

# engaging with ecology



*"Traditional Koyukon people live in a world that watches, in a forest of eyes. A person moving through nature – however wild, remote, even desolate the place may be – is never truly alone. The surroundings are aware, sensate, personified. They feel. They can be offended. And they must, at every moment, be treated with proper respect. All things in nature have a special kind of life, something unknown to contemporary Euro-Americans, something powerful."*

—from *Make Prayers to the Raven: A Koyukon View of the Northern Forest* (Richard K. Nelson 1983)

## Introduction

Welcome to module one "Engaging with Ecology". This module introduces the severity and urgency of the ecological crisis and its concomitant social, cultural and spiritual problems and entanglements. It balances practical and theoretical knowledge to create a solid foundation for study within Engaged Ecology.

We will experiment with a range of practices or methods – Western and non-Western, orthodox and unorthodox – for engaging with the other-than-human so as to be able to reflect critically upon their ecological, social, cultural and spiritual implications. At the same time, we will consider some of the key terms, discourses, worldviews and debates that determine the field of study of ecological engagement so as to gain precision of thought and to explore the explicit and implicit tensions that arise between them. We will also conduct a search of relevant primary and secondary literature and provide critical commentary.

The module encourages us to reflect upon the sympathies and antipathies between practical and theoretical ways of knowing the world, and to examine how the one informs, fortifies, clarifies, annuls, distils, dispenses with, or disrespects the other. In doing so, we will gain a firm and foundational knowledge that will inform all further modules.

Our learning will consist in a mixture of practical workshops and textual readings, with visits from several external tutors who are specialists in their area of expertise. There will be spaces for reflection and discussion, inspired by weekly readings.

**Module leader:** Dr Andy Letcher [andy.letcher@schumachercollege.org.uk](mailto:andy.letcher@schumachercollege.org.uk)  
Office in High Cross House, Rear Servant Bedroom Right

## Key dates:

- Term dates Monday April 19<sup>th</sup> – Friday June 25<sup>th</sup> 2021
- Formative reading response (i.e. marks don't count) due **11.00 Friday 7<sup>th</sup> May**
- Summative reading response (i.e. marks count) due **15.00 Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May**
- Essay and academic reflection both due **11.00 Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> June**
- Bank holidays: no classes on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> May and Monday 31<sup>st</sup> May

**Module aims:**

- To develop a critical understanding of key terms, concepts, theories and ideas to do with human engagement with the more-than-human and the world at large
- To give direct experience of contrasting practical methods of engaging with the more-than-human
- To provide an opportunity to reflect upon the ontological and epistemological implications of contrasting methods of engaging with the more-than-human
- To place the ecological crisis, and surrounding thought, in intellectual and historical context

**Module assessment**

The module assessment is 100% coursework and consists in three components.

- 2 x 1000 word reading responses to academic articles. The first response is due **11.00 Friday 7<sup>th</sup> May**. It will be marked and commented upon by the module leader, and also by peer to peer marking, but the marks will not contribute to the final award: they are for formative learning only. The second reading response is due **15.00 Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May**, and the marks for this **will** contribute to the final award. Component weighting 20%.
- 1 x 2500 word academic reflection comparing differing ways of ecological engagement, due **11.00 Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> June**. Component weighting 40%.
- 1 x 2500 word academic essay on a subject to be determined with the module leader, due **11.00 Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> June**. Component weighting 40%.

Assessments should be uploaded via the Schumacher VLE. Marks and feedback will be available within 20 working days.

<https://open.schumachercollege.org.uk/course/view.php?id=210>

**Assessed module learning outcomes:**

In sum your coursework should meet the following learning outcomes

1. Name, explain and critique key terms, concepts and debates concerning human engagement with the more-than-human and the world at large, placing them in their historical context.
2. Demonstrate a critical understanding of the current ecological crisis and some of its concomitant social, cultural and spiritual problems and entanglements.
3. Critically assess and evaluate a range of quantitative and qualitative, theoretical and experiential methods of engaging with the more than human, including at least one drawn from field trips.
4. Perform an appropriate literature review using material derived from online databases

**Teaching and learning strategy:**

<b>SUMMARY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING [Use HESA KIS definitions]</b>		
<b>Scheduled Activities</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Comments/Additional Information (briefly explain activities, including formative assessment opportunities)</b>
Lectures	20	
Demonstrations	8	Library induction, engaged ecology practice workshop introductions
Practical classes and workshops	6	Essay writing skills, research methods, documenting skills
Seminars	12	
Peer to peer	8	Reading and other learning
Fieldwork	12	Two field trips
Tutorials	1	Face to face tutorials on assignments
Independent study	233	
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>(NB: 1 credit = 10 hours of learning; 10 credits = 100 hours, etc.)</b>

Students are expected to take full responsibility for their learning, **attend all** scheduled sessions, read appropriate indicated readings, and work on set exercises (formative and summative assessment).

