

Human-Wildlife Interactions

IDST-3063 (3 credits)

Switzerland: Choose Your Track—Wildlife, Food Systems, Cities OR French Culture

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This course investigates the evolving relationship between humans and wildlife in Europe's diverse ecosystems, with a focus on regionally grounded challenges and continental conservation frameworks. Using field-based learning, students analyze how land use, urbanization, agriculture, and climate change influence biodiversity. Emphasis is placed on habitat fragmentation, species recovery, cultural and ethical dimensions of conservation, and broader, regional commitments to biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration. Through comparative case studies and an applied simulation project, students explore innovative approaches to sustainable land management, ecological restoration, and community-centered conservation.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the ecological, social, and economic dimensions of human-wildlife interactions in diverse European contexts.
2. **Compare** wildlife management and conservation strategies across different European countries and ecosystems.
3. **Assess** the impacts of urbanization, agriculture, and tourism on native and non-native wildlife species.
4. **Apply** principles of conservation biology and environmental ethics to case studies involving human-wildlife conflict and coexistence.
5. **Interpret** patterns of species distribution and behavior in response to human-induced environmental change.
6. **Engage** with local stakeholders, including conservationists, policymakers, and community members, to understand regional approaches to wildlife governance.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

Instructional Methods

SIT's philosophy of education is rooted in experiential learning model, which drives the design of this class. Each module allows for experience, reflection, and application. Experiences range from critical analyses of datasets to site visits and conversations with local experts. These experiences are framed by readings, multimedia texts, and class discussion. Reflection occurs throughout the learning process in various forms, such as verbal debriefs after learning on location experiences to reflexive components in papers/projects. Through reflection, students are encouraged to become aware of their process of learning, to make sense of their experiences, and connect the learning acquired on the program with previous experiences and information. Application activities reinforce learning by practicing communication skills, experimenting with theories, and preparing to transfer learning to future contexts.

Course Readings

**These are sample readings. Individual instructors may adapt as necessary.*

Bütikofer, L., Adde, A., Urbach, D., Baudraz, M., & Joost, S. (2024). High-resolution land use/cover forecasts for Switzerland in the 21st century. *Scientific Data*, 11, Article 231.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41597-024-03055-z>

ALPARC, CIPRA, ISCAR, & WWF. (2010). Restoring the web of life: Ecological networks for more biodiversity in the Alps. Alpine Network of Protected Areas.
https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/restoring_the_web_of_life.pdf

Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). (2012). Swiss biodiversity strategy. Bern: Federal Office for the Environment.
<https://www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/en/home/topics/biodiversity/publications-studies/publications/swiss-biodiversity-strategy.html>

Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). (2017). Action plan for the Swiss biodiversity strategy. Bern: Federal Office for the Environment.
<https://www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/en/home/topics/biodiversity/policy/swiss-biodiversity-strategy-and-action-plan.html>

Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). (2023, June 21). Impact of the biodiversity action plan AP SBS (PDF, 83 kB).
<https://www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/en/home/topics/biodiversity/publications-studies/publications/impact-of-the-biodiversity-action-plan-ap-sbs.html>

Stauffer, Z., & Hunziker, M. (2025). Social acceptance of human–wildlife coexistence: A case study about the reintroduction of the large herbivore European bison (*Bison bonasus*) in Switzerland. *Restoration Ecology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec.14373>

Honeck, E., Moilanen, A., Guinaudeau, B., Wyler, N., Schlaepfer, M. A., Martin, P., Sanguet, A., Urbina, L., von Arx, B., Massy, J., Fischer, C., & Lehmann, A. (2020). Implementing green infrastructure for the spatial planning of peri-urban areas in Geneva, Switzerland. *Sustainability*, 12(4), 1387. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12041387>

Tappert, S., Klöti, T., & Drilling, M. (2018). Contested urban green spaces in the compact city: The (re-)negotiation of urban gardening in Swiss cities. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 170, 69–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2017.08.016>

Salomon Cavin, J. (2017). Between distance and proximity: Nature parks and the city in Switzerland. *Articulo: Journal of Urban Research*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.4000/articulo.3283>

Vasco, F., Perrin, J. A., & Oertli, B. (2024). Urban pondscape connecting people with nature and biodiversity in a medium-sized European city (Geneva, Switzerland). *Urban Ecosystems*, 27, 1117–1137. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11252-023-01493-y>

Office cantonal de l'agriculture et de la nature. (2018, January). Stratégie Biodiversité Genève 2030 [Geneva Biodiversity Strategy 2030]. Département du territoire, République et canton de Genève. <https://www.ge.ch/document/7302/telecharger> [English translation will be provided]

Initiatives pour l'Avenir des Grands Fleuves. (2021, August). Fiches synoptiques: The Swiss Rhone [Synoptic sheets]. Retrieved June 11, 2025, from https://www.initiativesfleuves.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Fiches-synoptiques-RHONE_ENG.pdf

Janssen, P., Stella, J. C., Rähple, B., Gruel, C.-R., Seignemartin, G., Pont, B., Dufour, S., & Piégay, H. (2021). Long-term river management legacies strongly alter riparian forest attributes and constrain restoration strategies along a large, multi-use river. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 279, 111630. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2020.111630>

Grimardias, D., Chasserieu, C., Beaufigli, M., & Cattaneo, F. (2022). Ecological connectivity of the upper Rhône River: Upstream fish passage at two successive large hydroelectric dams for partially migratory species. *Ecological Engineering*, 178, 106545. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoleng.2021.106545>

