

## Herpetology

*Biology 512, 512L, 592E*  
(4 Units)

### *Instructor*

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### *Graduate Assistant*

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### *Meeting Times*

*Lecture:* T/TH: 1–2 PM in CR 5330; *Laboratory/Field:* T/TH: 2–5 PM in CR 5330 or TBA; Students must be concurrently enrolled in the Lecture, Lab, and Field components.

### *Text & Field Guide*

Vitt, L. J. and J. P. Caldwell. 2009. *Herpetology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Academic Press, Burlington MA.  
(*required*)

Stebbins, R. C. 2003. *A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, MA. (*required*)

Additional readings from the primary literature will be provided electronically.

### *Course Overview*

This course provides a general overview of the biology of amphibians and reptiles including aspects of their evolutionary history, taxonomy, anatomy, physiology, ecology, behavior, conservation, and natural history. The emphasis is on adaptive breakthroughs within each major lineage as studied in a phylogenetic context. Laboratory and field experiences will complement and expand upon topics introduced in lecture and reproduce the studies performed by contemporary herpetologists.

### *Course Requirements*

Lecture Exams	100 points × 2 = 200
Laboratory Practicals	75 points × 2 = 150
Pop Quizzes	25 points × 3* = 75
Species Specialist and Short Literature Review	25 points × 2 = 50
Lab Report <i>or</i> Group Presentation	75 points = 75
Field Notebook	50 points = 50
Participation	50 points = 50
	<b>Total points      650</b>

\* Four quizzes are given, but the lowest score is dropped.

### *Grading*

Grades will be distributed as follows: ≥ 90% = **A**; 80–89% = **B**; 70–79% = **C**; 60–69% = **D**; ≤ 59% = **F**. Plus and minus grades will be assigned as follows: percentages ending with 8 or 9 will be given a plus (e.g., 88–89% = B+); percentages ending with 0 or 1 will be given a minus (e.g., 80–81% = B-). Grades will not be curved. **Because the elements of the course are tightly interwoven, the same grade will be assigned for the lecture, lab, and field components.**

### ***Participation and University Attendance & Withdrawal Policy***

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**This is an intellectually challenging and time-demanding course. Students with other time-consuming responsibilities (heavy course loads, jobs >20 h/wk, athletics, music groups, etc.) should seriously consider their ability to meet these demands.** You are expected to attend and actively participate in every lecture, lab, and field experience (50 points of your course grade). Ten points will be deducted for unexcused absences and five points will be deducted for each tardy or for leaving class/lab early. Class withdrawals are permitted until the end of the third week. Thereafter, requests to drop a class will be honored only when a verifiable serious and compelling reason exists and when there is no viable alternative to withdrawal. Poor performance is **not** an acceptable reason for dropping a class. Students with borderline grades (e.g., A- or B+) at the end of the semester will receive the higher grade if they have attended and actively participated in all or nearly all class activities.

### ***Fieldtrips***

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Throughout the semester we will go into the field during regularly scheduled class hours and on one Sunday and one full-weekend trip (see Course Schedule). These experiences will provide the opportunity to watch live amphibians and reptiles in nature, note where and how they live, and practice field identification. Please come prepared (appropriate clothing, shoes, hat, water, sunscreen, etc.) *every* Tuesday and Thursday for possible field trips. **Fieldtrips are a mandatory part of the course (and required to fill out field notebooks) and no make-ups are possible.** Students who miss a fieldtrip will be required to do an independent assignment (e.g., keying out a specimen, working on the herpetology collection, etc.) or 25–50 points will be deducted from their final point score.

### ***Lecture Exams***

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There will be two lecture exams. The second exam will only include topics discussed after the first exam (i.e., non-comprehensive). The format will be a combination of matching, fill-in, multiple choice, short answer, and essay. Be prepared to synthesize ideas rather than just regurgitate information. **There are no make-up exams.**

### ***Laboratory Practicals***

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There will be two, non-comprehensive lab practicals. During these exams, you will be required to know amphibians and reptiles (or their parts) on sight and **without keys or notes**. Because of the substantial amount of time required to set up lab practicals, there will be **no make-ups**.

### ***Pop Quizzes***

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During the semester, four short quizzes will be given at the end of lecture. These will be short-answer format and should take no longer than 10 min to complete. **No make-up quizzes** will be offered; however, your lowest score will be dropped for grade calculation.

### ***Species Specialists***

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Students will become experts of a single amphibian or reptile species by conducting library/Internet research. A list of species will be provided along with questions and directions. The answers should be **typed** and all references consulted must be cited.

### ***Short Literature Review***

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Students will review current ( $\leq 3$  yr old) papers from the herpetological literature. The paper must (1) concern the biology of amphibians and/or reptiles, (2) be original research (not a review paper), and (3) be published in a professional journal (i.e., no magazines or Internet sources), otherwise the topic is your choice. The review should be **typed, double-spaced, 1–2 page** (2.5-cm margins and 12-point font) synopsis of the entire article written in **layperson terms** so the information is accessible to a general audience (as if you were a science reporter writing for a newspaper). Please include a photocopy of the abstract from the paper you review.

### ***Laboratory Report or Group Presentation***

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Students will write reports for the one of two laboratory exercises (see Course Schedule). The reports will require a brief review of the literature relevant to the topic of the study and will follow a standard format (introduction, methods, results, discussion, etc.). A detailed handout will be provided to guide in preparation of this report.

Alternatively, a small groups of students (2–3) will develop a project **outside of class time** on a **pre-approved** herpetological topic of their interest, synthesize gathered information, and present their information in oral format using PowerPoint. Grades will be highest for groups that present well-researched topics in a clear, concise, and aesthetically pleasing manner. Presentations will be evaluated by your fellow students as well as the instructor.

### ***Policies on Assignment Due Dates, Cheating, & Plagiarism***

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In **exceptional** cases, and only when arrangements have been made **in advance**, exams (but not pop quizzes or lab practicals) may be taken at a mutually agreed upon time (usually before the rest of the class). All other assignments must be turned in at the **beginning of class** on the due date. Late assignments will be docked **one full grade** for each day they are late. There are **no “extra credit”** assignments. As per CSUN policy, cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing, you will receive a **failing grade** for the assignment and will be reported to the university for appropriate disciplinary action.

### ***Accommodations for Disabled Students***

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If you have a documented disability (i.e., you are registered with Disability Resources and Educational Services) and feel you may need academic adjustments or accommodations, please speak with the instructor by the end of the second week of class. Discussions will remain confidential.

*Enjoy the course!*