Based on previous experience; students who failed to attend sessions are likely to be unsuccessful or show poor performance. Please ensure that you are engaging with the content and learning activities relating to this module.

**Late work/extenuating circumstances:**

If your participation in an examination or assessment has been affected by an extenuating circumstance, then you can ask the University to take this into consideration. You can submit a claim for extenuating circumstances to cover late submission of work, non-submission of work or non-attendance at a time specific assessment, such as an examination, test presentation or performance, or field class.

Information regarding the Extenuating Circumstances policy and how and where to submit Extenuating Circumstance Claims are available here: <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/your-studies/essential-information/exams/exam-rules-and-regulations/extenuating-circumstances>

Where there are no valid extenuating circumstances, the following regulations will automatically apply:

- Work submitted after the deadline date/time but within 24 hours of it, will be capped at the pass mark 50%
- Work submitted 24 hours after the deadline will receive a mark of zero.

Please notify Dr Andy Letcher of any extenuating circumstances as soon as possible.

**Referencing protocols and academic offences:**

When writing a report or an essay you are expected to fully reference the materials you have used. The report or essay should be your own work, in your own words. For details on referencing please read the University of Plymouth referencing library guide:

<https://plymouth.libguides.com/referencing>

Please use the **Harvard** system of references.

**Plagiarism** is an offence under the University regulations on examination and assessment offences. It is important that you familiarise yourself with what constitutes plagiarism, and academic offences. Further information can be found:

<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/your-studies/essential-information/regulations/plagiarism>

And <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/your-studies/essential-information/exams/exam-rules-and-regulations/examination-offences>

**Module feedback**

At the end of the module we ask that you complete and submit a module feedback form, available on the VLE <https://open.schumachercollege.org.uk/course/view.php?id=210>. This enables us to monitor quality, listen to your feedback and to make improvements.

**Provisional term timetable (modules 1 & 2)**

\* some sessions may begin earlier/later in day e.g. workshops

19.04  
 week 1

	morning 10.00-13.00 (approx.)	afternoon 14.15-16.30 (approx.)	additional info
mon	Welcome session "Engaging with Ecology"	Seminar: What is the Anthropocene?	Weather & Climate study ongoing project
tues	Deep Time Walk (Dr. Stephan Harding)	Deep Time Walk continued.	
wed	"Making Connections" What matters?	Materials against materiality.	Internal weather & body scan project
thurs	Unmaking: carrying stories & practicing relationships.	Orienting practice: becoming-with things.	
fri	Independent study	Independent study	

26.04  
 week 2

	morning 10.00-13.00	afternoon 14.15-16.30	additional info
mon	Goethean observation of plants (Stephan)	Seminar: Introduction to phenomenology	
tues	How to conduct a literature search.	Reflection on Goethean Method (Stephan)	
wed	Making gestures: clay workshop (Lou)	Tacit and haptic geographies	
thurs	Outdoor session collecting wood (Duncan)	Independent study	
fri	Independent study	Independent study	

03.05  
 week 3

	morning 10.00-13.00	afternoon 14.15-16.30	additional info
mon	Bank holiday, no classes	Bank holiday, no classes	
tues	Seminar: What is ecology?	Practice: outdoor sit spots How to do reflective writing.	
wed	Outdoor session: Flax (Simon & Ann)	Outdoor workshop continued.	
thurs	Making threads: practice & reflections	Independent study	
fri	Formative reading response due at 11.00am	Independent study	1 <sup>st</sup> reading response

10.05  
 week 4

	morning 10.00-13.00	afternoon 14.15-16.30	additional info
mon	Seminar: Systems theory	Seminar: Gaia Theory (Dr. Stephan Harding)	
tues	Independent study	Independent study	
wed	Outdoor session: Cordage (Linda)	Outdoor workshop continued.	
thurs	Knot making	Making tangles: entanglement and meshwork	
fri	Independent study	Independent study	

17.05  
 week 5

	morning 10.00-13.00	afternoon 14.15-16.30	additional info
mon	Fire by friction (Jessie Watson Brown)	Workshop continued.	
tues	Reflection: What have we learned about climate?	Independent study	
wed	Outdoor session: Making spoons (Alex)	Outdoor workshop continued.	
thurs	Tutorials **group divides for this week	Tutorials	
fri	Independent study	Independent study	

