

**Environmental Studies 295**  
**Birding to Change the World: The Elves' Workshop**



An elf teaches birds to sing by Richard Doyle

Spring Semester 2021 (4 Credits): **Mondays, 8-11:00am, off-campus, Wednesday  
Lab:2:00-5:00pm at Flynn Elementary School**

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**Office Hours on Teams:** Monday, 3-5:00pm & Thurs., 3:30-4:30pm

**Be the change:** “Birding to Change the World” is a community-based course to meet a public health need to get kids outside. This course puts UVM students at the service of children and teachers at Flynn Elementary School and Hunt Middle School in Burlington’s New North End, five miles from campus. Flynn Elementary has the largest after-school program in the Burlington school district with students from 33 different countries. Just a five-minute walk from Lake Champlain and surrounded by woods, parks and community gardens, Flynn is an ideal setting for an environmental education program for children. Based on the theoretical framework of environmental justice—that the environment is where we live, work and play—our class helps connect kids (and you) to Burlington’s urban wilds. We are working to bust down the barriers that stop too many of our children from getting outside.

For the past five years, UVM student mentors have been taking kids outside to learn and play together every Wednesday afternoon. This special COVID year, we cannot meet directly with the kids because of health risks (this could change by April of 2021). However, the school staff badly needs our help, maybe even more than before. Teachers and staff want to take the kids

outside every day but as educators they are unfamiliar with the birds and other species living around both schools. So this semester instead of being mentors, we will become hardworking elves--invisible, creative, ingenious and mischievous. On Wednesday afternoons, while the schools are closed for cleaning, we will hold our Elves' Workshop deep in the pungent pines of Flynn Elementary School's woods. We will prepare scavenger hunts, conjure up nature art and leave magical treasures in the woods for the kids and their teachers to discover on Thursdays and Fridays. **We will also research and produce a neighborhood nature guide to Flynn's Woods that any teacher, staff member or parent can use, with a particular focus on the birds of the New North End.**

Besides channeling your best inner-elf, this class requires patience, persistence, flexibility, long underwear (the entire course is taught outside), and a sense of humor. The course also requires humility and the ability to learn from more-than-human teachers. Birds are master teachers of sustainability and a portal to the natural world. As builders, artists, musicians, inventors, comedians, acrobats and actors, birds are also a constant source of wonder. They make tools. They learn and compose songs. They build complex green homes from sustainable materials. And they travel thousands of miles to their many homes with the sun and stars as their guides. One of the most visible and accessible wild beings, they grace our daily lives with flashes of color and beauty, and songs that pour from leafy treetops and hedges. For urban children, birds are the nature that they can see and hear every day without having to be driven somewhere.

### **Course Objectives**

This course's main objective is to connect you with the marvelous feathered teachers all around us, to fill you with a sense of wonder, and to give you a chance to meet an urgent community need for environmental education materials. This course has an environmental justice focus. In addition to exploring Burlington's socially and ethnically diverse New North End, we will also examine how privilege—class, gender, ethnicity, culture, religious and urban/rural background— influences how we all perceive and experience nature.

In this course you will:

- Learn to find and identify 45 Vermont birds by sight and sound;
- Share this knowledge with children, teachers, after-school staff and parents through a neighborhood nature guide to the New North End;
- Explore the New North End's lakeshore, woods, wetlands and delta region;
- Develop your own practice of scientific inquiry by doing weekly research to answer the children's questions about nature;
- Analyze how privilege affects how we perceive and/or enjoy nature;
- Learn to sing like a bird;
- Set up weekly scavenger hunts and nature games for kids;
- Keep a weekly reflection journal;
- Share your experiences with the class and become part of a human flock.

