



Welcome to Biology!

Introductory talk at 10am on Friday 0th Week (10th October) in the Lecture Theatre 1, Life and Mind Building, South Parks Road

There will be an introduction to the Biology course from Professor Tom Pizzari, Associate Head of Department for Education. You will be introduced to key members of the Academic Administration Office and directed to the materials you need to watch and read before teaching begins on Monday of 1st Week (13th October).

After the introductory talk you will receive a Health & Safety Talk which will provide you with essential preparation before your laboratory practicals begin in Week 1 and a Buildings Induction.

You are asked to arrive at the Life and Mind Building, South Parks Road at 9.55am. Follow the stairs down the 'scoop' and enter the lower ground floor. Lecture Theatre 1 is immediately to the left.

Lab coats, safety glasses and dissection kits (ACTION NEEDED)

We need all students to complete this [survey](#). It asks you for lab coat sizing details and whether you wear glasses, so that you can be provided with the correct style of safety glasses. Please complete the survey by **Wednesday of 0th Week (8th October)**. When you arrive at your first practical in Week 1, you will collect your lab coat, safety glasses and dissection kit – please do keep these safe for the duration of the course. It will be your responsibility to bring them with you to Biology practicals throughout the course.

N.B. The cost of your lab coat, dissection kit, safety glasses and bag is covered by the Department of Biology.

2025-2026 First Year Form (2)



THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

Biology is an exciting and rapidly developing subject area with great relevance to addressing global challenges from disease and poverty to biodiversity loss and climate change. The study of living things has undergone tremendous expansion in recent years, and topics such as cell biology, developmental biology, evolutionary biology and ecology, all of which are covered in the course, are advancing at a great pace. This expansion has been accompanied by a blurring of the distinctions between disciplines: a biologist with an interest in tropical plants may well use many of the tools and techniques that are indispensable to a molecular geneticist. The modular structure of the first-year course encourages a cross-disciplinary approach.

The teaching is designed to deal with individual topics in some depth, and especially to transmit the excitement of modern biology. The first year of the course is intended to provide a broad overview of



biology, introduce you to key biological research skills and to prepare you for the more specialised themes offered in the second and third years.

More detailed information will be available on [Canvas](#), the University's virtual learning environment for teaching and learning. You will receive access to this in Michaelmas week 0.

Themes

The year starts with a 4-week Orientation period in which students are taught core skills and knowledge that are essential for later material. The subject matter of the first-year course is separated into three major themes:

1. Building a Phenotype;
2. Diversity of Life;
3. Ecology and Evolution.

Each theme will have numerous lab and/or field practicals.

The Research Skills sessions (computer practicals and group discussions) integrate across these themes.

All components of the first year are compulsory and it is expected that you will attend all of them.

Typical workload

In the first year, your typical weekly timetable (following Orientation) can be broken down into the following categories:

- Lectures: 8 hours a week
- Lab practicals: 6 hours a week
- Computer practicals: 1 hour a week
- Group discussions: 1 hour a week (*for majority of weeks*)
- Tutorials: one hour a week, plus preparation time. Please note that these are the responsibility of colleges and will vary.

In the second, third and fourth years, variable hours are also spent on research projects.

First-year structure

| Term | MT | HT | TT |
|------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Week | | | |
| 1 | Orientation | Core teaching | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 4 | Mini-project | | |
| 5 | | | Field Course |
| 6 | | | |
| 7 | | | Revision |
| 8 | | | |
| 9 | | | Prelims |

Full details of the Orientation Weeks will be provided before the start of term.



Practicals and Research Skills

Practicals and research skills sessions are taught in groups - **you must remain in the lab group you are assigned to**. This is important for safety measures and because your group identity is used to provide your personalized electronic calendar on Canvas so that you only see calendar entries for teaching for the group to which you belong. If you have any questions relating to practical groups contact Asya Naish, the Practicals Coordinator (practicals@biology.ox.ac.uk).

