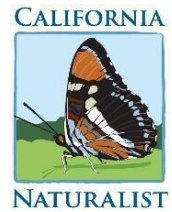
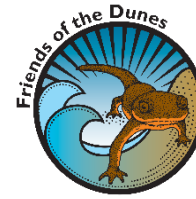


California Naturalist Training

Fall 2026 Syllabus

September 9 to October 28, 2026



Lead Instructor: Jennifer Ortega (she/her)

jen@friendsofthedunes.org

Admin & Co-Instructor: Suzie Fortner (she/her)

suzie@friendsofthedunes.org

Zoom or in-person "Office Hours" available upon request

Course Description

The Coastal Naturalist Training, a California Naturalist certification course through [UC Environmental Stewards](#), will introduce participants to the wonders of Humboldt's coastal ecology and engage them in stewardship of California's natural communities. This course combines a junior college-level introductory science course curriculum with classroom and field experiences, guest lecturers, and project-based learning to immerse participants in the natural world of the Humboldt Bay region and coastal dune ecosystem.

UC Environmental Stewards promotes environmental literacy and [stewardship through discovery and action](#). Our courses give Californians the knowledge, skills, and network to help protect and preserve our unique and diverse wildlife, habitats, rivers, lakes, and coastal resources, wild and urban alike, to increase ecosystem and community resilience.

UC Environmental Stewards Program Objectives for California Naturalist Courses

- To promote environmental literacy and stewardship of California's natural resources
- To increase participation in resource conservation and participatory science projects throughout the state
- To develop a core constituency of committed and educated community members motivated and trained to participate in resource conservation, preservation, and restoration efforts
- To provide participants with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to educate others and participate in many aspects of resource management, such as public education, resource planning, and public decision-making
- To provide the communication experience and critical thinking skills necessary to grow a citizen base that supports environmental protection and sustainable growth in California
- To support partner organizations and collaborators as they implement the program

Participant Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, participants will:

- Understand what it means to be a naturalist
- Have increased knowledge of the natural history of the Humboldt Bay region
- Have integrated knowledge of the interconnectedness of abiotic, biotic, and cultural factors and their influence on the natural history of the Humboldt Bay region and coastal ecosystems
- Demonstrate skills in recording natural history observations in a field notebook and on iNaturalist
- Demonstrate skills in communicating and interpreting natural science information
- Be able to apply knowledge of the Humboldt Bay region and coastal ecosystems to local and global environmental issues
- Be equipped and empowered to become active volunteers with Friends of the Dunes or other local environmental organizations

Time and Location

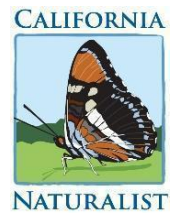
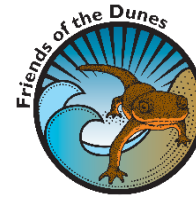
- **Course Dates:** September 9 to October 28, 2026
- **Classroom Sessions:** Wednesday evenings from 6 to 8 p.m. at the [Humboldt Coastal Nature Center](#)
- **Field Sessions:** Sunday mornings from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.* Locations vary, carpooling is encouraged.
- **Stewardship Project Presentations & Graduation:** Wednesday, October 28th from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

** Exact times for field sessions may vary depending on activities for the day*

California Naturalist Training

Fall 2026 Syllabus

September 9 to October 28, 2026



Program Costs

- **Program Fee:** \$400 or \$350 for students & [Friends of the Dunes members](#)
- **Kayak Rental (Optional):** Approximately \$30 for a kayak rental through Center Activities
- **Academic Credits (Optional):** \$80 for four UC Davis Continuing and Professional Education academic credits upon course completion and certification

Scholarships are available based on need. Contact suzie@friendsofthedunes.org for more info.