## Course Structure

**Mondays:** We meet every Monday from 8-11:00am for a class birding lab. Labs will be held primarily in the woods around Flynn Elementary School and in Ethan Allen Park. We will also explore Delta Park and Derway in the New North End. If the weather is truly terrible, we will meet online for a discussion, instead. We cannot use the RSENR vans because of COVID: all trips to the New North End will be either by bike-bus (biking together) or in private cars. **Please check email Sunday night for updates on Monday labs: bird-walks are weather-dependent.**

**Wednesdays (Elves' Workshop):** Every Wednesday afternoon from 2-5:00pm, all elves meet in the woods surrounding Flynn. During our elves' workshop we will play, learn and plan the activities that the children will do in their pods on Thursdays and Fridays. Elves love masks so be creative and make yourself a beautiful one! Transport will either be by bike or private car (unless you have special elfin powers and can fly or transport yourself telepathically.) Just be there and **be on time**).

Course structure is based on learning through relationships and through daily and weekly practices:

**Learning through relationships:** This is an opportunity to learn from children, the birds, a place (the Winooski Delta and its non-human residents or Ethan Allan Park, and the New North End, a neighborhood outside the university bubble), Burlington school staff, and from each other. During this semester we are not teachers, mentors and students—we are all co-explorers. Co-exploring is based on a series of reciprocal relationships.

**Learning through practices:** There are three weekly practices: 1) birding; 2) nature-study and public research for our Flynn and Hunt co-explorers; and 3) reflective reading and writing.

1. **Birding:** Every week, you will spend at least one hour birding with a class “bird buddy.” **Please make sure you maintain a distance from each other and wear masks.** Together you will list all birds observed during this session. You can go birding on or around campus or wherever convenient--the birds are everywhere. Every Monday we will share stories from our birding journals; you will turn in your journal for a grade that day.
2. **Nature Study and Public Research:** Teachers and staff have asked for a nature guide that describes the creatures great and small who live around the school. They are trying to take the kids outside as much as possible and urgently need this material. This will be our number one priority as a team. We will research and produce this nature guide during the first month of class and present it to the school hopefully by mid-March.
3. **Reading, reflecting and writing:** We will read short articles and books this semester to provide the social context to understand what we are doing and why we are doing it. Flynn Elementary, Hunt Middle School and the New North End are a learning laboratory in which you can immediately test and apply ideas and concepts from class readings. Weekly reading reflection questions are posted on BlackBoard. Reflections (**hard copy**) are due on Mondays during our Birding Lab. **Late papers receive half-credit.**

## Attendance Policy: No Mask—No Class

**This is not just a class—this is a community program.** There are children, teachers, principals, after-school staff and parents depending on **you** to show up, on time, every week, and help produce teaching materials. Please do not let them, and do not let my neighborhood and UVM down. As a member of the Elves’ Workshop, you are UVM’s ambassador in the New North End.

Everyone gets one free absence (I don’t need a written excuse—just take the absence when you need to). Additional absences from class sessions will seriously impact your participation grade **which is worth 50%**. In extreme circumstances, see me and I will refer you to our Dean of Students, Marie Vea-Fagnant: [Marie.Vea-Fagnant@uvm.edu](mailto:Marie.Vea-Fagnant@uvm.edu).

The [Green and Gold Promise](#) clearly articulates the expectations that UVM has for students, faculty, and staff to remain compliant with all COVID-19 recommendations from the federal CDC, the State of Vermont, and the City of Burlington. This include following all rules regarding facial coverings and social distancing when attending class. If you do not follow these guidelines, I will ask you to leave the class. **If you forget your mask, you cannot join the class and should go back and retrieve your mask.** The [Code of Student Conduct](#) outlines policies related to violations of the Green and Gold Promise. Sanctions for violations include fines, educational sanctions, parent notification, probation, and suspension.