Please note that in order to understand how living organisms function, evolve and adapt, it is sometimes necessary to explore their inner structures and physiology. In addition, biology and ecology in the field involves the collection and examination of plant, animal and microbe samples. The undergraduate course of Biology at Oxford therefore includes some examination of animals via dissection, and the collection and examination of invertebrates on field courses and in practicals. In 2021, we underwent a thorough review of all our dissections to ensure that all specimens are sourced in a way that is sustainable and in line with best ethical practice, with efforts made wherever possible to minimise the use of protected animals (vertebrates and cephalopods).

In the first year, participation in these types of study is strongly recommended. If you do not wish to take part in animal dissections, please contact Tom Pizzari (tommaso.pizzari@biology.ox.ac.uk).

Getting in touch

The following emails will be for any matters relating to the year of the MBiol specified, including examinations and any summative assessed materials (i.e. projects) for that year.

General course email for Year 1: year1@biology.ox.ac.uk

General course email for Years 2 and 3: fhs@biology.ox.ac.uk

General course email for Year 4: year4@biology.ox.ac.uk

The exception to the above is that all queries regarding field courses will go to a separate email. This includes the Year 1 Field Course and the Year 2 Research Skills Courses.

Field Courses email: fieldcourses@biology.ox.ac.uk

For any matters relating to disability and student welfare in any year of the MBiol, use the following email.

Student welfare email: student.welfare@biology.ox.ac.uk

For any matters relating to practical attendance, equipment or group assignments, use the following email (queries on the assessment of practicals go to the Year 1 email above).

Practicals email: practicals@biology.ox.ac.uk

For any matters relating to departmental IT or AV issues, use the following email.

IT email: teaching.it@biology.ox.ac.uk

Canvas

Canvas is the University's virtual learning environment for teaching and learning. This will be the predominant form of communication from the Academic Administration Office (AAO) and teaching staff to students.



You should receive access to the Biology units on Canvas in 0th week. [MBiol Course Information](#) will hold an overview of the MBiol with specific information for first year in [MBiol Year 1 Core Curriculum](#). It is important that you manage your notifications in your personal Canvas account so that you receive push notices from the Canvas app or emailed announcements. To set these up in Canvas click on 'Account' in the dark blue column to the left of your screen and select 'Notifications', under Course activities select one or both ticks to the right of Announcement.

You will also receive a circular via your university email on Monday of each week in term with notices pertaining to 1st Year Biology. Weekly circulars will be posted in Year 1 Core Curriculum throughout the year for your reference

Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) nominations

Your feedback and views are welcome at any time, but you also have the opportunity to raise items for discussion at JCC.

The JCC sits once per term (normally 4th Week) to consider matters raised by junior members. Items on the agenda may also include topics raised by Biology Administration or Biology Undergraduate Teaching Committee, but your concerns are always the focus of each meeting. Junior members take the majority of seats on this Committee. A representative from each year also attends the Biology Undergraduate Teaching Committee which meets twice termly – normally 2nd and 7th Week.

Members

Chairs: Scarlett Burley (St Hilda's) and Charles Upchurch (Keble), 4th Year students

Secretary: Nina Womack, Undergraduate Assistant (Teaching and Year 4)

Senior members:

Tommaso Pizzari, Associate Head of Department for Education; Academic Year Leads (on rotation): Andrew Hector (Year 1), Owen Lewis (Year 2), Rob Salguero-Gomez (Year 3), Peter Holland (Year 4);

Junior members:

2 representatives from each year, Student representative for accessibility, student representative for EDI and EDI academic (Jorgelina Marino);

The Biology Senior Academic Administrator: Helene Augar;

The Undergraduate Officers, Cre Tonks and Wendy Yeates, and the Engagement and Admissions Officer, Siobhan Organ, will attend as required.

You may nominate yourself or someone else within your year ([with their permission](#)) to act as one of your first-year representatives. Nominations will be open in weeks 1 and 2 of Michaelmas. Details on how to nominate will be given closer to term.