

**Contemporary topics in Israeli nature conservation –workshop**

**by Merav Seifan**

**Course description and objective:**

The study of nature conservation and management relies on general theories in biology and ecology. However, these theories are only the basis for solutions to dilemmas encountered during the everyday work on nature conservation issues. In this annual course, we aim at bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge based on the academic courses offered by the program in ecology, conservation & management and the urgent needs encountered during the on-going work in nature conservation in our region. Students will be exposed to the multiple demands and tasks that compose actual conservation work and will need to participate in the process of producing fast, practical solutions to urgent problems which are relevant to our immediate environment. By working in cooperation with the nature reserve authority, the students will be introduced to contemporary topics in conservation and nature management and will be required to suggest a framework to study the problems at hand, aiming at finding a solution that will be both scientifically robust and practical.

**Course structure:**

- The course will be conducted with the active participation of members of the nature authority staff, especially from the immediate region of the Negev. It will include a weekly meeting that will be divided into one-hour lecture and one-hour exercise, summing to 1.5 cpt per semester (3 cpt for the annual course). In addition, the students are expected to perform independent work on the specific topic and to participate in an excursion in which the topic will be presented in the field.
- The course is designed for M.Sc. and Graduate students of the ecology, conservation & management program.
- The assessment of student work will be based on written documents and oral presentations:

Assessment of students and structure of final grade:

Proposal and work plan	30%
Presentation of topic	20%
Presentation of results and solutions	30%
Final report	20%

**Detailed description of course units:**

1. Introductory meetings between students and staff of the nature reserve authorities; Presentation of contemporary topics that are of high priority and discussion of the different topics with the nature authority staff; Assignment of students to specific topics.
2. Independent work in the assigned groups; The aim is to specifically define the problems using scientific tools, to suggest a way to solve, reduce or assess the problem (depending on topic) and to create an experimental framework to test the suggested solution. During this unit, lectures will be dedicated to the chosen topics and to particular methodology related to it.
3. Presentation of the problem to the forum (students and nature reserve authority staff).

4. Excursion – introduction to the nature reserve authority work in our region with a specific focus on the chosen topics.
5. Submission of a working proposal, based on the group discussions and the adjustments suggested by the whole forum.
6. Independent work in the groups toward data collection and analysis of results. During this unit, lectures will be dedicated to relevant analysis solutions.
7. Presentation of work progress and results to the forum.
8. Submission of a final report.

**Currently we will be focusing on one project, thus capitalizing on the information gathered by the students last year and advancing the analysis and cooperation with the nature reserve authority.**

The project will center on the assessment and understanding of the noise impact of visitors to the Ovdad canyon.