

Passing on the knowledge: A herpetology course for undergraduate students by postgraduates

INSPIRED by Dr. Billy Hau who eagerly organizes a lot of non-credit bearing courses for undergraduate students and Dr. Nancy Karraker who used to hold a formal herpetology course for the Ecology & Biodiversity major/ minor, a non-credit bearing herpetology course was put together this summer to promote the study of herpetology, enrich students' knowledge in herpetofauna and provide them with some hands-on field experiences. The course was principally coordinated and led by Dr. Edward Lau from Dr. Karraker's lab with the help of his fellow labmates, Mr. Ken Chan (M. Phil graduate) and Ms. Nicole Kit (current M. Phil student), as well as Dr. Evan Pickett. Thirty undergraduate students from four different years enrolled in the course.

The herpetology course consists of both lectures and field trips to reach its intended learning outcomes. A wide selection of topics was covered in the lectures, from history of herpetology, basic biology and ecology of herpetofauna, common field techniques and conservation, to some specific topics by invited guests and our distinguished alumni. Notably, Dr. Edgar Lehr from the Illinois Wesleyan University, USA, gave a refreshing talk on the diversity of Peruvian herpetofauna and presented a very different set of herpetofauna from the other side of the world to the students.

We were also fortunate enough to have invited Dr. Michael Lau, our distinguished alumnus who is an established, renowned local expert on herpetology, to share his decades-long experience with the students and inspire them on what they could do with their passion for herpetofauna.

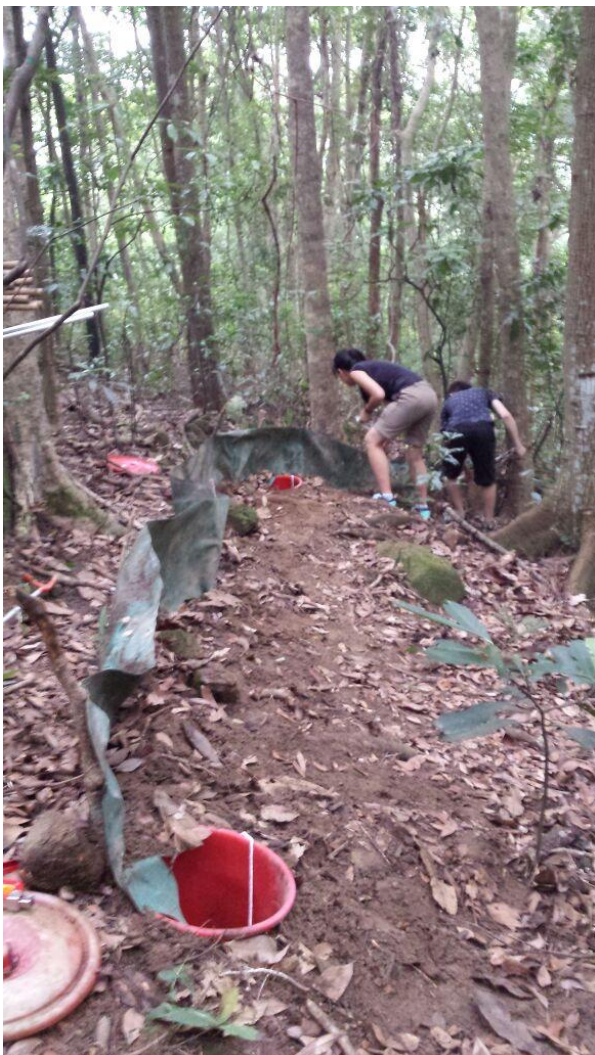


Dr. Edgar Lehr from the Illinois Wesleyan University, USA talking about his expeditions in Peru in search of herpetofauna

