



TROPICAL BIOLOGY ASSOCIATION

COURSE GUIDE

**A general guide to all TBA courses
2010 edition**

For participants from Africa & Madagascar

Contains important information on:

- The course
- Forms you need to send TBA
- Preparation
- What to expect

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Summary of key dates:

Week commencing 22nd March: Invitations to attend courses sent to successful applicants

14 days after receipt of invitation: Confirm your acceptance of your course place

19th April:

Deadline for sending completed Liability Release Form (Form 1, p. 9) to TBA

1st May:

African & Malagasy participants must provide a copy of their passport – all relevant pages. In addition, **West Africans** to send 2 coloured passport photos.

Three weeks before the start of your course:

Pre-course Registration Form (Form 2, p.10) returned to the TBA

A brief introduction to the TBA and its courses

The TBA is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization working in partnership with institutions in Europe, Africa and Asia to build expertise in biodiversity research and conservation in the tropics.

Activities of the TBA

Effective biodiversity conservation requires an informed, well-motivated and self-sustaining community of tropical ecologists. The Tropical Biology Association is working to meet this need through its field courses and support to tropical institutions. Its unique feature is bringing together biologists from host region (African or ASEAN) and European and other countries for relevant field training and institutional support. This approach is an effective means of exchanging ideas and forging links for future collaboration.

The TBA ran its first courses in 1994 and has trained almost 1300 biologists from nearly 50 countries worldwide. Following their TBA courses, participants keep in touch through our newsletters and our alumni network.

The TBA courses

TBA courses teach current concepts and techniques in tropical ecology and conservation to graduates or postgraduates at an early stage in their training. They are aimed at biologists wishing to pursue a career in research or conservation and who have little practical field experience. By selecting half the participants from the host region and half from elsewhere, the TBA provides a unique forum for sharing experiences and building international links between like-minded biologists.

Lasting for one month the courses include over 60 hours of fieldwork, practicals and analysis and 100 hours of independent project work. The emphasis of TBA field courses is on building skills and understanding, rather than accumulating factual information. They cover a range of topics in plant and animal ecology, including natural resource management, conservation biology, experimental design and field techniques.

The first week of the course introduces the flora and fauna of the field site during guided walks, identification workshops and field exercises. Evening lectures and seminars cover selected topics in tropical ecology, focusing on the expertise of the teaching staff present. Teachers are selected from institutions throughout the world so that we are able to provide the variety and depth of teaching that no single university or NGO could match. Short excursions to nearby projects and different habitat types take place during the second week. The remainder of the course is devoted to independent research projects carried out mainly in pairs. Projects are written up in full and presented to the class as short research papers.

Courses are intensive, but since you may not get an opportunity to learn about tropical ecology in such a unique setting again, we think we should make the most of the time you have available. On successful completion of a course, the TBA awards participants a certificate.

Typical daily schedule

07:00 – 07:30	Breakfast
07:30 – 12:30	Morning session
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
14:30 – 17:30	Afternoon session
19:00 – 19:30	Evening meal
19:45 – 21:00	Evening lecture or presentation, moth trapping, night walks, socialising

IMPORTANT: The schedule is intensive and will operate 7 days a week; you will be expected to participate in all activities and, while we do try to include free time, work usually continues throughout Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Typical course outline

Each course timetable is unique and we will send you a more detailed timetable before the start of your course. Here is a typical course outline

Day	Activity
1	Travel to field site
2	Orientation, introductions and equipment handout
3-4	Identification workshops and guided walks. Seminar on tropical diversity and thinking of research questions. Lectures on ecology, biogeography and relevant local research programmes
5-10	Field exercises and seminars on biodiversity assessment and management. Lectures on current issues in tropical ecology and research
11-13	SHORT EXCURSIONS
14	Introduction to research projects
15	Project clinics
16-25	Independent research projects and evening lectures covering staff research interests and further topics in tropical ecology, biodiversity assessment and management.
26	Participant presentations of projects
27-28	Excursions and site visits. Return

What will life be like on a TBA course?

