

All That the Rain Brings

By Suzie Fortner, Executive Director



Fly agaric mushrooms (Amanita muscaria) emerge from the sand at Digawututklh. Photo by Suzie Fortner

As the rainy season arrives, I find myself looking forward to the growth it brings. While I love the spring and summer in dunes full of colorful blooms and pollinators, our fall and winter months bring their own treasures. Mushrooms seem to magically appear along our sandy trails overnight, while lichens and mosses are at their most lush and impressive after a good rainstorm. Our coastal forests become damp wonderlands filled with new life, and seasonal wetlands begin to collect water, providing temporary habitat for amphibians and invertebrates.

While the recent rains interrupted some of the outdoor fun we had planned for this year's Spooky Dunes event, our innovative education team did an excellent job adapting the treasure hunt to be an indoor adventure (see page 6). On the other hand, the timing was perfect to nourish newly transplanted native dunegrass (*Elymus mollis*), which had just been planted along our freshly restored foredunes at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center (more on page 3). Thankfully, the weather seemed to cooperate perfectly with the field sessions for our annual California Naturalist course, the Coastal Naturalist Training. Our participants have grown personally and professionally during this 8-week course by expanding their knowledge of, and connection to, Humboldt's diverse coastal environments through this transformative learning experience. Learn more about this year's course from a participant's perspective on page 5.



Friends of the Dunes is dedicated to conserving the natural diversity of coastal environments in Humboldt County, California, through community supported education and stewardship programs.

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Dunesberry design and layout by
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All That the Rain Brings

(continued from page 1)

As our programs slow down for the winter months, this is a great time to reflect on what we've accomplished over the past year and identify areas for growth in the coming year. So far in 2025, our education and stewardship programs have engaged over 1,500 community members in meaningful connections with coastal environments! We have also seen an incredible increase in ecological diversity on our foredunes at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center. After completing the "first dig" of European beachgrass (*Ammophila arenaria*) in the summer of 2024, this spring, we saw a massive resurgence of native dune mat species repopulating the restoration site. We look forward to the continued recovery of native species during the final stages of this foredune restoration project in the coming year.

It has undoubtedly been a year of growth for our organization, and we could not have accomplished it without you — your continued support made it all possible. Your dedication to Friends of the Dunes nourishes our essential work of engaging the community in coastal conservation, just as the rain nourishes our natural landscapes. I am endlessly grateful for your support.



Dune Ecosystem Restoration Team (DERT)

Add gloves, shovels, and brush axes to human hands, and you have the strongest dune restoration tool around. You can make a difference in the ecosystem, one invasive plant removal at a time. Within months of initially removing invasive plants, volunteers witness native plants re-sprouting on their own. No experience is necessary. We will have snacks and tools to share. **No need to reserve a spot,** meet us at the specified locations a few minutes before 10 am. Training, camaraderie, and beautiful scenery are provided.

DERT meets two times a month:

- Every second Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center
- Every third Sunday of the month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the BLM's Ma-le'l Dunes South (meeting location varies)

Visit friendsofthedunes.org/calendar for specific dates and details on meeting locations.

Restoration Update: A New Chapter Begins

By Justin Legge, Stewardship Director & Restoration Manager

If you've walked the Wildberries Trail to the foredune lately at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center (HCNC), you may have noticed something remarkable: the stubborn European beachgrass (*Ammophila arenaria*) that once dominated the landscape is now missing! Aside from a very few sporadic resprouts, which we continue to aggressively pull and monitor, it is just about gone. Thanks to the hard work of Redwood Community Action Agency (RCAA) crews, as well as our dedicated volunteers and interns, native dune plants are rapidly returning to our foredunes, which only two short years ago were dominated by the invasive European beachgrass.

Our College Corps Restoration Fellows, along with a restoration intern from Cal Poly Humboldt, now survey the area regularly to make sure the European beachgrass doesn't have a chance at making a comeback. Their efforts are paving the way for the next exciting step, planting native dune species to help the foredune thrive naturally once again. In the past, we have not planted native species in our restoration site, except for a bit of experimenting with American dunegrass (*Elymus mollis*). This is due to the smaller scale of restoration zones we have taken on over the years, supported mainly by our volunteers. In these smaller zones, we simply let the native seed bank naturally revegetate restored areas. Due to the restoration site now encompassing the entire stretch of foredune and the rapid removal of large amounts of European beachgrass, we will be planting a significant number of native dune mat species to provide natural stabilization, in part to prevent excessive sand movement during this stage. This process has already begun with the planting of *Elymus mollis*. Recently, RCAA crews added around 1,000 more plugs of this American dunegrass, completing planting of this important native grass along the entire foredune.