24.05  
 week 6

	morning 10.00-13.00	afternoon 14.15-16.30	additional info
mon	5.00am dawn chorus walk (Tony Whitehead)	Anthropology and birdsong (Dr. Andrew Whitehouse)	Birds & birdsong ongoing project
tues	Seminar: Science, music and birdsong	1 <sup>st</sup> reading response feedback session	
wed	Outdoor session: Making baskets (Linda)	Outdoor workshop continued.	
thurs	Tutorials **group divides for this week	Tutorials	
fri	Independent study	Independent study	

31.05  
 week 7

	morning 10.00-13.00	afternoon 14.15-16.30	additional info
mon	Bank holiday, no classes	Bank holiday, no classes	
tues	Listening Workshop (Tony Whitehead)	Tutorials	
wed	Making space & time: revisiting a practice	Independent study	
thurs	Independent study	Reflection session	
fri	Tutorials	Tutorials	

07.06  
 week 8

	morning 10.00-13.00	afternoon 14.15-16.30	additional info
mon	The Language of Birds (Robin Bowman)	Workshop continued.	
tues	Seminar: Animism	Birds & Birdsong in Indigenous Southern Africa (Colin Campbell)	
wed	Outdoor session: Smelting (Duncan)	Outdoor workshop continued.	
thurs	Outdoor workshop continued.	Outdoor workshop continued.	
fri	Outdoor workshop continued.	Outdoor workshop continued.	

14.06  
 week 9

	morning 10.00-13.00	afternoon 14.15-16.30	additional info
mon	Birdsong and mimesis in art & culture (Hanna Tuulikki)	Workshop continued.	
tues	Seminar: What is nature?	Summative reading response due at 15.00	2 <sup>nd</sup> reading response
wed	Reflection session	Independent study	
thurs	Practice: the urgent slow	Independent study	
fri	Independent study	Independent study	

21.06  
 week 10

	morning 10.00-13.00	afternoon 14.15-16.30	additional info
mon	Seminar: What is place?	Reflection session	
tues	Independent study	Reflection session	
wed	Assessment: presentations	Assessment: presentations	Final assessments
thurs	Assessment: presentations	Reflection session	
fri	Independent study	Independent study	Final assessment due Tues 29 <sup>th</sup> at 11.00am

# reading list

## Week 1

**Monday 1st February** *What is the Anthropocene?*

### Required reading

Steffen Will, Paul J. Crutzen and John R. McNeill 2007. 'The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?' *Ambio* 36(8): pp. 614-621

Haraway Donna. 2016. 'Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene' Ch. 2 in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press. Available at <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/>

## Week 2

**Monday 26th April** *Goethean observation of plants*

### Additional reading

Holdrege Craig. 2013. *Thinking Like a Plant: A Living Science for Life*. Lindisfarne Books.

**Tuesday 27th April** *Introduction to Phenomenology*

### Required reading

Pratt Vernon with Jane Howarth and Emily Brady. 2000. *Environment and Philosophy*. Abingdon: Routledge. Ch. 5, pp. 53-80. 'Phenomenology.'

### Additional reading

Bortoft Henri. 2012. 'Into the dynamic way of thinking'. Ch. 1 in *Taking Appearances Seriously. The Dynamic Way of Seeing in Goethe and European Thought*. Floris Books.

Fischer Luke and Dalia Nassar. 2015. 'Introduction: Goethe and Environmentalism'. Ch. 1. in Adrian Daub and Elisabeth Krimmer (eds) *Goethe Yearbook Volume XXII*. Camden House: Rochester, NY.

Dr Matt Segall explaining Goethe's participatory method: <https://youtu.be/NL7Sz6KNZKk>

## Week 3

**Tuesday 4th May** *What is ecology?*

### Required reading

Bauman Whitney A., Richard R. Bohannon II and Kevin J. O'Brien (eds.). 2011. *Grounding Religion. A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology*. Abingdon: Routledge. Ch. 4, pp. 49-63 'Ecology: what is it, who gets to decide, and why does it matter?'

Jenkins Willis. 2017. 'Whose religion? Which ecology?' Ch. 3, pp. 22-32 in Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. Abingdon: Routledge.

### Additional reading

Deborah Bird Rose; Thom van Dooren; Matthew Chrulew; Stuart Cooke; Matthew Kearnes; Emily O'Gorman. 2012.

'Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities.' *Environmental Humanities* 1(1): pp.1-5.

Morton Timothy. 'Queer Ecology.' *PMLA* 125(2): pp. 273-282.

## Week 4

**Monday 10th May** *Introduction to Systems Theory*

### Required reading

Bortoft Henri. 1985. 'Counterfeit and authentic wholes: finding a means for dwelling in nature.' In D. Seamon and R Mugerauer (eds). *Dwelling, Place and Environment*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Watch episode 2 of 'All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace' by Adam Curtis, 'The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts' Available here: <https://vimeo.com/groups/96331/videos/80799352>

Curtis Adam. 2011. 'How the 'ecosystem' myth has been used for sinister means. The Observer 29th May 2011. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/may/29/adam-curtis-ecosystems-tansley-smuts>

### Additional reading

Capra Fritjof and Pier Luigi Luisi. 2014. *The Systems View of Life. A Unifying Vision*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

**Tuesday 11th May Gaia Theory**

**Required reading**

Žukauskaitė Audronė 2020. 'Gaia Theory: Between Autopoiesis and Sympoiesis'. *Problemos* 98: pp. 141-153.

**Additional reading**

Free Andrew and Nicholas H. Barton. 2007. 'Do evolution and ecology need the Gaia hypothesis?'. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 22(11): pp. 611-619.

Latour Bruno 2017. 'Why Gaia is not a God of Totality.' *Theory, Culture and Society* 34(2-3): pp. 61-81.

**Week 5 No required reading**

**Week 6**

**Monday 24th May Anthropology and Birdsong**

**Required reading**

Whitehouse Andrew. 2017. 'Senses of being: The atmospheres of listening to birds in Britain, Australia and New Zealand.' Ch. 5, pp. 61-75 in Schroer, S., Schmitt, S (eds) *Exploring Atmospheres Ethnographically*. London: Routledge.

**Additional reading**

Whitehouse Andrew. 2017. 'Loudly sing cuckoo: more-than-human seasonalities in Britain.' *The Sociological Review Monographs* 65(1): pp. 171-187.

Whitehouse Andrew. 2015. 'Listening to birds in the Anthropocene: the anxious semiotics of sound in a human-dominated world.' *Environmental Humanities* 6: pp. 53-71.

**Tuesday 25th May Science, music and birdsong**

**Required reading**

Lack David. 2016 [1943]. *The Life of the Robin*. London: Pallas Athene (Publishers) Ltd. Ch. 2 'Song' pp. 23-35, pp. 224-225.

Rothenberg David, Tina C. Roeske, Henning U. Voss, Marc Naguib and Ofer Tchernichovski. 2014. 'Investigation of musicality in birdsong.' *Hearing Research* 308: pp. 71-83.

**Additional reading**

Marler, Peter. 2004. 'Science and birdsong: the good old days.' Ch. 1, pp. 1-38 in Peter Marler and Hans Slabbekoorn (eds.). *Nature's Music. The Science of Birdsong*. Elsevier Academic Press: San Diego, California. <https://epdf.pub/natures-music-the-science-of-birdsong.html>

Anyone wanting to play with sonagrams, download the free generator here: [www.sonicvisualiser.org](http://www.sonicvisualiser.org)

I've put a recording of a Nightingale that I made in Oxford 2011 up on my Google Drive folder for you to download. It starts quietly but gets louder as I approach the tree from which the bird was singing.

**Week 7**

**No required reading**

**Additional reading**

R. Murray Schafer. 1992. *A Sound Education: 100 Exercises in Listening and Sound Making*. Indian River, Ont., Canada : Arcana Editions. Pdf available at:

[https://monoskop.org/File:Schafer\\_R\\_Murray\\_A\\_Sound\\_Education\\_100\\_Exercises\\_in\\_Listening\\_and\\_Soundmaking.pdf](https://monoskop.org/File:Schafer_R_Murray_A_Sound_Education_100_Exercises_in_Listening_and_Soundmaking.pdf)

**Week 8**

**Tuesday 8th June Animism**

**Required reading**

Harvey Graham 2017. 'If not all stones are alive...: radical relationality in Animism studies.' *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 11(4): pp. 481-497.

Ingold Tim. 2006. 'Rethinking the animate, re-animating thought.' *Ethnos* 71(1): pp. 9-20.

Watch 'Make Prayers to the Raven' episode 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzYQX9oUvrg&t=112s>

**Additional reading**

Harvey Graham. 2017. *Animism: Respecting the Living World (2nd edition)*. London: Hurst & Co.