We hope you will be adaptable and fit in with the field station domestic arrangements. Living away from home in close proximity with new acquaintances for a whole month does require a little bit of compromise from everyone. A diverse array of nationalities means different cultures, beliefs and codes of conduct, which is all part of the learning experience on a TBA course. We ask our participants to respect these differences and consider moderating their behaviour if appropriate e.g. excessive drinking may be offensive to those who do not drink for religious reasons. We ask all participants to come on the course expecting differences and to try to be tolerant of them. Please respect local sensibilities regarding your clothing and behaviour and remember that the field station is a public facility. Common sense and a little thoughtfulness resolve most dilemmas, but some things are not so obvious; please ask a member of the TBA staff if in doubt.

What to expect on the course

The TBA course will be an intensive one with field practicals, seminars, lectures and independent project research and write-ups over the 4-week period. Clearly, we cannot teach you everything there is to know about tropical ecology in one month, but the course will provide a unique opportunity for you to learn new skills and concepts and/or expand your knowledge of a particular subject area. But how much you get out of the course, depends very much on how much effort you put into the course itself. Please do not come expecting just to be 'fed' information; this course will make you think and learn for yourself.

Meals

We will be eating fairly traditional food, which is generally very healthy (high in fibre, low in cholesterol), but like any institutional food, it may seem a little monotonous after a month, however delicious it is. At least half the meals will be vegetarian, such as beans (pulses) and rice. We are usually served one meat dish a day, sometimes less frequently, which tends to be stews made from chicken, lamb/mutton, beef or fish. Breakfasts will be white bread, eggs, and some fruit. Drinking water is also provided and available throughout the day. Please be aware that, while we are able to exercise influence over the catering arrangements at the field stations, we are less able to do the same during the brief excursions away from these sites.

Some people bring their favourite spread to liven up the bread at breakfast. Otherwise, you may wish to bring a few "treats" with you such as your favourite sweets or snacks for long days in the field.

Vegetarians and special dietary requirements

We can make special arrangements for vegetarians and some other special requirements – please let the TBA office know these as soon as possible. **Although we do our best, it may not be possible to follow a strict vegan diet on a TBA course.**

Key information

Scholarships

You will receive an award that covers the full cost of course fees, accommodation and travel to/from the field course; please note that African/Malagasy participants are not eligible for the Borneo course.

In addition, the TBA will also pay you an allowance for travel and incidentals to help you pay for travel to/from airport or bus stations and cover travel expenses such as passports (if you do not already possess one), visas, and other costs associated with getting to the course. These allowances are paid through Western Union. If, for any reason, you are unable to receive payment via Western Union you should contact the TBA office immediately to discuss an alternative (for example, bank transfer).

- Payment will be made from the TBA Cambridge office; you will be contacted to arrange and confirm payment details.
- TBA does not take responsibility for money going astray once it has been sent by the method stated above, nor will it cover losses associated with money transfers. It is up to the individual to ensure the method of transfer used is safe and agreeable.
- Allowance or balances not paid in advance will be paid in the currency of the country where the course is held, and at a standard rate set by TBA at the start of the course.

Course Liability Release Form

It is very important that you send us this information before the course starts. **Please fill in Form 1 (p.9) and send this to us as soon as possible (and no later than 19th April).**

How do I register for the course?

Successful applicants must register for their course no later than 3 weeks prior to the course start date. The form is at the back of this guide (p.10). Please detach, complete and return them to us.

What do I need to do to prepare for the course?

Passports

- **Make sure you have a valid passport.** If you don't have one, make sure you apply for one in plenty of time. **You will automatically lose your offer if you have not sent us your passport details one month prior to the start date for your course.**
- **Your passport should be valid for at least six months after the date you arrive in the course country.** All African & Malagasy participants must send **a copy of the information pages of their passports** - pages with your picture, passport details (place of issue/ validity/passport number, etc) preferably by 19th April to the TBA Nairobi office. These copies will be copied to appropriate immigration offices at the course site for information.
- **All participants must provide details of their next of kin** – name, full address (including **phone and/or fax**), and relation. **West African participants must also provide 2 coloured passport size photos.** This information is needed to process referred visas to allow them attend the courses. Any additional information that may be needed will be communicated separately.

Getting a visa

Many of you will require visas for entry into the course countries. This information can be found in the separate course guide for your specific course.

We strongly recommend that you check with the relevant embassy in your own country to find out whether you need a visa or not and how much it will cost. Make sure that the visa is valid for the entire time you will be in the country. Start applying for your visa NOW as it can take a long time to receive one.