These transplants were harvested from the Wadulh Unit of the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge and transported by RCAA crews to the HCNC property. Logistically, this process was challenging because we could only transport the plants down the beach at low tide.

In late September, our team joined partners from the Humboldt Coastal Dunes Cooperative for a visit to Samara Restoration, the local native plant nursery growing dune plants for the HCNC and Wadulh projects. We learned about their process and saw firsthand how these plants are maturing. Together, the plants for our project here at the HCNC, combined with those being grown for our partners at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the Wadulh Unit, are the largest quantity they have ever attempted to grow at one time. The numbers are exciting: 39,535 dune mat plants destined for the HCNC site, and 305,089 more for the Wadulh restoration area! The next stage of the project is adding this colorful mix of dune mat species, such as yellow sand verbena, beach strawberry, coastal sagewort, seaside daisy, and dune goldenrod, which will take root and spread across the site. Due to the extremely high number of plants destined for Wadulh, they will require helicopter transportation. Thankfully, for the HCNC project, our proximity to the large parking area at Ma-le'l South will work perfectly as our staging area for transporting our plants down the beach with an all-wheel-drive vehicle.

The big planting of dune mat species at the HCNC is scheduled for January 24, 2026, and we can't wait to celebrate this moment with you all. Members and volunteers can help put the finishing touches on this incredible restoration effort. We hope to see you at the community planting day!

Thank You Sustaining Members!

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Learning From the Land and One Another: Reflections on the 2025 Coastal Naturalist Training

By Ryland Sherman, Stewardship & Restoration Manager

Every fall, Friends of the Dunes welcomes a new group of community members to explore the dynamic ecosystems of Humboldt Bay through the Coastal Naturalist Training. The Coastal Naturalist Training is an 8-week California Naturalist course through UC Environmental Stewards. Participants immersed themselves in local geology, native plants, wildlife, and stewardship through evening classes and weekend field sessions. This year's training felt especially meaningful to me, not only as an employee with Friends of the Dunes, but also as a participant and first-time Teaching Assistant.

One of the most memorable days was our geology and ethnobotany field session at Digawututklh (previously Samoa Dunes and Wetlands). We began the morning amongst the dune forest, listening to geologist Annie Fehrenbach describe the geological forces that have shaped the Humboldt coast from tectonic uplift and the Cascadia Subduction Zone. Even though I've spent years working in the dunes, I gained a deeper appreciation for the geologic processes that created the terrain I walk across every day. Gaining a more thorough understanding of sand movement and dune geomorphology brought a greater understanding to my restoration work.

Later that day, Wiyot Tribal Natural Resources Director Adam Canter guided us through the coastal dune forest, sharing the cultural connections between the Wiyot people and these lands. He spoke about traditional plant uses from dune tansy and yarrow to yerba buena and how those practices continue today. He reminded us that restoration isn't just ecological, it's also cultural. Healing the land includes acknowledging the stories and stewardship practices that have existed here for generations and will continue to sustain the land that sustains all of us.

Every week's lecture and field session built on each experience, deepening our cohort's understanding of the interconnections in our coastal ecosystems. Throughout the course, different content experts shared their knowledge with participants. Some examples include: dune botany with Tony LaBanca, birding at the Arcata Marsh with Mark Colwell, learning about local amphibians with Michael van Hattem and mammals with Karen Riess, and then identifying their tracks in the field with David Orluck. We also had optional field trips, such as a bay tour on the Madaket and kayaking with the Humboldt Bay Aquatic Center.

As graduation approached, I looked around at our group of college students, volunteers, educators, and community members, all here with a shared interest in and love of the coast. This shared curiosity culminated in each naturalist presenting a stewardship project. Each naturalist proudly presented their stewardship project, showcasing weeks of creativity and dedication. These projects marked the transition from naturalist in training to a certified California Naturalist. Projects included a voluntourism website, a deck of native dune plant cards, a guide to land snails of the dunes, educational videos, and plans for future workshops, among many other inspiring efforts. The dedication and passion of our participants were truly inspirational.

The Coastal Naturalist Training offers much more than information, it also builds community. It reminds us that stewardship begins with understanding, and that understanding grows stronger when shared. For me, this year's course reinforced that learning never ends, no matter how familiar the landscape seems. The dunes continue to reveal new stories with every change in season. I'm grateful to have learned from so many teachers, scientists, Tribal leaders, fellow naturalists, and of course, the dunes themselves.



