

GEOG 2156B: Animal Geographies

Course Outline – Winter 2026

This course is taught in person



1. Course Information

Classes Start	Spring Reading Week	Classes End	Study day	Exam Period
January 5	February 16-20	April 9	April 10-11	April 12-30

January 13, 2026: Last day to add a second-term half course

February 16, 2026: Family Day

March 30, 2026: Last day to drop a second term half course without penalty

April 3, 2026: Good Friday

Course Instructor	Contact Information	Office Hours
Dr. Tony Weis	tony.weis@uwo.ca	Thursdays 1.30-2.30 pm, SSC 1403

Teaching Assistants	Contact Information	Office Hours
Briana Magnuson	bmagnuso@uwo.ca	TBD
Eva Escandon	eescando@uwo.ca	TBD

2. Calendar Description

Investigates the fast-changing geographies of animals in relation to global environmental change. The initial focus is on extinctions, endangerment, and broad population declines occurring among many wild animal species. The subsequent focus is on the soaring populations and conditions of life for a few species of domesticated animals.

3 lecture hours, 0.5 credit. No prerequisites.

3. Readings and documentary films

There is no required textbook and all readings for each unit are available on OWL Brightspace organized by the 4 units. You are also expected to watch a number of documentary films and short videos. Most are available for free, but for a few you will need to pay a small rental fee (through iTunes, Amazon, GooglePlay, or Vimeo). Links are provided in each unit.

In addition to the readings, films, and short videos, the PowerPoint slides provide an abundance of optional links to encourage you to dig deeper into subjects you are most interested in.

4. Course Format

The course outline is indicated below in *Units and Schedule*. There are 3 scheduled lecture hours per week, although the 2-hour session will rarely run the full 2-hours. PowerPoint slides are posted to OWL Brightspace as pdfs shortly before each class. You should budget roughly 2-3 hours per week to complete the readings and watch the documentary films and short videos.

You are responsible for material covered in the lectures as well as the assigned readings and documentary films, and it is important to keep up with this material on a unit-by-unit basis. The evaluation is based on 3 tests (20% each) and a final exam (40%) (dates in the schedule).

All course material will be posted to the OWL Brightspace learning environment: <https://westernu.brightspace.com/d2l/home>. Any changes will be indicated on the OWL site and discussed with the class.

Current versions of all popular browsers (e.g., Safari, Chrome, Edge, Firefox) are supported with OWL Brightspace; what is most important is that you update your browser frequently to ensure it is current. All JavaScript and cookies should be enabled. Students interested in evaluating their internet speed, please click [here](#). If students need assistance, they can seek support on the [OWL Brightspace Help page](#). Alternatively, they can contact the [Western Technology Services Helpdesk](#). They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

5. Overview

This course examines the fast-changing geographies of both wild and domesticated animals. The basic context for this is the crashing populations of many wild animal species on one hand, and the soaring populations of a small number of species on the other, many of which are being intensively produced. Most attention is given to mammals, followed by birds. A core premise of the course is that the *interspecies relations* between humans and animals are a central and often underappreciated aspect of global environmental change, and that this is essential to understanding contemporary conservation challenges and prospects for a more humane and sustainable world.

The first unit situates our understanding of human relations to other animals in a deep historical geographic context. This begins with a brief overview of human-driven animal extinctions and habitat loss over very long periods of time, before turning to the long history of animal domestication and the crucial

role that animal labour has played in human societies for most of the history of civilization and agriculture. Moving towards the modern world, we next consider the importance of animals in European imperialism, both as harvested commodities and as indispensable sources of labour mobilized in the remaking of landscapes and the extraction of various resources. The unit concludes by assessing the acceleration of extinction rates following 1492 and a discussion of important early conservation responses.

The second unit focuses on contemporary patterns of endangerment and extinction risk and the desperate contexts of conservation facing a growing array of animal species within rapidly shrinking and modified habitats, with climate change now overarching threats to habitat. This discussion draws upon many examples, with a particular focus on mammals (especially top predators and large herbivores), but some attention is also given to birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians. Emphasis is placed on the increasing centrality of parks and protected areas to wildlife conservation and the mounting pressures they face, including poaching and the growing scale of legal and illegal trade. The unit concludes by considering debates about the role that zoos and wildlife sanctuaries play in relation to contemporary conservation challenges.

The third unit turns to the small array of animal species with fast-rising populations, starting with livestock, which comprise a large and growing share of all mammalian and bird biomass on earth today and occupy far more land than any other human activity. The discussion of livestock production focuses heavily on the conditions of life for animals in industrial systems, which is how the great majority are produced on a global scale today. Next, we consider other ways that animals are being intensively produced and used, briefly examining aquaculture, fur, and vivisection. The unit concludes by considering how this trajectory of animal life is amplifying zoonotic disease risks.