At your port of entry, ensure you verbally inform the immigration officer of the length of time required in the country (even if you have filled in these dates on your entry form) to cover your entire stay (i.e. including any days immediately before and after the course). The time spent in the host country WILL EXCEED 30 DAYS so please ensure that the officer does not write '1 month' above your visa; where this has happened in the past, considerable time has been expended trying to get visa extensions in these circumstances. Ensure that your passport is stamped on entry into the country.

- If you have difficulties obtaining a visa please contact the Nairobi office as soon as possible. Anyone returning elsewhere (e.g. in foreign study country) rather than their home country will have to arrange their visa independent of TBA; TBA will not incur any costs associated with such arrangements.

Flights

Except for those travelling by road, all participants will receive a THIRD CLASS air ticket payable, and arranged for by TBA or as otherwise informed; we will write to you about this

- We will meet all flights at the airport – see specific course guide for more details.

Money

- You will be paid a small personal allowance by the course co-ordinators at the start of the course (for drinks, postcards etc.) and you may feel the need to bring extra pocket money for other personal expenditure (e.g. airtime, souvenirs, etc.). As a very rough guide for these additional expenses, you may need 50 \$US dollars for the course duration but this will vary from person to person. It is a good idea to carry this money in cash. Anything more than that should be carried in travellers' cheques. **Currencies accepted in the course countries include pounds sterling and \$US dollars (East Africa), Euros & \$US dollars (Madagascar).**
- **Travellers' Cheques** – Please note that during the course itself there are no facilities to change travellers' cheques. You will need to change these before going to the field sites. Remember to bring the receipt, as some banks won't change travellers' cheques without it.
- **Credit cards / Debit cards** - DO NOT RELY ON CREDIT CARDS (Visa, MasterCard) or DEBIT CARDS (Maestro, Cirrus). Very few places accept them, even in the cities. Visa is the most widely accepted card in all host countries; beware that MasterCard, Maestro & Cirrus CAN RARELY BE USED IN ANY OF THE HOST COUNTRIES (and not at all in Madagascar).
- **The black market** – DO NOT CHANGE MONEY ON THE BLACK MARKET. It is illegal and you may be tricked.
- For specific information about changing money and costs in the country where your course is being held, please see Part 2 of the course guide. We can't give exchange rates as these change regularly; for the latest currency exchange rates, please visit the following website: www.xe.com

Health, medical and safety advice

Tropical Biology Association courses are physically demanding, involving some walking on difficult terrain and working in climatic extremes, especially in Madagascar. You should be in good health and must inform us of any existing health conditions or of any medication being taken (see Form 1, page 9).

ESSENTIAL: Malaria: the risk of getting malaria is high throughout East Africa, Madagascar and Malaysia

- Even if you live in an area where malaria is endemic and believe that you are resistant, malaria is likely to be of a different strain. Malaria is a serious disease and must be avoided at all costs. There is chloroquine-resistant malaria in many regions.

- **The TBA recommends all participants take malaria prophylactics.** Your doctor or a travel nurse will advise you on what you should take, how long you should take it for, and provide up to date information on malarial areas.
- Please take sensible anti-mosquito measures; where mosquito nets are provided, use them (if you don't get bitten, you can't catch malaria). In the evenings (when mosquitoes are most active), wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts, and wear socks or douse your ankles with insect repellent.

Yellow fever

Requirements may vary dependent on where you are travelling from; yellow fever is endemic in some countries and you **must check the requirements very carefully in your own country.** Hence, inoculation for yellow fever may be necessary. If you do not live in the country in which the course is being held, **you may need to have this inoculation to enter**, proof of which should be stamped on an **International Vaccination Certificate** for presentation at the airport (or your port of entry). Make sure you bring the certificate with you. Also, yellow fever inoculation must be taken 10 days before travel date.

We recommend you consult your doctor regarding inoculations and malaria prophylactics; the TBA cannot offer advice on these matters. It can take time to organise inoculations so don't leave it until the last minute!

Medication

If you take medication regularly, don't rely on being able to obtain it abroad. Please make arrangements with your own doctor and bring enough to last you the entire duration of the course.