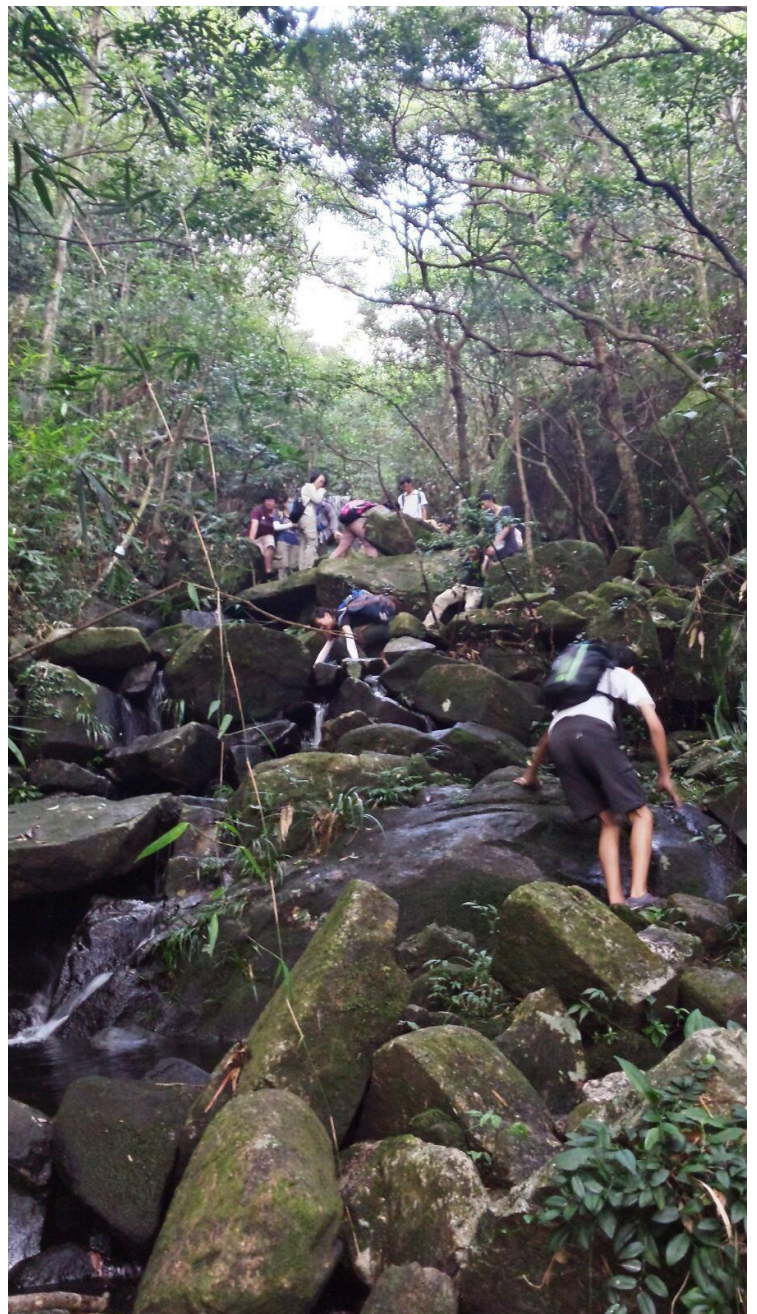


Mr. Sin Pang Lau from the Conservancy Association introducing their work in Long Valley and the importance of agriculture to local wildlife

Field trips were also organized to let students experience hands-on field and survey techniques (e.g. cover boards, pitfall traps with drift-fences and auditory survey). Field trip sites (which included Pokfulam, Tai Po Kau, Mui Tsz Lam, Tai Mo Shan, Shek Kong catchwater and Long Valley) were carefully selected to cover a variety of habitat types to maximize the diversity of herpetofauna to be seen. Even though some of the field trips were somewhat tough and physically demanding for students who were not used to work in such environments, the students still managed to complete them without much complaint.



Repairing some used pitfall traps with drift-fences for field demonstration



Climbing up and down a montane stream – a big challenge to some of the students!



Mr. Bill Ho explaining features of a Tokay gecko to students

The course concluded with a students' presentations session which aimed at promoting student-centred learning and mutual sharing of knowledge among students. The presentation topics focused primarily on research, public and media perception and conservation of herpetofauna. Students were actively asking questions; some interesting points were raised which initiated some discussion.

A lot of people have to be thanked for making this course possible. First of all, the idea of creating this course would not have occurred without the inspiration from Dr. Billy Hau and Dr. Nancy Karraker. Thanks must be given to Prof. David Dudgeon, our course advisor, and Ms. Lily Ng for her technical support. Mr. Ken Chan, Ms. Nicole Kit and Dr. Evan Pickett have been incredible buddies as part of the core organizing team of the course. A lot of alumni and friends have sacrificed their personal time to prepare and deliver lectures or help with field trips: Dr. Michael Lau, Dr. Yik Hei Sung, Dr. Edgar Lehr, Mr. Bill Ho, Mr. Ivan Tse, Ms. Teresa Ma, Mr. Sin Pang Lau and Mr. Jianhuan Yang. Last but not least, as much as we wanted to create a herpetology course, it would be a waste of time and effort without the commitment of our undergraduates who share the same love for herpetofauna.

Dr. Edward Lau
Course coordinator



Tadpole survey in a muddy field



A Rufous Burrowing Snake, one of many snake species we encountered during the course



Lab session for tadpole identification

In total 28 students has completed the course, they included:

Chu Keng Hong

Luk Tsz Yat

Chang Alan Chi Leung

Chung Ching Yan

Tracy Wong

Leung Yu Yan

Cheung Shun Chi, Roy

Yip Yuen Ming Louisa

Yeung Tsz Ching

Li Chung Hoi

Lee Shing Yiu

Mok Teen Wai

Cheung Cheuk Yiu

Lam Tsz Yin, Kestrel

Chung Yan Chi Arthur

Cheng Lok Yi

Chan Cho Kwan

Hau Cheuk Yu

Ho Pui Shuen

Tsang Hin Fat

Wan Chun Hin

Chan Man Ho

Chan Wing Kwan

Wong Sze Wai, Cecilia

Wong Ka Kiu

Lam Pui Yin

Wu Ka Lun

Ma Chun Ning



Group photo at the Tai Mo Shan field trip

Thanks for their participation and support!