

Field training in the Tanzanian rainforest

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Amani Nature Reserve in the morning

Through its many field courses, the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) has provided rigorous training in tropical biology and conservation for the past thirty years. OTS has recently partnered with its European counterpart, the Tropical Biology Association (TBA), to offer unique graduate-level exchange programs in tropical areas throughout the world.

As one of the founding members of OTS, the University of California, Los Angeles has long supported the participation of its graduate students in tropical field courses each year. This past fall, I had the privilege to partake in one of four exchange programs between OTS and TBA in eastern Africa. Despite having spent a considerable amount of time in the tropics for my dissertation work, this course was my first glimpse into the splendor of an African rainforest.

For four weeks, my classmates and I studied the incredible biodiversity contained in the various strata and niches of the Amani Nature Reserve (ANR), an 8380-ha reserve in the East Usambara Arcs of northeastern Tanzania. Home to the second largest botanical garden in the world, a staggering number of endemic plants and animals, and eighteen local villages, ANR presented an ideal setting to explore pantropical diversity patterns in understory plant communities and the conservational implications of the biotic mechanisms shaping these trends.

As the only American participant on the course, I was introduced to the diverse cultures and traditions of my fellow classmates, who came from countries such as Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Madagascar, Sweden, England, the Netherlands, and South Africa. This course provided me with new perspectives for my own research, as well as great inspiration for future academic and personal pursuits.



Baby chameleon