Allergies

If you suffer from any allergies related to food or medication, please provide us with the full details regarding the nature of your allergies. This information is important in helping us plan for emergencies.

Medical kit

There is a TBA medical kit for minor health problems. However, as some people suffer allergies to various medicines, you are recommended to bring a small kit of your own containing the following:

- **Malaria prevention tablets**
- **Insect repellent**
- **Basic painkillers** e.g., aspirin or paracetamol
- **Plasters, sterile wipes, wound dressings** etc.
- **Antiseptic cream**
- **Cream for insect bites** (very useful if you know mosquitoes like the taste of you!)

What to bring with you

You do not need any specialist equipment, other than that recommended on our list below.

Clothes

Please consider local cultural sensitivities when packing your clothes. People do not tend to wear revealing clothing, so choose shorts and T-shirts that will not offend. Camouflage wear is NOT considered acceptable; however, do remember that you will be more conspicuous to animals and birds in bright clothes (e.g. white, yellow, red & blue) and these may reduce your chance of seeing them before they see you!

- **Walking boots – essential for all courses.** Bring waterproof boots with a good tread for Uganda and Tanzania; **trainers/casual shoes are not suitable for walking at these sites**
- **Lightweight, loose trousers** (if you wear shorts in the forest and savanna, your legs may be scratched and pierced)
- **Long-sleeved shirts** (better protection for your arms when clambering through thick vegetation). Short sleeved shirts for short forest walks and around the field station.
- **Waterproof clothing** – raincoat or poncho and trousers. It will almost certainly rain during your stay. **Please come prepared to get wet in Uganda and Tanzania!** For Madagascar participants, a raincoat is also recommended for occasional morning showers.
- **Shorts; t-shirts; trousers; warm sweater or jacket - essential for cold mornings and nights; socks** (useful in the evening to keep the mosquitoes at bay); **trainers/casual shoes** (please don't walk around in bare feet)

Other items

- Towel
- Toothbrush (always use bottled/potable water for brushing teeth), soap, shampoo, etc.
- National or traditional dresses and outfits (optional) for social events

Equipment – essential

- **Small 'day bag'** for your note books, sandwiches, samples, etc. during field excursions and other trips (TBA has a few day packs to loan, but if you have your own, you should bring them)

Equipment – recommended

- Water bottle; pen knife; roll of toilet paper for emergencies; torch or head torch plus spare bulbs and lots of spare batteries (TBA has a few torches to loan, but if you have your own, you should bring them); note books and pen (for lecture notes – TBA will provide small notebooks and pencils for field notes); sun hat, sunglasses and sun cream.

Equipment – optional

- Mosquito net. These are provided at all our field sites.
- Lightweight sleeping bag. Useful if you suffer from the cold (nights can be chilly).
- Identification guides. The TBA has multiple bird guides, a few flower and animal guides and a tree guide. However, many people like to have their own copy
- Statistics book: TBA has some statistics text books in English but participants have found it useful to have a statistics book in their own language. **The statistical software used during the course is Minitab.**
- Camera and binoculars - if you have a good pair of **binoculars**, bring them (7x40 are best in the forest). If you have a **camera** you can buy film duty free at airports, and bring plenty! You are advised to bring your own batteries. Remember to bring a camera case to protect from the elements in the field! Most participants now bring digital cameras on courses; remember that **there will not be facilities to download images while on the course so you should bring additional memory cards if planning to do lots of photography. As a courtesy to teaching staff, you are also requested to keep photography to a minimum during field exercises.**
- A dictionary - if English is not your first language, a dictionary will be very useful for both writing your projects and general communications on the course.
- Treats - such as sweets and chocolate.
- Mobile phones – you are welcome to bring a mobile phone with you but see the specific course guide for details of coverage. **It is, however, strict TBA policy that phones should not be used during timetabled activities.**

What the TBA provides

- Paper and pens but it would be helpful if you brought your own notebooks for lectures
- Compasses
- Binoculars - best to bring your own if you have them
- Computers – these are only for use for course-related work and no personal items (e.g. CD roms, iPods, MP3 players, memory sticks, digital cameras) may be used/connected to them. Some participants choose to bring their own laptops and everyone is free to do so at your own risk. **However, due to problems with transmission of computer viruses, you will not be able to transfer material between your own and TBA computers**
- Library of tropical biology text books, statistic books and research papers

What you need to send to TBA

Form 1 – Liability Release (please return to Nairobi office)

Please answer all questions & return the completed form to the TBA by 19th April at the very latest.

