

**“What advice would you give to students starting your course?”**

### **Top ten things to note when undertaking a Zoology degree:**

1. First of all, realise this: very few people that you come across will actually know what a degree in ‘Zoology’ is and many will ask if it’s ‘something to do with zoos and stuff?’ Apart from being pretty far off the mark it is also rather frustrating, especially during the endless introductions you go through in Freshers’ week. Don’t despair, just smile politely and have good, concise definition of the course up your sleeve. You will need it.
2. Secondly: even if we have watched the latest ‘Planet Earth’ series avidly and may have learned all of David Attenborough’s commentary by heart and even though we may have come into this world with a fervent desire to watch the ‘Really Wild Show’ with Michaela Strachan, there are not enough jobs in the BBC to support us all. Some of us will have to find work elsewhere. This doesn’t mean we can’t dream, just that our dreams need a back-up.
3. Third: turn yourself into a morning person before you start. If you’re like the grunting ape in the cornflakes advert, that takes time to evolve into a human after the alarm goes off, then make sure your alarm is set early and that there are plenty of supermarket value cornflakes on the go! You have to accept that possibly four out of five days of the working week will start with 9 o’clock lectures, even if the resident English student in your shared house is not going in until two in the afternoon.
4. Fourth: take good lecture notes. Even if the lecture is on the cell division of labour in the *Porifera* and you are counting down the days till the lecture on the social systems in lions, everything has equal importance in this course and it’s always the topics you neglect that will end up the key theme for the exam. Also, if the lecturer gives the class a handout with a complicated-looking diagram on it, don’t use it to put your chewing-gum in or write your Asda list on, keep it and learn to reproduce a simplified version of it- you may need to do this in the exams.
5. Fifth: botany. Even though you will eventually hold a degree certificate in Zoology, due to the way most biological sciences departments are organised you will often share lecture units with biologists and botanists and, in first year at least, there will invariably be some compulsory sections where you may study photosynthesis (again!) or the evolution of land plants. Try not to persecute the botanists too much for the fact that you have to share in their ‘green enthusiasm’. That would of course make you ‘plantist’ and constitutes as a form of discrimination. Anyway, superiority is best displayed with a sense of humility.

6. Sixth: lecturers. The genus 'Lecturus' is comprised of a variety of species. All will be top of their fields and all will have their pluses and minuses. *Lecturus extrovertus* are great public speakers but may be less organised than the dull but thorough *Lecturus monotonous*. Similarly, *Lecturus scroogus* may be a far harsher marker than *Lecturus give-marks-awayus*. Either way, you will come across all species, so learn to categorise them fast and that way you can get the most from their lectures and learn how to pass their exams.
7. Seventh: lab classes. At least in first year, this will require you to work with lots of different people, many of whom you will not know and occasionally will not like. However, you will depend on them, through a form of mutualism, for a good data set and hence a good mark. Data from labs will lead (more often than not) to the much-loved (and much-hated) discipline we call statistics. Learn statistics fast and well, a 'stats pro' will out-compete a 'stats dunce'. If you are not good, pretend. This at least will lure a better choice of project partner towards you under the false pretence that all the stats will, in theory, be under-your-belt before the project even gets under way.
8. Eighth: field trips. Field trips will not be a holiday in the sun. Quite often they won't even be somewhere sunny and often the schedule will be tight. Expect even earlier mornings (!) and if you're studying anything nocturnal, very late nights. Head-torches are a key accessory, as are wellies.
9. Ninth: final year project partners. Choose well. You will have to spend many hours with them in (more often than not) quite stressful lab situations, upon which your degree will rest. It is not a partnership that should be undertaken lightly. For the girls, a shared love for 'cake breaks' may be the key.
10. Tenth: exams. Get used to reading scientific papers in your first year. This is not so much a requirement in the early stages but needs to be second nature by the time of your finals. Abstract and discussion are always a good place to start: it helps you get the feel of the paper before deciding if you have the stamina to decipher the method and results section. Also, revise early. It is not like A-level where you will have seen material over and over again and have one core textbook with nearly all the relevant information for last minute cramming. You will only have seen most lectures once and this may well have been at nine o'clock on some dark morning the previous November where you were fantasising about the nice warm bed you left at five to nine. Take time to go over everything a few times, regardless of the immense volume of notes you will have.

Other than that, I can only say good luck. It will be difficult and hair loss is almost guaranteed but it will be fun and you never know, perhaps we will see you presenting 'Planet Earth' in a few years time!