### COVID and Attendance, Isolation and Quarantine:

If you need to isolate or quarantine, Student Health Services will inform our dean. If possible, please email me to let me know. I will help you continue with classwork when you are healthy enough to do so. You will be able to make up assignments; all reading assignments will be posted on BlackBoard. This is a very rough time. I expect you to do the work and earn the grade, but not until you are well. **Sick elves must rest. Please do not come to class if you are not feeling well. You will not be penalized.**

### GRADING SYSTEM:

<b>Participation in Elves’ Workshop:</b> production of neighborhood nature guide, scavenger hunts, games, nature art, videos, discussions, answering kids’ questions	50%
<b>Weekly Reading and Writing Reflections:</b>	25%
<b>Weekly Birding Field Practice (with your bird buddy)</b>	15%
<b>Field Journal and Drawings:</b>	10%
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## Course Texts and Readings:

Please make **VT Digger** your homepage this semester. You should be familiar with any news stories and editorials covering education issues, social justice and racism in Burlington, and particularly in the neighborhood where you are working, the New North End. **VT Digger** is the only publication covering local struggles against white supremacy. Many of the children at Flynn Elementary and Hunt Middle Schools are kids of color and are directly affected by racism. We all have a responsibility to be informed and to understand how we can change this situation, so please—**read the local news.**

I also strongly recommend that you purchase your own birding field guide. If you are a beginner, I recommend this field guide which is organized by color (red birds, blue birds, etc.). This is the quickest and easiest way to learn birds:

Tekiela, Stan

2016 *Birds of New Hampshire and Vermont Field Guide*. Adventure Publications: Cambridge, MN. (Bookshop.org and probably Phoenix Books on Bank St.)

### In addition, please purchase the following texts:

**An engineering fieldbook (waterproof or “Rite-in-the-Rain”).** This fieldbook should be at least 7 inches by 4.5 inches. Please do not buy tiny notebooks. You will be drawing and writing in this book every week.

Gange, Jared

2019 *Suddenly You Are Nobody: Vermont Refugees Tell Their Stories*. Huntington Graphics: Burlington, VT. (Phoenix Books, on Bank Street)

Haupt, Lyanda

2001 *Rare Encounters with Ordinary Birds*. Sasquatch Books: Seattle, WA. (bookshop.org)

Lanham, J. Drew

2016 *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man’s Love Affair with Nature*. Milkweed Editions: Minneapolis, MN. (bookshop.org)

O’Kane, Trish

2020 *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Elves But Were Afraid to Ask: A Comprehensive Guide to Elfology*. Sunflower Press: Dublin, Ireland.

### Web Sites for Research Assignments and Weekly Bird Identification:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology	<a href="http://www.allaboutbirds.org">http://www.allaboutbirds.org</a>
Vermont E-Bird: subscribe to e-newsletter for news on birds in Vermont:	<a href="http://ebird.org/contact/vt/">ebird.org/contact/vt/</a>
Burlington Geographic	<a href="http://www.uvm.edu/place/burlingtongeographic/">http://www.uvm.edu/place/burlingtongeographic/</a>
The Birds of North America	<a href="http://www.wisc.edu">http://www.wisc.edu</a> (free access with student ID on library website, search for "Birds of North America" online.)
We Love Birds	<a href="http://www.welovebirds.org/">http://www.welovebirds.org/</a>
Vermont Breeding Bird Atlas	<a href="http://val.vtcostudies.org/projects/Vermont-breeding-bird-atlas/">val.vtcostudies.org/projects/Vermont-breeding-bird-atlas/</a>
Encyclopedia of Life	<a href="http://eol.org/">http://eol.org/</a>

# **ENVS 295 WEEKLY SCHEDULE FOR SPRING 2021**

## **ENVS 295 Weekly Activities Schedule**

**Note:** This class is weather-dependent so schedule is subject to change. Always be prepared to go outside for a feathered adventure (that means dressed for the cold and binos in hand). Check email before class for any weather-related changes. **All reading reflection questions and assignments on this schedule will be posted on BlackBoard.**

## **WEEKLY TASKS:**

**Every Week:** Go birding for **at least one hour with your bird buddy**. Record your birding adventure in your journal and be ready to share during labs.

Work on your individual species account for the nature guide.

**Every Monday:** **All assignments are due on Mondays.** Hand in birding journals, assigned drawings and **hard copy** of your reading reflection (if one has been assigned that week).

