

John Confer (SECTION 01)

Use of a Global Positioning System (GPS) to map the South Hill Ecosystem, relating plant communities to bird density.

Ithaca College owns about a square mile of wildlands that extend south of the campus buildings. This natural area has numerous kinds of ecosystems some of which are quite rare. The vegetation in this area has never been well studied and several natural communities have been recognized. However, the location of the natural communities is poorly mapped and the winter animal life in this area is almost unknown. This project would map the natural ecosystems and try to correlate the distribution of the plant communities with the observed animal distribution.

Consider waiving 303-30200 by doing summer research and writing a report on the summer work and giving an oral presentation to the department as well as taking an additional bio course at the 200+ level.

Summer Research on ECOLOGY & CONSERVATION BIOLOGY. This project requires external funding, which is uncertain at this time. If funded, this field research will continue my studies on the rapidly declining Golden-winged and Blue-winged warblers and for the guild of shrubland birds. About 70% of the shrubland birds of eastern U.S. show a statistically significant decline, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Shrubland habitat is rapidly declining as abandoned farmland passes through a shrubland stage and succeeds into second growth forests. In many regions of eastern U.S., we probably have less shrubland now than we had in pre-colonial times.. Both golden-wings and blue-wings are declining so rapidly that they are under "Status Assessment" for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine if they should be listed within the Endangered Species Act. I am co-author for the Status Assessment for both species and results obtained by student research assistants have a direct influence on the recommendation for listing and for habitat management. Studies this summer will help determine the nesting success of shrubland birds in three kinds of upland habitat (natural succession fields, normal maintenance on power line rights-of-way, and experimentally manipulated ROW), and compare nesting density and nesting success in upland vs. wetland habitats.

LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS. This summer field work is intense, requires long hours of work and is physically tiring. We will have to work and live and drive and eat and clean house in close proximity with other, tired co-workers who start the season as complete strangers. The success of summer research crews requires that everyone sustains a sensitivity for everyone else. Because bird activity is far greater early in the morning, even in the half hour pre-dawn, in many mornings we will leave for the field by 4:30 or 4:45. Consequently, there are some guidelines for this communal living. I know that tired workers become forgetful and grouchy and loose motivation to go the extra "mile" [you could take that literally] to find another nest. Consequently, it is a requirement that we retire to our rooms generally before 9:00 and almost never later than 10. I know this sounds childish, but after 25 years of working with field crews I know what works and does not work. You must expect to share in shopping, cooking, cleaning, data entry, packing/unpacking the car, care of damp or wet gear and general cooperative living. I assure you this can be fun. It can even be a really wonderful experience. Yet, I have had unfortunate summer crews that did not work well together. From such experiences, I am now sure that working together cooperatively is necessary for the accumulation of an appropriate quantity and quality of data and is a requirement for continued employment throughout the summer field season.

We will work primarily in southern NY in Sterling Forest State Park within the Hudson Highlands. While working at this location. We will live in a cottage in s. NY, which is clean but not fancy. Living facilities for work in the northeast have not been determined, but we may live in cottages or in motels. In all cases, we will have to live close together and travel for hundreds of miles together in cars. (Do you know the song about "New age sensitive man"? It is supposed to apply to male - female relationships, but the concept applies here). Sometimes, we will split up during the day and sometimes we will spend some days apart.

The nesting season for Neotropical migrants is extremely brief. These birds do not care about your weekend schedule and all data on breeding must be collected over a very brief time. Consequently, we will work 6 days a week for the first 7 weeks (8 May - 1 July). Each individual will be able to choose one weekend in that 7 weeks where they can take 2 or possible 3 days off. Later in the season we will spend 8 additional days doing data entry and compilation and vegetation measurements. We will determine the exact days of this follow-up work by mutual agreement. For instance, one could work straight through on weekends without a break and finish before 4 July, or one could take several days off and resume after 4 July. I will determine this timing depending primarily on the necessity of completing the data collection and analyses, but also considering your individual schedules.