Summary of block courses 2026 - “Scientific Nature Conservation”

Please use this poll to indicate your preference until **3 May**:
https://dud-poll.inf.tu-dresden.de/CjwI34D9Sg/

Option 1:

Nature Conservation in Central-European grasslands **31.8. - 4.9.2026 (NEW DATE)**
Kolja Bergholz & Michael Ristow

Place: daily excursions to different grasslands around Potsdam / Berlin (e.g. Döberitzer Heide, Hennigsdorf, Groß Kreutz)

Participants: max. 16

“Grasslands are the most extensive, arguably the most useful to human society, yet the most threatened biome on the planet.” David J Gibson

Semi-natural grasslands in Central Europe have evolved through a long history of human land use and are recognized as one of the most important agricultural and forage crops and supplier of diverse societal/cultural and ecological functions and services. Further, grasslands belong to the most species-rich habitats in the world. However, changes in land uses during the 20th century have led to significant biodiversity losses across various types of grasslands. Therefore, the protection and appropriate management of grasslands is a key task for nature conservation in Central Europe.

In this course, we will get to know most of the important grassland types in Brandenburg and the key factors that determine their plant species composition. We will visit different grasslands in Brandenburg, discuss their historical and recent management and which practices can be applied in order to increase biodiversity. Further, we will learn and apply different methods to evaluate the condition of grasslands in respect to biodiversity. In particular, we will compare different methods of population assessments. Our overall aim of this course is that students are able to recognize the most important grassland types of Brandenburg, know different management options depending on the grassland type, and to evaluate the status of plant populations.

Option 2:
Flies and Midges (Diptera) – Determination and Ecology: 14.9.-18.9. 2026 (NEW DATE)
Michael Ristow

Place: Ludwigsfelde

Participants: max. 8

Flies and midgets are among the most species-rich animal groups worldwide and in Germany as well; approximately one-third of all known insect species belong to this group (just under 10,000 in Germany).
They play a central role in many ecosystems, particularly as scavengers, parasitoids, pollinators, and food sources for a wide variety of organisms. But hardly anyone can identify them; in Germany, there are likely fewer than 100 people who study even a single selected family in detail.
That is set to change:
We are offering an intensive course on the identification of selected fly groups, which will naturally also cover important aspects of the ecology of individual groups.
The course series will include the following components (details to be discussed on a case-by-case basis):
Practicum – 5-day block, location to be determined Objectives: Identification of the most important Diptera clades, in some cases down to the genus or even species level. Use of identification keys. Collection and preparation

Option 3:
Movement Ecology and Movement Data Analysis (26.09 - 30.09.2026)
(Simeon Lisovski, IZW)

Place: Hallig Langeneß; if less than 17 participants: Potsdam

Participants: max. 20

Animal movement is a central component of ecology and conservation, and the growing availability of tracking data has opened new possibilities for studying how animals use space, respond to environmental conditions, and connect habitats across landscapes. This block course provides an introduction to animal movement ecology, animal tracking, and the analysis of movement data in R. Participants will be introduced to key concepts, research questions, and common tracking approaches, and will discuss the strengths, limitations, and suitability of different methods such as GPS-based tracking and telemetry for specific ecological questions.

Set on Hallig Langeneß in the National Park Wadden Sea, the course uses the unique natural surroundings of an internationally important migratory bird area as a field-based learning environment. Participants will observe movement patterns of different bird groups, develop and collect simulated tracking datasets in teams, and analyse data generated by another group using hypothesis-driven and state-of-the-art analytical workflows in R. The course concludes with group posters presenting and discussing the results. Overall, the course aims to provide both conceptual understanding and practical skills in animal movement ecology, with relevance for basic research, applied ecological studies, and nature conservation.

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Important: Hallig life comes with a generous amount of fresh air. In early autumn, the weather in the Wadden Sea — and especially on the islands and Halligen — can be anything from beautiful sunshine to strong wind and persistent rain, sometimes all within a few hours. Please be prepared to spend time outdoors even under less-than-glamorous conditions. It may be glorious; it may also be character-building.
We will arrive by ferry, but our return to the mainland will be on foot across the intertidal mudflats during low tide. The walk is approximately 12 km and takes around 3.5 hours. You will need to carry your own luggage, so packing light is strongly recommended. Good rubber boots are not just helpful but a very good idea. With realistic expectations, suitable clothing, and a bit of adventurous spirit, this will be a memorable experience in any weather — and with luck, even in sunshine. And a final note on logistics: in the very unlikely event of severe storm conditions, Hallig Langeneß may temporarily become inaccessible because the Hallig are flooded. In that case, plans may need to change at short notice. This could mean that the course takes place in Potsdam instead, or that we remain on the Hallig longer than planned and return a few days later. This is part of working in a dynamic coastal environment. Unusual, but not impossible.



Costs:

Arrival and Departure:

Official meeting point will be Bredstedt Bhf to get the Bus (195) at 26.09 17:55

Official end-point will be Dagebüll Mole Bhf to catch the train 30.09 12:50 to Niebüll

You are responsible to get to Bredstedt and back home from Dagebül Mole. There are options for regional train connections that result in no extra costs if you own a Deutschland ticket, or faster connections including an ICE that will result in extra costs. After registration we will send out more details and can organise groups for joint travel.

Per Person (190 - 210 Euro + arrival/departure costs e.g. train ticket):

Bus/Ferry	22.00	Euro
Accommodation/Kurtaxe	115,00	Euro
Food/Drinks*	50,00	Euro

* we have to make a mutual order of food via EDEKA (Hallig Food Service)