Course Requirements

- **Contact Time:** Participants are required to complete a minimum of 40 hours of educational contact time. Information about making up missed sessions is included on page 3 of this syllabus.
- **Required Reading & Homework:** Participants are required to complete reading and homework assignments, which will include reading the entire texts, *The California Naturalist Handbook* and *Coastal Naturalist Manual*. A detailed schedule of class sessions and associated homework assignments will be available at least 2 weeks before the course starts.
- **Stewardship Project:** Participants are required to complete a Stewardship Project focusing on one of six areas: 1) Participatory Science, 2) Organizational Support, 3) Education, Interpretation, & Communication, 4) Conservation & Restoration, 5) Collective Climate Mitigation & Adaptation, and 6) Policy, Systems, & Environmental Change. Participants will present their Stewardship Projects to the class on graduation day. More information about Stewardship Projects is provided on page 3 of this syllabus.
- **Using a Field Notebook:** All participants are required to keep a field notebook during the course to keep notes from field sessions and field observations. Field notebooks may be checked by the instructor periodically throughout the course. Participants are also encouraged, but not required, to keep a Nature Journal. The difference between a field notebook and a nature journal will be discussed during our first field session.
- **iNaturalist Observations & Course iNaturalist Project:** Participants will be responsible for registering for an [iNaturalist](http://www.inaturalist.org/) account (<http://www.inaturalist.org/>) and adding at least 10 observations to the course iNaturalist Project. Our iNaturalist Project is [FOD Coastal Naturalist Training](https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/fod-coastal-naturalist-training) (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/fod-coastal-naturalist-training>)
- **Volunteer Portal:** After the course administrator initiates an invitation, participants are required to set up a profile in the [UC Environmental Stewards Volunteer Portal](#) by the **second class meeting**. By the **fourth class meeting**, participants will need to add their first Stewardship Project hour and submit their Stewardship Project title and category to the Volunteer Portal. Before graduation, participants will need to add the rest of their Stewardship Project hours to the Volunteer Portal, for a total of 8 hours worked on the project.

Required Course Materials:

- *The California Naturalist Handbook* (2nd ed.) by Greg Nevers, Deborah Stanger Edelman, & Adina Merenlender
([Available through UC Press 30% off with Discount Code: UCPSAVE30](#), at College of the Redwoods Bookstore, or order in advance from a local bookstore)
- *Coastal Naturalist Manual* published by Friends of the Dunes (Available as a PDF)
- Field notebook and pencil or pen for class notes and field observations
- Access to the internet and an email account

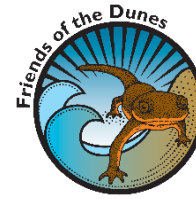
Optional Course Materials:

- Nature Journal for reflections & observations (we recommend a multimedia art spiral notebook)
- Colored pencils and/or watercolors
- Binoculars
- 10X Hand Lens (Available at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center)

California Naturalist Training

Fall 2026 Syllabus

September 9 to October 28, 2026



Field Sessions

Participants must be able to walk in soft sand, up steep dunes, and along uneven trails while carrying their field supplies. Please bring lunch, drinking water, sunscreen/hat, comfortable walking shoes, layers, rain gear if needed, and note-taking materials. Field sessions are rain or shine; only extreme weather conditions will cause a field session to be canceled. If any sessions are canceled, we will do our best to reschedule. Participants may not bring guests, children, or pets to field sessions. For service animal accommodations, please contact suzie@friendsofthedunes.org before the course start date.

Graduation Day

Our Graduation and Stewardship Project Presentations will take place on **Wednesday, October 28, from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.** at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center. More details will be provided in class.

Homework

Reading is assigned for each class meeting based on the week's topic. Participants are expected to complete the assigned reading before coming to class. Other homework assignments include field notebook entries, registration with the California Naturalist Volunteer Portal, downloading the iNaturalist app, and working on Stewardship Projects.

iNaturalist

iNaturalist Apps are available for free on both Android phones and iPhones. Observations can also be uploaded to [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org) from a computer. A smartphone is not required for this course; participants without a smartphone can share with others who do have one or upload their observations from a computer or tablet.

Stewardship Project

Participants are required to complete a project that falls within one of the Stewardship project categories: 1) Participatory Science, 2) Organizational Support, 3) Education, Interpretation, & Communication, 4) Conservation & Restoration, 5) Collective Climate Mitigation & Adaptation, and 6) Policy, Systems, & Environmental Change. The Stewardship Project allows participants to integrate the course content with an applied work project. Participants should work with an established organization, conservation group, nature center, or park on a project that will benefit that entity. Stewardship Projects should be completed in a relatively short time (8 hours). Participants are encouraged to work in teams when appropriate. On graduation day, all participants will present their projects to the group, unless other arrangements are made with the instructors. Presentations will be approximately 3-5 minutes for individuals and 5-8 minutes for group projects. The course instructors will provide a Stewardship Project proposal form, project ideas, and feedback as necessary throughout the course.

Attendance Policy/Making-up Missed Sessions

Participants must complete a minimum of 40 hours of instruction during the course. If a session is missed, it can be made up by attending any special topic walk, workshop, lecture, or service learning opportunity relevant to the course and writing a brief description for the instructor. These make-up sessions can be, but do not need to be, through Friends of the Dunes. Please check with the instructor beforehand to confirm whether the make-up session will be acceptable. All make-up sessions must be completed by November 6, 2026, at the very latest. Preferably, make-ups should be completed by graduation on October 28, 2026. The maximum number of sessions that can be missed or made up is **three**; exceeding this number will result in participants not achieving the learning outcomes.