The fourth unit considers the prospects for improving the conditions of animal life in light of units 2 and 3, starting with a discussion of the major issues associated with re-wilding and some hopeful examples. We then turn to a very different sort of interspecies relations, those of companion species, and consider some of the important moral and environmental issues associated with rising pet populations. The unit concludes by reviewing some recent developments in the field of ethology and reflecting on how these challenge us to reassess the sorts of interspecies relations examined throughout the course.

6. Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

- be able to understand and explain how human relations with other species relate to major dynamics of environmental change;
- be capable of critically engaging with debates, conflicts, and policy issues surrounding biodiversity conservation and the use of animals in human societies;
- have a conceptual basis for further studies in conservation, agriculture and food, and critical animal studies;
- be inspired to think about questions surrounding environmentalism, trajectories of animal life, and interspecies responsibilities, and how these relate to one another.

7. Units and Schedule

You are responsible for the material covered in the lectures as well as the assigned readings, and it is important to keep up with lecture material and readings on a unit-by-unit basis. The evaluation is based on 3 unit tests and a final exam, as highlighted in yellow below.

Units	Dates	UNITS
	Jan. 6	Introduction: The narrowing of animal life
		The mostly slow but sometimes fast transformations of animal life
1	Jan. 8	Animal extinctions from the Pleistocene to Columbus
	Jan. 13	Animal domestication in human civilization
	Jan. 15	
	Jan. 20	Animals on/as European settler colonial frontiers
	Jan. 22	
	Jan. 27	Accelerating extinctions and early responses
	Jan. 29	TEST 1 (20%)
		The narrowing conditions of animal life in the modern world I: in 'the wild'
2	Feb. 3	Animals in the biodiversity crisis
	Feb. 5	
	Feb. 10	Deepening reliance on protected areas
	Feb. 12	Wildlife trade
	Feb. 16-20	Reading break
	Feb. 24	Zoos & animal sanctuaries
	Feb. 26	TEST 2 (20%)
		The narrowing conditions of animal life in the modern world II: in production
3	Mar. 3	The intensification of livestock production
	Mar. 5	
	Mar. 10	The intensification of other animal production
	Mar. 12	
	Mar. 17	The trajectory of animal life and zoonotic disease risks
	Mar. 19	TEST 3 (20%)
		Improving the conditions of animal life in a crowded and warming world
4	Mar. 24	Re-wilding
	Mar. 26	
	Mar. 31	Companions: animals in our homes and families
	Apr. 2	
	Apr. 9	The frontiers of ethology and moral responsibilities to animals
	Apr. 10-11	Study day
	Apr. 12-30	Final exam (40%) in examination period – date TBD

8. Communication

You are encouraged to check the OWL site every 24 – 48 hours.

Please post general course-related queries (whether content or logistics) to OWL Brightspace, so that clarifications can be seen by everyone. For queries posted in OWL Brightspace or sent via email you can expect to receive a response in 48-72 hours (or longer if over a weekend).

Some communications about the course will arrive through your university email account. It is your responsibility to ensure that email received from the University at your UWO address is attended to in a timely manner. You can read about the privacy and security of the UWO email accounts [here](#).

9. Evaluation

The evaluation breakdown for the course is as follows:

Assessment	Format	Weighting	Dates
3 unit tests	multiple choice + fill-in-the-blank + short answers	60% (20% each)	Thursday, Jan. 29 Thursday, Feb. 26 Thursday, Mar. 19
Final exam	multiple choice + fill-in-the-blank + short answers	40%	TBA in exam period: April 12-30

The evaluation methods described in the syllabus are essential requirements for the course. Students are responsible for the material covered in the lectures as well as the assigned readings, documentaries, and short videos. More detailed instructions will be given in advance of the tests and the final exam.

If you fail to write the term tests or the final exam on the scheduled time you will be given zero, unless you communicated and came to an arrangement with the instructor before the exam. Exam absences require a note from your physician (see note on special examination policy below).

Term Tests (3 x 20% = 60% of course grade)

The 3 term tests combine multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer questions. They are written during the regular class time and space. The tests focus entirely on the material covered in the preceding unit, as specified in the schedule.

Final exam (40% of course grade)

The final exam is comprehensive and will be written in the exam period as scheduled by the office of the registrar. Its structure resembles the term tests, just longer.