The TBA course will be physically demanding and participants must be in good health to attend; a lack of general fitness may compromise your enjoyment of the course. Failure to disclose known health problems might potentially endanger other participants on the course. Field research could include walking considerable distances (over 5 km) in sometimes difficult terrain and may entail working in extreme climatic conditions.

You **MUST** inform us here of any specific health problems prior to attending the course. The TBA cannot be held responsible for any health problems that arise during the course that you have omitted to mention in this form. You are expected to bring all your own medication with you on the course. The TBA will not provide any medication apart from emergency first aid treatments; you will be working in relatively isolated areas that are some distance from the nearest medical facilities.

1. Full name (as it appears on your passport):

2. Have you read the description of the TBA course conditions and can you confirm that you are in a fit and healthy condition to participate fully? Please tell us below (or on a separate sheet if required) about any health problems that may affect you during the course.

3. Do you have any allergies (e.g. nut, medication, severe hayfever allergies)?

Please provide details

4. Blood group (if known):

5. Are you using any regular medication that you will be taking during the course?

Please provide details

6. Is there anything else you think we should know before the course starts?

Please provide details

7. Please sign and date the following declaration:

I confirm that I am in good physical and mental health and the information above is correct. I also undertake to inform the TBA of any changes in my medical condition prior to the commencement of the course.

Signature : _____ Date : _____

Form 2 – Registration Form (please return to Nairobi office)

Please return the completed form to the TBA at your earliest convenience but no later than three weeks before you course starts

1. **Name:**
2. **Next of Kin: (whom we can contact while you are in field)**

Name:

Relationship (e.g. Mother):

Address:

Phone:

Fax:

3. Travel Details (Arrival and Departure)

If we are NOT arranging your travel for you, please complete this section:

Arrival

Date of arrival:

Time of arrival:

Flight number:

Departure

Date of departure:

Time of departure:

Flight number:

If you are not flying into the country, please give details of when and how you expect to arrive and leave and where you will be staying before the rendezvous with TBA (if known):

4. **Dietary requirements (if any):**
5. **Other information you would like us to know:**

Please sign and date the following declaration:

I confirm that I am in good health and the information above is correct.

Signature : _____

Date : _____

PARTICIPANTS - CHECKLIST

All enquiries and forms are dealt with through the TBA Nairobi office

- Make sure you know what your allowance covers/doesn't cover.
- Send a completed **Liability Release Form (Form 1, p.9)** to TBA Nairobi by 19th April.
- **Check you have a valid passport.** This must be valid for at least 6 months after the date you arrive in the course country. If you do not hold a passport you must APPLY as soon as possible as it could take some time to obtain it, and the visa thereafter.
- Send TBA Nairobi **copies of the relevant pages of your passport (or travel permit)** by 1st May. This is important as the TBA must submit proof of persons attending courses to the immigration department of host country.
- All **West Africans MUST send 2 coloured passport size photos** to TBA Nairobi by 1st May. The photos are need to process referred visas, where required but will be returned if not used. In addition, provide full details of next of kin.
- Apply for **visa (where applicable)** at LEAST 2 months in advance. Make sure it is valid for the entire time you are in the foreign country. Any problems contact the TBA Nairobi office, immediately. **Those travelling from, or returning to, countries other their home country will be responsible for arranging their visas and any associated costs.**
- Check **vaccination** requirements (**essential to check yellow fever requirements**) and malaria preventive tablets. Remember to bring any medication you are taking with you on the course. Also inform TBA of the medication in question.
- Ensure you have **approval from your employer/institutions** to attend your TBA course.
- **Keep the original copy of your course offer letter** and only give out copies/the spare sent to you by TBA.
- Send your course **Registration Form (Form 2, p.10)** to TBA Nairobi at LEAST 3 weeks before the start of the course.
- Check **equipment list** and what you need to bring for your course.
- **Flights/accommodation** will be booked for you by the TBA.
- **The TBA will arrange your** insurance cover. Please let us know if you already have an international insurance policy already, that you can use.

If you have any further queries, please contact us at:

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