Arlettaz, R., Lugon, A., Sierro, A., Werner, P., Kéry, M., & Oggier, P.-A. (2011). River bed restoration boosts habitat mosaics and the demography of two rare non-aquatic vertebrates. *Biological Conservation*, 144(8), 2126–2132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2011.05.002>

European Commission. (n.d.). Biodiversity strategy for 2030. Retrieved June 11, 2025, from https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en

European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2024, June 24). Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 on nature restoration and amending Regulation (EU) 2022/869 (Text with EEA relevance). Official Journal of the European Union, L 1991, 29 July 2024. <https://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1991/oj>

European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. (n.d.). The common agricultural policy at a glance. Retrieved June 11, 2025, from https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-glance_en

Environmental Protection Agency. (2023). EPA submission: NPWS draft strategy statement 2023–2025 (EPAC-2622). <https://www.epa.ie/publications/corporate/submissions--position-papers/epa-submission--npws-draft-strategy-statement-2023-2025-epac-2622.php>

Teagasc. (n.d.). Farmland habitats. Agriculture and Food Development Authority. <https://www.teagasc.ie/environment/biodiversity--countryside/farmland-habitats/>

European Environment Agency. (2016). Urban sprawl eating into wildlife habitats in Europe. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/urban-sprawl-eating-into-wildlife>

Williams, B., & Shiels, P. (2000). Acceleration into sprawl: Causes and potential policy responses. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/5019189_Acceleration_into_Sprawl_Causes_and_Potential_Policy_Responses

Course Assignments

Class Participation (10%)

Students are expected to be physically and mentally present for all classes. To prepare for class, students should critically read the assigned texts prior to each class and come prepared with relevant questions and insights.

Field Journal (30%)

Students will write weekly field journals, making connections between the course readings and the field visits. Journal entries are expected to be 250-500 words in length. Students are allowed to miss 2 weeks.

Stakeholder Analysis & Dialogue (30%)

Students will analyze a real-world conservation challenge based on human-wildlife interactions in each location. The topic will be decided collectively by the class. In pairs or small groups (or individually if class size is small) students will adopt stakeholder roles (e.g., local farmers, conservation biologists, tourism managers, citizens). After researching and analyzing the situation from their unique vantage point, each group will come prepared with notes and evidence to present in a formal dialogue with the other stakeholders. Each stakeholder group will present challenges and suggestions for improvement.

Strategic Conservation Plan (30%)

An individual written assignment, this final paper details a thorough conservation plan. Drawing upon the concepts, case studies, and scientific literature discussed throughout the course, students must identify a specific human-wildlife interaction challenge in a European context and develop a comprehensive, evidence-based plan aimed at mitigating conflict and fostering coexistence. The paper should be 8-10 pages with a minimum of 6-8 sources.

Note on Attendance and Participation: Due to the nature of this experiential program, full participation in all classes and program activities is required. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the Program Director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, which may impact grades. Excessive, unexcused absences could result in program dismissal. Alternative work for absences will be expected.

Note on Late Assignments: IHP programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis with approval from the Program Director or other designated staff person. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. Students who do not submit their work within the extension period will receive a failing grade.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A	74-76%	C
90-93%	A-	70-73%	C-
87-89%	B+	67-69%	D+
84-86%	B	64-66%	D
80-83%	B-	below 64	F
77-79%	C+		

Program Expectations

In order to make the most of the opportunities presented in program, communicate respectfully, prepare for student success, and demonstrate best possible engagement, SIT has the following expectations of students:

- **Content Considerations:** The texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- **Learning Community:** Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across differences and consider other perspectives with respect.
- **Presence.** Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- **Engage.** Ask questions in class. Interact with the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- **Be Honest.** Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- **Store Your Work:** Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.

- **Personal Technology Use:** Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable, especially during a guest lecture or presentation from a peer. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- **Course Communication:** Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- **Recording Policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use. Documented academic accommodations may supersede this policy.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

Note: This is a suggested sequence of modules and topics where each location explores parallel modules with a comparative focus. Local faculty should appropriately adapt how these

topics are taught and select local texts, case studies, guest speakers, and site visits that are relevant to the context and course themes.

Week 1: Course introduction

- Review of syllabus, assignments, expectations
- Overview of key concepts of biodiversity

Week 2: Ecological & policy landscape of Europe

- Examine major European Union environmental policies and international agreements shaping wildlife conservation

Week 3: Land use & landscape change

- Analyze historical and contemporary patterns of land use across Europe

Week 4: Wildlife habitat diversity

- Identify the varied types of wildlife habitats found across Europe, and explore the ecological characteristics that support different species populations

Week 5: Wildlife conflict

- Investigate the ecological and socio-economic drivers behind human-wildlife conflicts in Europe

Week 6: Urban sprawl

- Discuss the impacts of sprawling development on natural and agricultural landscapes in Europe

Week 7: Urban green spaces

- Explore how parks, gardens, and urban forests contribute to biodiversity and human well-being

Week 8: Stakeholder dialogue

- See details in assignment description

Week 9: Habitat recovery

- Explore principles, methods, and case studies for restoring degraded wildlife habitats in Europe

Week 10: Conservation engagement & public participation

- Discuss strategies for involving the public in conservation efforts and fostering pro-environmental behavior

Week 11: Course reflections