Coastal Naturalist participants at the Ma-le'l Dunes North Unit of the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge.
Photo by Suzie Fortner

Family Nature Connections

Spooky Dunes

By Jennifer Ortega, Education Manager

On Saturday, October 25th, Spooky Dunes pivoted from an outdoor event to an indoor event due to a very rainy forecast. Oh boo! How do dunes full of interesting, wild and silly characters like the Forgetful Flower Fairy, Lost Pirate and Beach Grass Monster keep the Spooky Dunes tour an adventure while being indoors?

Twenty fabulously amazing volunteers arrived at their teaching stations with scripts in hand. With a few modifications of animal tracks in the sand (table), skulls on display and a spotting scope under the building's eave, a great adventure was to be believed.

A treasure map was stamped in no time flat, guiding families where the trail had sat. Around the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center, the loop was spun, a prize in a chest when the journey was done. With smiles and laughter, around forty came, for a free bilingual (Spanish) event, in fun and family's name. Children ages three to ten were all in sight. Let there be no fright with snacks and an art project to highlight.

We all enjoyed the day and we'll do it again, already planning to see you soon, my friend!



Guests learn about nature along the Spooky Dunes quest with help from dedicated volunteers!

Nature Story Time

By Jennifer Ortega, Education Manager & Ashley Osia, Development Director



Come join our super volunteer, Phoebe Hughes, who is highlighted on page 7, for a weekly **Nature Story Time** on Thursdays from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center.

Nature Story Time is geared for children 2-5 and their caregivers. Weekly topics focus on local flora and fauna. Each week, there is a short story, a kinesthetic activity, and an art project. Nature Story Time is completely free, and the next bilingual (Spanish) story time will be on November 20th.

Nature Story Time will run until December 11th, 2025 and then begin again in February 2026.

As an entirely donation and grant-funded environmental nonprofit, Friends of the Dunes is grateful to provide programs like Nature Story Time, aimed at inspiring the next generation of nature lovers. If you wish to support our mission and help us sustain engaging educational experiences, we warmly welcome your contributions. Your generosity will ensure that the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center continues to be a hub for environmental exploration and learning for many years to come. For more information, please reach out to our Development Director at ashley@friendsofthedunes.org or call 707-444-1397 x 105.



Volunteer Highlight: Phoebe Hughes

By Jennifer Ortega, Education Manager



Phoebe Hughes, also known as her nature name Pinecone, has been a volunteer field trip leader with Friends of the Dunes a little over two years and plans to return every season she can. In the wake of college graduation, the rose-colored glasses of opportunity fell away for Phoebe to reveal that she was going to actually have to find something "useful" to do with her Botany degree. But the job market for botanists in Humboldt County is competitive, and the range of options is narrow at best. Even in college, she couldn't quite put her finger on why she dreaded being stuck in a lab or being made to collect data in the field. It all felt so dry, where was the sense of wonder? She asked herself, "Surely, this can't be it, can it?" Phoebe got a cafe job, but the itch to be out in nature was persistent. She poked around for other opportunities, an internship, a foothold into the field she loved so dearly. Then, in the fall of 2023, she found Friends of the Dunes.

Phoebe is one of our field trip guides for the Bay to the Dunes program. During the 4-5 hour field trip, elementary school students explore the dunes around the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center, where they identify animal tracks, learn unique dune plant adaptations, gain an appreciation for dune ecosystem restoration, and have some free time at the beach.

The bay portion of the program takes place at the Manila Community Park, where students explore the mudflats, look for birds using binoculars, and play educational games to understand the importance of wetland habitats.

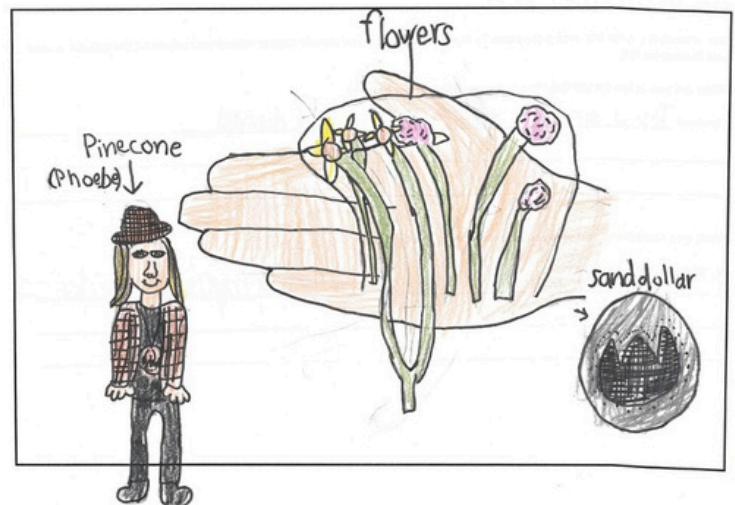
Phoebe explains, "Public schooling has not done environmental education any favors. I went to grade school in the concrete jungle of Southern California, and I didn't even know the difference between a lichen and a plant before I moved to Humboldt for college. Kids should have easy access to information about the natural world, and especially with the age of screens, the opportunity to interact with it first-hand."

