly home on the scheduled date or remain in Belize to do some touring around.

For vaccinations and travel medications, we recommend you see a travel nurse at your university or county health clinic and follow their recommendations, as well as consider the travel immunizations recommended by the Center for Disease Control. At the very least, you should have current tetanus and hepatitis vaccinations.

Within Belize we will use a charter bus to travel to and from each destination. Because of our mode of travel, it is essential that you be able to carry all of your gear on your back, so please make sure that you can do this before you leave. Load your pack, try it for a couple of hours, if your pack is too heavy, eliminate some things. (Do not bring any extra duffel bags or packs but do bring a daypack). Once you are enrolled, we will be sending a specific gear/food list to team members.

Reasonable efforts will be made to follow the program that Wildlands Studies has outlined here. However, experience indicates that weather conditions, road flooding, and bureaucratic considerations may affect our plans. Wildlands Studies has put together an innovative program in Belize, 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.



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PRE-PROGRAM MAILINGS

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

PROJECT COSTS

Program Fee:	\$2695 plus \$150 Application Fee. Program fee due May 15, 2010 Enrollment on a space-available basis after the fee due date until the program is full.
Estimated in-country Expenses:	\$1900 per person share of land/sea transportation and fuel in Belize, instructors transportation, lodging, field activities/permits, group supplies, readings
Food in Belize:	\$400
Airfare:	\$750 (estimated)
Personal Spending Money:	\$400 (this varies according to taste - but don't be caught short)

Students should inquire at the financial aid office of their home campus regarding the use of their loans or grants for this program. CSU, Monterey Bay/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.

PROJECT LEADER

COLIN YOUNG is the Director of the Environmental Science Program at Galen University where he developed and teaches courses in sustainable development, ecology, plants and society, botany, ethnobotany, adventure and ecotourism, environmental problems, society and environment and consultancy in both the undergraduate and MBA programs. Colin is also an adjunct professor in the department of anthropology at the University of Calgary, Canada as well as at Arkansas State University. His research interests include plant diversity and distribution, conservation biology, tropical biology, ethnobotany, and community conservation policy.