

# Welcome to Biology!

## Introductory talk at 10am on Friday 0th Week (9<sup>th</sup> October) in the Lecture Theatre 3, 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 the format and expectations of the course and directed to the materials you need to watch and read before teaching begins on Monday of 1<sup>st</sup> Week (13<sup>th</sup> 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.

Please arrive at the Life and Mind Building, South Parks Road, by 9.55am. Follow the stairs down the 'scoop' to the lower ground floor, where Lecture Theatre 3 is at the far end on the left.

## Preparation for Lab Practicals

### (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 (7th October)**. When you arrive at your first practical in Week 1, you will collect your lab coat and safety glasses – 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 and safety glasses is covered by the Department of Biology.*

2026-2027 First Year Form



## 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 be aware that these are the responsibility of colleges and will vary.

Below is a representation of the typical week in Year 1 but may vary slightly. Note that your cohort will be divided into four groups for those sessions running with multiple iterations.

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

| Year 1                                                                          |                                           |                                           |           |                                           |                                           |                                           |                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| from Michaelmas Term week 5 (following Orientation) through Trinity Term week 5 |                                           |                                           |           |                                           |                                           |                                           |                                           |
|                                                                                 | Monday                                    | Tuesday                                   | Wednesday | Thursday                                  |                                           | Friday                                    |                                           |
| 09.00 - 10.00                                                                   | Lecture                                   | Lecture                                   |           | Lecture                                   |                                           | Lecture                                   |                                           |
| 10.00 - 11.00                                                                   | Lab Practical<br>(Repeat 1)<br>Groups x 2 | Lab Practical<br>(Repeat 2)<br>Groups x 2 |           | Lab Practical<br>(Repeat 1)<br>Groups x 2 | Group Discussion*<br>(Repeat 1) Group x 1 | Lab Practical<br>(Repeat 2)<br>Groups x 2 | Group Discussion*<br>(Repeat 3) Group x 1 |
| 11.00 - 12.00                                                                   |                                           |                                           |           |                                           | Group Discussion*<br>(Repeat 2) Group x 1 |                                           | Group Discussion*<br>(Repeat 4) Group x 1 |
| 12.00 - 13.00                                                                   |                                           |                                           |           |                                           | Computer Skills<br>(Repeat 1) Groups x 2  |                                           | Computer Skills<br>(Repeat 2) Groups x 2  |
| 13.00 - 14.00                                                                   |                                           |                                           |           |                                           |                                           |                                           |                                           |
| 14.00 - 15.00                                                                   | Lecture                                   | Lecture                                   |           | Lecture                                   |                                           | Lecture                                   |                                           |
| 15.00 - 16.00                                                                   |                                           |                                           |           |                                           |                                           |                                           |                                           |
| 16.00 - 17.00                                                                   |                                           |                                           |           |                                           |                                           |                                           |                                           |

\*Group Discussions take place intermittently

## First-year structure

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

Full details of the Orientation Weeks, including the mini-project, will be provided before the start of term.

## Practicals and Research Skills

Your cohort will be divided into four college-based groups for practicals and research skills sessions; **you must remain in your assigned lab group**. This is important for safety and because your group identity is used to provide your personalised electronic calendar on Canvas, so that you only see calendar entries for teaching for your assigned group. Groups are organised by college to support college teaching and event planning, and groups will rotate pairings with other groups during the first year. If you have any questions about practical groups, contact Asya Naish, the Practicals Coordinator ([practicals@biology.ox.ac.uk](mailto: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. 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](mailto: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](mailto:year1@biology.ox.ac.uk)

**General course email for Years 2 and 3:** [fhs@biology.ox.ac.uk](mailto:fhs@biology.ox.ac.uk)

**General course email for Year 4:** [year4@biology.ox.ac.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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 0<sup>th</sup> Week (w/c October 5). [MBiol Course Information](#) provides an overview of the MBiol, while [MBiol Year 1 Core Curriculum](#) contains specific information for first year.

**Please manage your Canvas notification settings so that you receive announcements by push notification, email, or both.** To do this, select 'Account' in the dark blue column on the left of the screen, choose 'Notifications', and then select one or both ticks next to 'Announcement' under Course activities.

You will also receive a circular via your University email each Monday during term with notices relevant to first-year Biology. Weekly circulars will be posted in Year 1 Core Curriculum throughout the year for 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Week.

### Members

Chair(s): elected fourth-year student(s)

Secretary: Undergraduate Assistant Administrator (Teaching and Year 4)

Senior members: Associate Head of Department for Education; Academic Year Leads, on rotation; Academic Lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Junior members: Two representatives from each year, student representative for accessibility, and student representative for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Biology Senior Academic Administrator, Undergraduate Administration Officers, and Engagement and Admissions Officer 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.