When Phoebe found Friends of the Dunes, she just knew, it just clicked. She had the opportunity to show kids why nature compelled her to go to college in the first place. In addition, being surrounded by young, curious minds enriches her to a degree that money cannot buy. The childlike wonder makes her life warmer and brighter.

She thinks it is important that the field trip leaders with Friends of the Dunes are volunteers. Phoebe shares that the field trip leaders who keep coming back do it because they love it. Because there is something beautiful and powerful about a community that gathers, not because it's their job, but because they choose to. Phoebe volunteers for many other Friends of the Dunes events such as Kids Ocean Day, Spooky Dunes, Pollinator Party, and Nature Story Time.

"Let's go change some lives, one bright mind at a time!"

-Phoebe Hughes



An artistic depiction of Phoebe and some dune discoveries by a Bay to Dunes student. As part of the evaluation process, students are asked to draw something they liked or learned.

Growing Our Community

By Verenice Sanchez, Outreach Manager

This year has flown by, leaving us with so many wonderful memories from our free community events. From walks and workshops to a paddle adventure, it's hard to choose just a few highlights, but any time spent enjoying nature with friends is always a highlight for us!

Some of the incredible events we've hosted or joined include Native Plant Dye Day, the Houda Point Hike, the Tvughuquhu'r (Mad River Slough) Paddle with Latino Outdoors Humboldt, and our Nature Journaling Workshop.

Native Plant Dye Day

Laura Sanchez from the Northern California Native Plant Society shared her extensive plant knowledge during this event at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center. Participants learned about native dune plants and how to use them safely and responsibly for natural dyeing. Using evergreen huckleberry berries and dune goldenrod, we transformed plain fabric into colorful artwork.

Houda Point Hike

In partnership with Save California Salmon, we hosted an evening hike at Houda Point Beach, known for its tide pools and gentle cove, a perfect spot to explore at low tide. Participants joined our program guides to observe marine life up close, identify seaweed and shorebird species, and enjoy a stunning sunset. For several attendees, it was their first visit to our local beaches!

Tvughuquhu'r (Mad River Slough) Paddle

To celebrate Latino Conservation Week, we teamed up with Latino Outdoors Humboldt for a paddle through Tvughuquhu'r, the Soulatluk (Wiyot language) place name for the Mad River Slough. With 30 guests on the water, we traveled through Tvughuquhu'r while sharing the importance of conservation, the history of these ancestral Wiyot lands, and our ongoing stewardship efforts. The group enjoyed lunch and birding from kayaks before a joyful paddle back to our launch site.

Nature Journaling Workshop

Our Nature Journaling Workshop brought together a diverse group of budding naturalists; from seasoned journalers to those just beginning their journey. Executive Director Suzie Fortner led the session, sharing resources, art mediums, and creative prompts to inspire observation and reflection. After a short hike to the foredune, participants immersed themselves in the sights, sounds, and scents of our beautiful coast, observing the flourishing life in a recently restored area. Many participants left feeling inspired. Some even expressed interest in starting a local nature journaling club!

Fundraising Extravaganza!

Dine by the Sea 2025

Friends of the Dunes is immensely grateful to have had the opportunity to host another wonderful annual, exclusive, locally-inspired celebration. This year we broadened our horizons and spread our roots, changing the event's name from *Wine by the Sea* to *Dine by the Sea* to increase inclusivity and offer a broader range of beverages and local flavors. A **heartfelt thank you** to all of the amazing donors, volunteers, attendees, business partners, and generous community members for supporting coastal conservation and making this event possible!