**Every Wednesday:** Participate in Elves' Workshop.

Our course calendar is divided into three units by these themes: 1) **What Are We Doing?** (neighborhood-based nature guide); 2) **Who Are We Doing It With?** (our New American flock); and 3) **Why Are We Doing It?** (environmental justice).

**Part I: What We Are Doing: The Elves' Workshop**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Intro to Our Feathered Teachers</b>	
<b>Mon. 2/1</b>	During the scheduled bird lab please study syllabus and materials from last semester in email from instructor. Prepare questions for Wednesday session online.	
<b>Wed. 2/4</b>	Orientation I: Meet with Flynn after-school director Lauren Drasler online to find out what our community needs this semester.	<b>Please pick up your binoculars by Friday.</b> Use the instructions to set your diopter and practice with them.  Do readings over the weekend for first reflection due on Monday, 2/8.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>The Weird and Wonderful World of Birding</b>	
<b>Mon. 2/8</b>	First birding lab at Colchester Bridge/Delta Park.	* Reflection due on Comstock reading and O’Kane dissertation chapters (see BB).  * Two drawings: one of a Vermont bird (colored) and the second of the track of an animal likely to be found in the Flynn Elementary woods.
<b>Wed. 2/10</b>	Elves’ workshop in Flynn Woods. TRISH: Discussion of Nature Study movement and methods.  TRISH: Hand out “Birding for Beginners.”  <b>Go birding with your new Bird Buddy</b> before the next class!	

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>“The Child Should First See the Thing.”</b> Liberty Hyde Bailey, 1903	
<b>Mon. 2/15</b>	Birds and bagel breakfast in Trish’s backyard. Discussion of feeders, pros/cons.  Neighborhood birding exploration of the New North End.	*Birding journal due.  * Two drawings: one of a Vermont bird (colored) and the second of the track of an animal likely to be found in the Flynn Elementary woods.  *One-page reflection on pgs. 1-106 of “Birding for Beginners.” Hard copy due in class.
<b>Wed. 2/17</b>	Elves workshop in Flynn Woods to begin neighborhood nature guide. Choose a species that you are going to study! Addy is the editor.  <b>Go birding with your new Bird Buddy.</b> Find a bird doing some of the tasks you read about in “Birding for Beginners” and record in your journal.	

**TOWN MEETING DAY IS COMING UP. ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE IN BURLINGTON?**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Education as Liberation: Freire</b>	
<b>Mon. 2/22</b>	Birding lab.	*Birding journal due.  * Two drawings: one of a Vermont bird (colored) and the second of the track of an animal likely to be found in the Flynn Elementary woods.  *Reflection due on O’Kane and Freire readings, see BB.
<b>Wed. 2/24</b>	Elves’ Workshop in Flynn Woods to set up scavenger hunts and work on neighborhood nature guide.	* Draft of your species account for nature guide. Turn in to Addy.

	Share your nature guide creature with the class. Teach us something really cool about your creature.	
	<b>Go birding with your new Bird Buddy!</b>	

**TOWN MEETING DAY IS COMING UP. ARE YOU REGISTERED TO VOTE IN BURLINGTON?**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Rare Encounters with Ordinary Birds</b>	
<b>Mon. 3/1</b>	Bird walk.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one Vermont bird (colored) and one animal track.  *Reflection due (Haupt and Birds of The World online, see BB).
<b>Tues. 3/2</b>	Town Meeting Day: pay attention to what is going on in our brave little state. <b>VOTE.</b>	
<b>Wed. 3/3</b>	Elves' Workshop: Did you know that according to one fairy tale, elves taught the birds to sing? Figure out a way to use birdsong to teach the kids.	*Revised species account for Addy for final draft of nature guide.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 6</b>	<b>Don't Just Study the Bird-BE the Bird!</b>	
<b>Mon. 3/8</b>	Birdwalk and birdsong practice.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one bird (colored) and one track.  *Reflection due (Haupt and Birds of The World online, see BB).
<b>Wed. 3/10</b>	Elves' Workshop: create scavenger hunts and other activities for the kids.	<b>TARGET date</b> to finish our neighborhood nature guide: Addy is responsible for final version.

