

HERPETOLOGY, Spring 2026

BIOL 439 / 539, EVPP 439 / 539

Basic information:

Instructor:

Arndt F. Laemmerzahl

Office: Expl. 1206
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Phone: 703 993 5608
Office hours: See web page.

Texts:

Herpetology, 4th ed., L.J. Vitt and J.P. Caldwell, 2013. Academic Press.

Not a great text, but there are not a lot of choices.

A field guide is also required. There are several possibilities

Reptiles and Amphibians, Eastern/Central North America
R. Powell, R. Conant and J. T. Collins. Peterson Series Field Guides. 2016.
Houghton Mifflin.

Finally updated after 25 years!

The National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Reptiles and Amphibians.
F. W. King. 1979. Knopf.

*Uses photographs instead of drawings. Quite old, but does have actual pictures.
The taxonomy has changed a lot since this was published. Some people do prefer
this one or use it as a secondary source.*

Lecture exams:

Two exams, a midterm and final. Each is worth 35% of your total grade. Each exam is closed book, and will contain a combination of short essays, multiple choice, fill in the blanks, labeling and other things.

The midterm will use the entire class period and is 1:15 minutes long.

The final is also 1:15 minutes. It is not cumulative.

Labs:

Lab is worth 30% of your grade. You have three lab exams and possibly some miscellaneous assignments. Points are earned as follows:

Two identification exams, one for amphibians, one for reptiles; 10% each. These may be partially photo based.

A frog call exam, 5%.

Miscellaneous assignments, 5% (some or all of these points may be added to the lab exams)

Field trips are worth 1/2 extra credit point each (all you need to do is attend!).

There are several field trips scheduled; the dates and number may vary depending on weather and other factors.

Grading scale:

Your final grade will be based on your percent out of 100. The following grading scale will be used:

Undergraduates:

96-100 = A+	90 - 95 = A	86 - 89 = B+	80 - 85 = B
76 - 79 = C+	70 - 75 = C	60 - 69 = D	0 - 59 = F

Graduate students:

96-100 = A+	90 - 95 = A	86 - 89 = B+	80 - 85 = B
76 - 79 = C+	70 - 75 = C	0 - 69 = F	

You will notice that (-) grades are not used.

Miscellaneous

Honor code: if you are caught cheating, you will be taken to the honor committee. No arguments. Although quite rare, they have expelled people even for a first offense. Offenses are treated more severely for graduate students.

You are responsible for information and announcements presented in class and/or through e-mail. Not being in class or not checking your e-mail is not an excuse. Make sure your GMU e-mail is working - this is *your* responsibility!

Please do not be disruptive in class. No one is forcing you to be in class. If you want to have a conversation, use your phone, etc., please do it outside of class or you may be asked to leave.

Missed class: if for some reason class is canceled, then the following class will cover the material for the missed class. This is particularly important should an exam day be canceled for whatever reason (the exam will take place during our next scheduled class).

If you are having problems please see your instructor. Your instructor is here to help you learn this material **and** help you pass this class. They will do what they can to make sure that you make it through this class successfully. *Please don't wait too long if you are having difficulties.*

Finally, please try to be in class. *You will almost certainly not do well if you are absent too often.*

Tentative* schedule:

Week of:	Lecture topic	Lab topic	Comments
Jan 20	Intro/Taxonomy	no lab	Monday classes don't meet
Jan 26	Evolution/origin	Introduction/Lab procedures/Taxonomy	
Feb 2	Amphibian anatomy and physiology	Amphibian diversity	
Feb 9	Amphibian anatomy and physiology	Amphibian diversity	lab is self study
Feb 16	Reptile anatomy and physiology	Field trip to Huntley Meadows	Monday lecture and lab will be combined
Feb 23	Reptile anatomy and physiology	Lab exam on Amphibians Discussion of preservation techniques	
March 2	Amphibian diversity	Field trip to Burke Lake (?)	Monday lecture and lab will be combined
March 9	Spring Break	Spring Break	
March 16	Amphibian diversity	Lab exam on frog calls Reptile diversity	
March 23	Midterm Reptile diversity	Reptile diversity	lab is self study
March 30	Reptile diversity	Field trip to Mason Neck	Monday lecture and lab will be combined
April 6	Reptile diversity	Lab exam on Reptiles Discussion on keeping Field notes	
April 13	Behavior	Field trip to Smithsonian facility (?)	Monday lecture and lab will be combined
April 20	Ecology	Field trip to Huntley Meadows <i>or</i> Mason Neck	Monday lecture and lab will be combined
April 27	Ecology / Conservation	Field trip to research <i>Studies of the Piedmont</i>	Monday lecture and lab will be combined

*Depending on weather and other factors, the field trip schedule may change.

Learning outcomes:

- Understand the basics of amphibian and reptile anatomy
- Be able to explain the origins and evolution of amphibians and reptiles
- Be able to identify local (and some foreign) amphibians and reptiles
- Understand basic behavior, physiology and conservation as related to amphibians and reptiles.

Information that applies to all classes at GMU:

(Some of this is a bit repetitive, but important. It applies to *all* your classes at GMU.)

Academic integrity

GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit to those people in the proper, accepted form. When doing homework, the work must be yours. It is totally unacceptable to copy the work of another student in this course in any form.

GMU email accounts

Students must use their Mason email accounts—either the existing “MEMO” system or a new “MASONLIVE” account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES:

Writing center

A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

University libraries (“Ask a Librarian”)

<http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

Counseling and psychological services (CAPS)

(703) 993-2380;
<http://caps.gmu.edu>

University policies

The University Catalog, <http://catalog.gmu.edu>, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/>. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.

Disability Resource Center

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.