Native Plant Dye Day



Houda Point Hike



Dine by the Sea

Photo by Alan Workman



Tvughuquhu'r (Mad River Slough) Paddle

Humboldt Coastal Nature Center



Featured Artist: Aldaron Laird

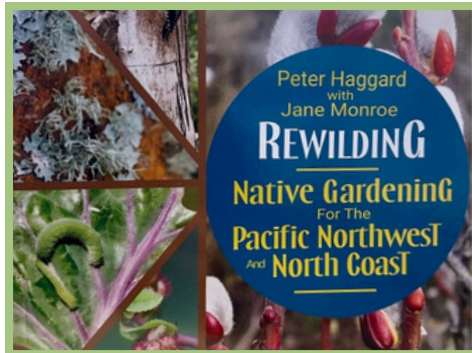
By Anouk Robison-De Fever, Nonprofit Intern

It is the honor of the Friends of the Dunes to highlight the artist Aldaron Laird in celebration of his first book, *A Photographic Exploration of Wigi*. We are grateful for all of his hard work within our community, and for helping plant the seeds of our new growing gallery!

The new art gallery at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center currently features four 16"x30" prints of some of Aldaron's photos from the book for sale and was installed by our long-time visitor's service volunteer and local artist, David Mast. In addition to his wonderful photographic skills, Aldaron is a highly respected environmental planner dedicated to protecting our coast and its waters, and he consistently amplifies Indigenous voices and perspectives. He is also a founding member of the California Coastal Resilience Network and has supported many adaptation and restoration projects to improve our coastline. Through his artistic, environmental, and social work, Aldaron fosters immensely valuable connections between people and the natural world, which sustains us all. If you were able to attend *Dine by the Sea*, you may have had the opportunity to meet Aldaron and purchase a signed copy of his book, thanks to his gracious donation of time to our event. Thank you, Aldaron, for all of your hard work, your thoughtful approach to environmental communication and education, and for your beautifully impactful art, which all add to the gorgeous, diverse garden that is our community here in Humboldt County.



Gift Shop Highlight



Our gift shop has been growing! We are absolutely blooming with new local artists' works that have been added to the collection we offer at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center. In addition to the first book release from our featured artist Aldaron Laird, *A Photographic Exploration of Wigi*, now available in our gift shop, we are also selling copies of *Rewilding: Native Gardening for the Pacific Northwest and North Coast* signed by both authors; Pete Haggard and Jane Monroe! We have increased the variety of stickers available introducing Shine Wildlife's beautiful ecological art into our selection. If you're more interested in wearable items, we have a wide variety of accessories and clothing pieces perfect for any outing or gift. If jewelry fits your tastes, Sequoia Siren's gorgeous and locally made earrings are featured including an exclusive Humboldt Wallflower design only available here at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center. Along with our Friends of the Dunes pins made in-house, we now also offer pins hand made by local artist Bonnie Hossack as well as her skillfully hand-crafted cards. If you're in need of a hat we have new HOMEBOLDT hats sporting an embroidered graphic of the Ma-le'l Dunes alongside our traditional Friends of the Dunes logo hats. Last but not least, is our return to multi-color designs for our shirts and zip up hoodies thanks to the artwork of prolific animator Steven Vander Meer! A variety of full color ten-lined June beetle t-shirts, long sleeved shirts, and zip up sweatshirts have arrived at the gift shop. **Stop by and get yours before they've all flown away!**

Thank You, New & Renewing Members

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Like any native garden, our many members, as well as our human and plant volunteers alike, keep us constantly growing, thriving, and renewing. Friends of the Dunes would surely shrivel without our powerful community. We're always looking for enthusiastic people to join our mission and help preserve the natural beauty of our dunes. Whether you're interested in hands-on conservation work, educational outreach, or supporting us through membership, there are countless ways to contribute. Check out our website at friendsofthedunes.org for more information on how to get involved!

Visit Us!

Humboldt Coastal Nature Center
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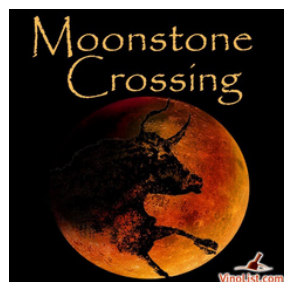
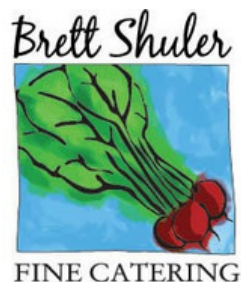
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Save the Dates!

December 3 - Dunes Coop Public Meeting

December 5 - King Tides Walk

December 13 - Mitote at the Dunes

December 20 - Digawututklh Guided Walk

December 21 - Winter Solstice Yoga

January 24 - HUGE Volunteer Planting Day!



Visit friendsofthedunes.org/calendar for more details and a complete list of upcoming programs.

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