Notes on grading

- after you receive your grade on a test or exam, if you have concerns you should wait 24 hours to digest feedback before contacting your TA. To ensure a timely response, reach out within 7 days

- click [here](#) for a detailed and comprehensive set of policies and regulations concerning examinations and grading. The following table outlines the University-wide grade descriptors

A+	90-100	One could scarcely expect better from a student at this level
A	80-89	Superior work which is clearly above average
B	70-79	Good work, meeting all requirements, and eminently satisfactory
C	60-69	Competent work, meeting requirements
D	50-59	Fair work, minimally acceptable
F	below 50	Fail

Grades will not be adjusted on the basis of need. It is important to monitor your performance in the course. Remember: *You* are responsible for your grades in this course.

10. Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

General Information about missed work: University policy on academic considerations are described [here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by a self-attestation. Further information about academic considerations, and information about submitting this self-attestation with your academic consideration request may be found [here](#).

Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.

Absence from Course Commitments

Students must familiarize themselves with the [Policy on Academic Consideration – Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#).

Students missing course work for medical, compassionate or extenuating circumstances can request academic consideration by completing a request at the central academic consideration portal. Students are permitted one academic consideration request per course per term without supporting documentation. Note that supporting documentation is always required for academic consideration requests for examinations scheduled by the office of the registrar (e.g. December and April exams) and for practical laboratory and performance tests typically schedule during the last week of the term. Students should also note that the instructor may designate one assessment per course per term that requires supporting documentation. This designated assessment is described elsewhere in this document. Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor of this course, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline. Supporting documentation for academic considerations for absences due to illness should use the [Student Medical Certificate](#) or, where that is not possible, equivalent documentation by a health care practitioner.

Academic Consideration for term tests

The first Term Test (Jan. 29) is designated as requiring supporting documentation for academic consideration.

Accommodation for Religious Holidays

Students should review the policy for [Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#). Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the term test or exam.

11. Make-up Examinations

Make-ups will be granted with approved documentation only. All documentation for missed exams must be provided to the Academic Counselling Office within 48 hours of the scheduled exam, otherwise the instructor will assign a grade of zero. The format and content of make-ups may differ substantially from the scheduled test or examination.

12. Use of Electronic Devices

No electronic devices will be allowed during quizzes, tests and examinations.

12. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The use of generative AI is rapidly de-stabilizing approaches to teaching and learning, especially with respect to research assignments and assessments. To some, it offers great opportunities for creativity, problem-framing and solving, and differentiated learning, and the advantages (along with the sense that it is inevitably changing the landscape of academia and future workplaces) means that its use should be encouraged with due care. To others, it offers immense risks to critical thinking, academic integrity, and essential skills of research and writing and threatens to reproduce biases and inaccuracies, and the disadvantages mean that its use should be discouraged or limited however possible (to say nothing of the implications with respect to energy and water use). Many others lie somewhere in between and are struggling to make sense of the pace of change and the scope of the ramifications.

Personally, I am on the skeptical and discomforted side of the debates about the use of generative AI, as I believe that it poses far greater risks than rewards in general and fear that it threatens to erode some core skills associated with academic life. I do not use generative AI in my teaching practices. At the same time, I try to stay open to the potential benefits for teaching and learning, and recognize that many may rightly feel that enhancing one's ability to draw upon generative AI is important moving forward in the world today.

The vulnerability of some assessments to generative AI has forced many change their approaches to assessments in recent years, and that has been the case with this course. One potentially beneficial way that some are using generative AI for learning is in preparing for tests and exams, as it can provide good example questions that can help in studying, and this could be worth experimenting with for this and other courses.

13. How to Be Successful in this Class:

Students enrolled in this class should understand the level of autonomy and self-discipline required to be successful.

- Invest in a planner or application to keep track of your courses. Populate all your deadlines at the start of the term and schedule time at the start of each week to manage your time.
- Make it a regular habit to log onto OWL Brightspace to ensure you have seen everything posted
- Take handwritten or typed notes as you go through the lesson material.
- Connect with others. Try forming a study group for peer supported learning.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions. If you are struggling with a topic, check the online discussion boards or contact your instructor(s) and or teaching assistant(s).

14. Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence.

15. Western's Commitment to Accessibility

The Department of Geography and Environment strives at all times to provide accessibility to all faculty, staff, students and visitors in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities.

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519-661-2147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website.

More information about "Accessibility at Western" is available.

16. Mental Health

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

17. Support Services

Office of the Registrar
Western's Support Services
Student Development Centre

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html.

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

18. Important Dates

- January 5: Classes resume
- January 13: Last day to add a first term half course
- February 16: Family Day – Department Office closed
- February 16-20: Spring Reading Week (No classes; Department Office open)
- March 30: Last day to drop a second term half course
- April 9: Classes end
- April 10 & 11: Study days
- April 12-30: Examination Period