Van Dooren Thom and Deborah Bird Rose. 2016. 'Lively ethnography. Storying animist worlds.' *Environmental Humanities* 8(1): 77-94.

**Week 9**

**Monday 14th June**

**Please watch**

Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCVZqX2td5Y>

Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF1uihdcZmY>

**Tuesday 15th June** *What is nature?*

**Required reading**

Chawla Louise. 2020. 'Childhood nature connection and constructive hope: a review of research on connecting with nature and coping with loss.' *People and Nature* 2(3): pp. 619-642.

Fletcher Robert. 2016. 'Connection with nature is an oxymoron: a political ecology of "nature-deficit disorder".' *The Journal of Environmental Education* 48(4): pp. 226-233.

**Additional reading**

Ginn Franklin and David Demeritt 2009. 'Nature: a contested concept.' Ch. 17, pp. 300-311 in Nicholas Clifford, Sarah Holloway, Stephen P. Rice and Gill Valentine (eds.) *Key Concepts in Geography*. London: Sage Publications. Available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265007577\\_Nature\\_A\\_Contested\\_Concept](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265007577_Nature_A_Contested_Concept)

Soper Kate. 1995. *What is Nature?* Oxford: Blackwells Ltd. (Available in the Schumacher library).

**Week 10**

**Monday 21st June** *What is place?*

**Required reading**

Cresswell Tim. 2008. 'Place: encountering geography as philosophy.' *Geography* 93(3): pp. 132-139.

Campbell Brian G. 2011. 'Place.' Ch. 14, pp. 203-221 in Bauman Whitney A., Richard R. Bohannon II and Kevin J. O'Brien (eds.). 2011. *Grounding Religion. A Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology*. Abingdon: Routledge.

**Additional reading**

Christie Douglas E. 1999. 'A sense of place.' *The Way* 39(1): 59-72.

**Some suggested background reading**

Abram David. 1997. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More Than Human World*. Vintage Books.

Bateson Gregory. 'Form, Substance, Difference.' pp. 454-471 in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. University of Chicago Press.

Begon Michael and Colin Townsend. 2020. *Ecology: From Individual to Ecosystems*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Bortoft Henri. 1996. *The Wholeness of Nature: Goethe's Way of Science*. Floris Books.

Bortoft Henri. 2012. *Taking Appearance Seriously. The Dynamic Way of Seeing in Goethe and European Thought*. Floris Books.

Capra Fritjof and Pier Luigi Luisi. 2014. *The Systems View of Life. A Unifying Vision*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Curry Patrick. 2011. *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction (second edition)*. Polity Press.

Curry Patrick. 2015. 'The Third Road: Faerie in Hypermodernity.' Ch. 37, pp. 468-478 in Graham Harvey (ed.). *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*. Routledge.

Davies Nick. 2016. *Cuckoo: Cheating by Nature*. Bloomsbury Paperbacks.

Dawkins Richard. 2016. *The Selfish Gene (40th anniversary edition)*. Oxford University Press.

Flood Gavin. 1995. *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*. Continuum.

Haraway Donna J. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*. Duke University Press Books.

Harman Graham. 2009. *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. re.press.

Harman Graham. 2018. *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. London: Pelican Books.

Harvey Graham. 2015. *Handbook of Contemporary Animism*. Routledge.

Holdrege Craig. 2013. *Thinking Like a Plant: A Living Science for Life*. Lindisfarne Books.

Kimmerer Robin Wall. 2020. *Braiding Sweetgrass. Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Penguin Books.

Kohn Eduardo. 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. University of California Press.

Lack David. 2016. *The Life of the Robin*. Pallas Athene.

Latour Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Latour Bruno. 2017. *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*. Polity Press.

Lenton Tim. 2020. *Earth System Science: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Lewis Simon L and Mark A Maslin. 2015. 'Defining the Anthropocene.' *Nature* 519: 171-180.

Lewis Simon L and Mark A Maslin. 2018. *Human Planet: How we Created the Anthropocene*. London: Pelican Books.

Morton Timothy. 2010. 'Guest Column: Queer ecology.' *PMLA* 125(2): 273-282.

Morton Timothy. 2017. *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People*. London: Verso.

Morton Timothy. 2018. *Being Ecological*. London: Pelican.

Plumwood Val. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge.

Plumwood Val. 2001. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. Routledge.

Rockstrom J, Steffen W, Noone K et al. 2009. A safe operating space for humanity. *Nature* 461: 472-5

Tsing Anna Lowenhaupt. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*.

Princeton: Princeton University Press.



