

## **Perils in Paradise – the Clash of Nature and Culture on Oceanic Islands**

**Wednesday, October 20 to December 8, 2021, 10am to noon**

**Zoom Session**

**[www.learningunlimiteddetobicoke.com](http://www.learningunlimiteddetobicoke.com)**

**Coordinator and Presenter: Tony Davis**

**Course Overview:** This series focusses on oceanic islands. Until recently these places were perceived as exotic, mysterious and remote. Their remoteness has conditioned the evolution of peculiar and vulnerable floras and faunas while that isolation and size have severely constrained human occupation. As such, they are laboratories for evolution and succession as well as for human behaviour and for the testing of nuclear and biological weapons. They have served as extensions of empires, prisons, asylums, places of quarantine, and more recently as military bases, tourist destinations and offshore tax havens. Perhaps the most obvious and immediate threats are the consequences of global warming, notably rising sea levels. We will examine the origins of oceanic islands and their distinctive biotas, the pattern of colonization and the social, cultural, biological and economic consequences of settlement.

**October 20: Baptism by Fire** - Island types and numbers. Oceanic islands are volcanic in origin. Their distribution is determined by plate tectonics. This produces island chains and hot spots. The natural hazards of island living. Iceland, Hawaii and the Galapagos.

**October 27: The Peculiar Floras and Faunas of Oceanic Islands** - Islands have low species diversity, high endemism (species found nowhere else) and high vulnerability- largely a function of island size and degree of isolation. There are often distinctive and peculiar evolutionary responses (dwarfism, gigantism, flightlessness, etc.). New Zealand and the Galapagos.

**November 3: The Settlement of Islands - Phase 1** - The human diaspora and island settlement. The peopling of the Pacific: Polynesian migrations; successes and failures. Navigation and boatbuilding. Widespread distribution of the Polynesian ‘package’ (taro, sweet potatoes, breadfruit, the kiore, etc.). Ecological and environmental impacts.

**November 10: The Settlement of Islands – Phase 2** - European colonization and extension of empire. Many islands were essentially plantations of sugar, tea, etc. The system brought with it genocide, disease, slavery and other social and economic legacies. The Caribbean, Hawaii, Fiji.

**November 17: Islands as Prisons and Laboratories for Plants, Animals and People** - Isolation has its attractions and problems. Islands as utopia, sanctuary and places of incarceration – St. Helena to Norfolk Island. Biological globalization and its impact on island plants and animals.

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**November 24: Islands at War and In Peace** - Islands as strategic locations (Midway, Okinawa, Diego Garcia, etc.). Testing of nuclear and biological weapons and human displacement Bikini and Enewetak Atolls.

**December 1: Paradise Lost and Preserved (For Now)** - The use and abuse of island resources and the myth of sustainability. Disasters and success stories Madagascar, the Galapagos, Nauru, Rapa Nui,

**December 8: The Future of Island Nations and Their Biotas** - The economic, health and environmental issues facing island nations: Old and new threats, tourism and global warming. Many are on the brink of social and economic collapse.

Tony Davis is an Emeritus Associate Professor in the Department of Geography, University of Toronto. Although his official appointment was as a biogeographer, he considers himself an environmental historian. His research focussed on the reconstruction of past environments using pollen analysis, but teaching has always been his passion. Increasingly this has shifted to an emphasis on human-environment interactions in both his undergraduate teaching and in his presentations for life-long learning groups. His involvement with the latter started with Learning Unlimited Etobicoke over three decades ago, but since his retirement has extended to other Later Life Learning groups.