## PART II: Who Are Our Partners?

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>Our New American Flock in Burlington</b>	
<b>Mon. 3/15</b>	Class birdwalk.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one bird (colored) and one track.  *Reflection on press articles on New Americans in Burlington.
<b>Wed. 3/17</b>	Elves' Workshop. Discussion on New Americans.	

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>Our Burlington Flock, Part II</b>	
<b>Mon. 3/22</b>	Prepare Elves Workshop for Flynn. Saturday, March 20 was first day of SPRING!! Design an activity for the kids that celebrates spring and the changing sunlight.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one bird (colored).  *Reflection on "Suddenly You Are Nobody" Gange, Part I.
<b>Wed. 3/24</b>	<b>Relaxing day—No class.</b>  <b>Go birding with your new Bird Buddy before the next class!</b>	

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 9</b>	<b>Our Burlington Flock, Part III</b>	
<b>Mon. 3/29</b>	Bird walk.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one bird (colored).

		* <b>No reflection due</b> because of Reading Day.
<b>Wed. 3/31</b>	Discussion of New American readings, Part II.	*Reflection on “Suddenly You Are Nobody” Part II.

### **PART III: Why We Are Doing This Program-Justice**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 10</b>	<b>Liberating the Children</b>	
<b>Mon. 4/5</b>	Birdwalk.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one bird (colored).  *Reflection on Hanscom, Sobel and Tierney readings.
<b>Wed. 4/7</b>	<b>Go birding with your new Bird Buddy before the next class!</b>  Elves’ Workshop: Play in Flynn playground and then discuss Hanscom reading and the Youtube on New Zealand’s revolutionary principal.	

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 11</b>	<b>Chill Week</b>	<b>No reflection due.</b>
<b>Mon. 4/12</b>	Prepare Elves Workshop for Flynn.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one bird (colored).
<b>Wed. 4/14</b>	<b>UVM Reading Day: No class.</b>	

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 12</b>	<b>Birding While Black I: Whose Home-Place?</b>	
<b>Mon. 4/19</b>	Birdwalk.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one bird (colored).  * Reflection on Lanham’s “The Home Place” and press articles.
<b>Wed. 4/21</b>	Flynn is on vacation. The Elves’ Workshop is helping ENVS002 this week. Some of you will participate in a panel on Wednesday. Many of you will help take these UVM first-year students birding on Friday, depending on COVID. We will meet Wed. afternoon to discuss.  TRISH: introduce implicit bias reading and concept.	
<b>Fri. 4/23</b>	Bird mentoring with ENVS 002.	

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 13</b>	<b>Birding While Black II: Implicit Bias in Education</b>	
<b>Mon. 4/26</b>	Spring migration birdwalk and outdoor discussion on privilege, white supremacy and the Great Outdoors.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one bird (colored).  * Reflection on systemic discrimination and on implicit bias tests.
<b>Wed. 4/28</b>	Elves workshop.	

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes and Class Activities</b>	<b>Assignments Due</b>
<b>Week 14</b>	<b>Our Home Place: What did we learn about Burlington this semester?</b>	
<b>Mon. 5/3</b>	Spring migration bird field trip.	*Birding journal due.  *Drawing of one bird (colored).  *Reflection on The Home Place, Part II to instructor.
<b>Wed. 5/5</b>	Elves workshop.	

<b>FINAL WEEK 15</b>		*Turn in birding journals for final grade.
<b>Mon. 5/10</b>	Last class meets in Flynn Woods to plan activities for the kids.	*Final drawing assignment TBA (possible art gallery).  *Final reflection on The Home Place.
<b>Fri. 5/15</b>		<b>Final Class Reflection due via email to instructor: <a href="mailto:pokane@uvm.edu">pokane@uvm.edu</a> by 12:00 noon.</b>

**Class party/beach bonfire/picnic to end semester: TBA depending on COVID.**