

# EurekaAlert! Science Reporting for Kids, Part A

Lesson Title: Simulating Climate Change Research in Grasslands

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## More time tells a different story about plants and climate change

Ecologists studying the effects of climate change on a California grassland, found that observing the interactions between plants and insects over five years, provides better information than one- or two-year-long studies on a single plant or insect.

Scientist Blake Suttle explained that they "manipulated the climate and saw how the grassland reorganized itself. The response was very different than we expected because of what we know about how the climate affects each species. This experiment taught us about the importance of interacting species in the community."

Suttle and other ecologists set up outdoor laboratories – hundreds of 10 meter-in-diameter plots of trees and natural plants in northern California. Their goal was to study the effect of climate change as predicted by two computer models on two different sets of plots. The two climate models involved changes in the amount and timing of rainfall, so the scientists added the extra water at the correct times to the plots to match the models.



Ecologist Blake Suttle enjoys working in the field. Here he is pictured in the California grasslands where researchers are studying the long-term effects of climate change on the ecosystem.



A third group of plots were "controls." Researchers did not do anything different to these areas. Setting up controls is a normal part of research, explains Suttle. "Without a control, we don't know whether what we are seeing in the experiments is due to the water we are adding or just natural conditions. The control gives us more confidence in our research because we have a 'normal' situation to compare it to," he said.

[The full story is found at <http://www.eurekaalert.org/features/kids/2007-02/aaft-mtt012607.php>.]