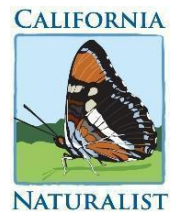
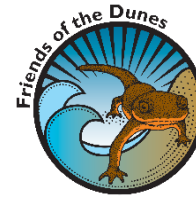
Volunteering

Participants are encouraged (but not required) to **volunteer 10 hours** with Friends of the Dunes or another local organization. Hours spent working on your Stewardship Project count as volunteer time and should be logged as Stewardship Project volunteer hours in the [UC Environmental Stewards Volunteer Portal](https://ucenv.stewards.org/). Participants who complete 10 hours of volunteering before graduation day (October 28, 2026) will be eligible for raffle prizes during graduation. Please note that UC Environmental Stewards recommends at least 40 hours of volunteering per year and offers incentives to reach this goal, including a [California Naturalist pin](https://www.california-naturalist.org/) with a new design each year. Examples of volunteer service include but are not limited to: restoration or trail maintenance, coastal clean-ups, visitor services in the Nature

California Naturalist Training

Fall 2026 Syllabus

September 9 to October 28, 2026



Center, leading field trips for school groups, assisting at special events such as Dine by the Sea, and leading or assisting with guided walks, workshops, or family programs. Examples of other organizations that offer coastal education programs and volunteer opportunities include: Friends of the Arcata Marsh, Humboldt Baykeeper, California Native Plant Society, Northcoast Regional Land Trust, Trinidad Coastal Land Trust, Northcoast Environmental Center, Humboldt Trail Stewards, California State Parks, Sequoia Park Zoo, Redwood Region Audubon Society, PacOut Green Team, Humboldt Fish Action Council, Humboldt Surfrider, Cal Poly Humboldt Natural History Museum, and Cal Poly Humboldt Natural Resources Club.

Volunteer Portal

You will be provided with an online account to track your volunteer service, starting with your Stewardship Project during the course and continuing for all future volunteer service as a certified California Naturalist. You will receive an introductory email invitation to complete our pre-course survey and to log into the Volunteer Portal. Notify your instructor if you do not receive this email by the first day of class. Please complete the six questions in the pre-course survey and record the unique password that you create during the survey. You will need the password later during the course evaluation. Log in to the Volunteer Portal and set your password, check that your name in your profile is how you want your name to appear on your California Naturalist certificate, and update your profile with a second email address if available. You will be accessing the Volunteer Portal during the course, logging your Stewardship Project information and hours as required for certification. Please bookmark and use this link to access the Volunteer Portal: <https://apps.ideal-logic.com/ucanr>. For assistance navigating the portal, visit the Volunteer Portal [help page](#) or ask your instructors..

Cancellation and Refund Policy

We reserve the right to cancel or modify any activity due to inclement weather, insufficient participation, or other conditions beyond our control. In the event that Friends of the Dunes cancels the program, all fees collected are fully refundable. Should any participant cancel at least one week before the beginning of the course, a full refund will be issued minus a \$25 administrative fee. If the participant withdraws before the second class meeting, a 50% refund will be issued. No refunds will be issued after the second class meeting.

Instructional Methods, Inclusion, and Accommodations

The course will integrate a range of instructional methods, including lecture, presentations, peer-to-peer discussion, small group activities, hands-on and inquiry-based activities, and experiential learning. Field sessions will take place in coastal environments, and participants will be expected to walk on soft sand at a reasonable pace. Two optional field sessions will take place on boats. Requests for reasonable accommodations for disabilities or limitations should be made prior to the first class session or field activity for which it is needed. Please make such requests as early as possible by contacting suzie@friendsofthedunes.org.

Instructors

Jennifer Ortega, Ed.D., Education Manager with Friends of the Dunes. Jen has a variety of interpretive and environmental education experiences, beginning as a middle school science teacher, to education ranger for Redwood National & State Parks, to education coordinator at Cal Poly Humboldt's Natural History Museum, and lastly as a faculty member at Cal Poly Humboldt, teaching Environmental Education and Interpretation. She is a Master Certified Environmental Educator and a Project Learning Tree, WET, and WILD facilitator. Her favorite place to be is the outdoors with family and friends.

Suzie Fortner, Friends of the Dunes Executive Director, has 21 years of experience in natural resource interpretation and environmental education. She has a B.S. in Marine Biology from U.C. Santa Cruz and an M.A. in Social Science through the Environment and Community Program at Cal Poly Humboldt. Suzie has been working with Friends of the Dunes since 2008, where she has developed, taught, and overseen educational programs that connect people of all ages to Humboldt's coastal environments while engaging the community in the stewardship of these special places.