BIOL 397 (Western Colorado University/RMBL summer course)

Course Title: Rocky Mountain Wildlife

Summer 2026

Instructor: Dr. Savannah Troy, savannahrtroy@gmail.com

Class meets in front of RMBL visitor's center at times listed in schedule

Course description:

This course will explore two key themes: 1) how naturalist skills contribute towards the creation of high-quality ecological science; and 2) the historical and ongoing stewardship context of lands in and around RMBL. We will explore the life history, ecology, and conservation of vertebrates in the Rocky Mountains with a focus on species interactions and biodiversity responses to a changing world. Students will have the opportunity to shadow professionals including land managers and the expert scientists at RMBL; will learn how to survey and monitor wildlife populations; record quality ecological data; leverage natural history collections; and communicate scientific results.

Course Credits: This course is 2 credit hours and is included as an option in the RMBL Summer Research Experience/Education Program. Please visit this page for details- Course Credits – Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory (rmbl.org)

Learning objectives:

- Develop competency in naturalist skills for montane and alpine wildlife in the Colorado Rocky Mountains
- Learn a variety of field techniques used in the study of wildlife ecology
- Learn to read scientific literature and understand the scientific method as it applies to ecological inquiry

Expectations:

This course strives to be an inclusive and respectful learning environment. The instructional team for this course values the diversity of backgrounds in our community including identities of race, disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation. We expect both students and instructors to engage with one another respectfully and mindfully, and if there are any concerns to this point, you are encouraged to reach out to Dr. Troy to discuss how to resolve them. Further, this course affirms all gender identities. There will be an **optional** survey administered at the beginning of the class asking that you provide the name and pronouns that you use. This information is how your instructional team will refer to you throughout the semester unless you request a change.

Students are expected to come to class prepared, including by reading assigned materials and being ready/willing to participate in group discussions. Students are expected to behave respectfully and be engaged when guest speakers/scientists speak to the class. Students will be given advance notice of any special preparations needed for a class meeting including (but not limited to): packing a sack lunch, preparing for hiking or other physical activities, and potentially overnight camping. Your instructor will always have a first aid kit on hand and students are **not**

expected to complete physical activities outside their ability or comfort level. Please communicate any concerns regarding outdoor activities with Dr. Troy at the beginning of the class so that everyone is able to participate safely and securely in learning exercises.

Grading scheme:

Participation and Preparation	Percent of grade
Attendance	*15*
Paper discussions participation	*5*
Paper summaries	*5*
Guest speaker preparation	*10*
Assignments	
Natural observations journal	*20*
Birdsong quiz	*12.5*
Mammal specimen ID quiz	*12.5*
Final reflection assignment	*20*
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90-100% = A, 80-89% = B, 70-79% = C, 60-69% = D, 59 and below = F.

Class schedule and required equipment.

Dr. Troy will communicate with the class using a group chat and/or email thread. Please come to class prepared by having read any assigned documents and bringing supplies. Assigned documents will be available for download in the class google drive, which Dr. Troy will share with students via email. **Every class day,** you are expected to come with:

- Field notebook (any kind of journal with at least 30 pages is fine)
- Pencil or pen
- Water
- Hat and sunscreen

If any additional supplies are required for a given class day, Dr. Troy will give students advance notice using the email thread/group chat.

Schedule- subject to change

Date & Time	Activities	Assignments
15-Jun (8a-12p)	How to do science & learning museum specimens	Daily journal
17-Jun (6-7:30a)	Birding morning	Daily journal
19-Jun (6-10a; 7-11p)	Shadow a Scientist: Rosemary Smith & Gunnison Valley Observatory	Paper discussion and summary; daily journal
22-Jun (8a-5p)	Wildlife tracking and birding; class project setup	Daily journal
24-Jun (8a-12p)	Shadow a Scientist: David Inouye	Paper discussion and summary; daily journal
26-Jun (8a-4p)	Shadow a Scientist: Joshua Grinath	Paper discussion and summary; daily journal
27-Jun (6a-12p)	Gothic Breeding Bird Survey	

29-Jun (8a-5p)	Field ornithology techniques & class project progress	Daily journal
3-Jul (8a-5p)	Shadow a Scientist: Colorado Parks and Wildlife	Paper discussion and summary; daily journal
6-Jul (8a-3p)	Class project conclusion; mammal ID quiz	Daily journal
8-Jul (6-7:30a)	Bird quiz	
10-Jul (8a-5p)	Shadow a Scientist: Mexican Cut	Paper discussion and summary; daily journal

Blue days are those when you should plan to pack a sack lunch. All others, we will be back at the dining hall for regular mealtimes.