

California Naturalist Course

Camp Ocean Pines – Aug 16-22, 2025

Get Ready for a Week of Wonder! 🌿



Dear California Naturalist Participant,

The countdown is on—our California Naturalist course kicks off in just a few weeks, and I couldn't be more excited to welcome you!

The course is officially a GO, and we're filling up fast. We've met the minimum, but there is still a little room left. Spread the word to any last-minute nature-loving friends who might want to join the adventure.

Attached you'll find the course schedule. Take a look to get familiar with the amazing week we've planned. Keep in mind that some tweaks may happen as we finalize details with instructors and field sites—but it's shaping up to be an unforgettable experience.

This is more than just a class—it's the start of a **naturalist community** you'll be part of for years to come. As a Nature Up Close CalNat alum, you'll have lifetime access to attend future lectures and field trips **for free**. You may meet past alumni during your course—a great chance to cross-pollinate your growing network.

We'll kick things off with a **nature storytelling night** where you'll get to meet your classmates and a special guests. Get ready for inspiration, connection, and a deep dive into the natural world around us.

A few important reminders:

- **Buy the course textbook** and read it before the first day.
- **Pack camp-style**: bring your own bedding, towels, and toiletries. This is a cozy camp experience.
- **Be ready to dive in!** This is a 4-unit course condensed into one week, with a full lineup of exciting field trips and engaging lectures from passionate instructors.

If you have any questions at all, don't hesitate to reach out—I'm here to help and can't wait to meet you soon.

Here's to a week full of discovery, laughter, and lifelong learning!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Chris Cameron'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Chris' being more prominent than the last name 'Cameron'.

Chris Cameron

UC California Naturalist Instructor

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A QUICK REVIEW OF IMPORTANT DETAILS:

Chris Cameron is the Course Instructor. I am a naturalist. I've spent my life in California. I am retired, spending my time leading CalNat courses and Sierra trips for Road Scholar. I love hearing a variety of perspectives, encouraging discussion and promoting hands-on experiences in the field. I have gathered amazing instructors for you. I will serve as an instructor and main "cat herder" on field trips. I can't wait to meet YOU!

Camp Ocean Pines in Cambria will provide food and lodging for the course. This camp is an inholding on the Ken Norris Rancho Marino UC Natural Reserve, a 600-acre ranch with two miles of coastline and 225 acres of Monterey Pines. Camp Ocean Pines has been serving the public since 1946, providing lodging in unique passive solar cabins constructed with local lumber and straw bales. Cabins have an indoor shower and bathroom – and the whole place has an amazing ocean view. We aren't the first ones to eat, learn, and celebrate on this site – many have come before us. Native Californians obtained shellfish along the shore, fished, and gathered acorns and other plants here for food as far back as 10,000 years ago. This land was part of a Spanish land grant given to Julian Estrada by Mexico in 1841. Swiss dairymen grazed cattle here, early settlers logged this forest of Monterey pine, and Chinese seaweed farmers used intertidal resources from 1900 to 1960, burning intertidal rocks in winter to encourage new sea lettuce growth. The Sibley family bought the property as a ranch/retreat and started Camp Ocean Pines to give people an opportunity to explore this pristine intertidal, coastal prairie, and Monterey Pine and Coast Live Oak forest. Camp serves good food and will always have a vegetarian and vegan option for those who request it.

Class Times

The Camp opens to us on Saturday afternoon at 1:00 PM, August 16. Our program concludes after lunch, 2:00 PM on Friday, August 22. Each day will be a mix of indoor lectures and discussions, and outdoor field excursions. We will eat breakfast at camp, make a sack lunch, and drive personal cars to daily field trip sites led by local experts. Come prepared each day with water, snacks and lunch, sun hat and sunscreen. Afternoons and evenings include discussions, lectures, and Stewardship project time in the meeting room at Camp Ocean Pines.

Field Notebooks

All participants are required to keep a field notebook during the course. **Please bring your own field notebooks** to use during class, on field trips and on your own time. Keeping a field notebook is one of the best ways of fostering continued learning and getting to know a place intimately. Field notebooks will be checked by the instructor periodically during the week.

iNaturalist

Before class, each participant will **create an iNaturalist account** on their smart phone (<http://www.inaturalist.org/>) and join the Plants and Animals of Camp Ocean Pines California Naturalist project (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/plants-and-animals-of-camp-ocean-pines>). We will learn about iNaturalist on the first day of class and use it all week, and **adding at least 3 observations, at least 1 achieving research grade.**

Stewardship Project

Participants are required to complete a Stewardship Project. Everyone gets nervous about this, but it turns out to be a highlight! I'll help you. Participants can work individually or in teams to design and implement their Stewardship Project. On graduation day, everyone will take 5 minutes to share their project with the group. Projects combine what you are learning in an area of your interest in stewardship, education, interpretation, citizen science, or program support. You will get Stewardship directions during the class, and I will give you time during the week to prepare.

Attendance

Participants must attend all classes. If a class is missed, the participant will be expected to complete make-up activities on their own time at the direction of the instructor. Please talk to me if you are going to miss a class.

Required Reading

Textbook: [The California Naturalist Handbook](#) must be **read before attending the class.** There will be daily questions on the reading. **Other short required readings are the free downloads:** "Natural History of the California Current" and "Natural History of the Central California Bioregion" in the [UCANR California Naturalist Series](#).

Graduation day

Graduation day will be Saturday, August 22, 2025. The course will end after lunch around 2pm.

Volunteer management system (VMS):

Participants will be provided an on-line account to track their volunteer hours, including hours spent on their Stewardship project. Tracking volunteer hours is an essential way to prove the impact of a program like the California Naturalist Program and to support your favorite environmental organizations. You'll also earn an annual pin!

Other Information

Participants may opt to pay an additional \$80 to receive 4 UC Davis Extension undergraduate academic credits upon course completion and certification. More information will be provided.

Other Helpful Items:

- Download the following free apps on your phone before class: iNaturalist, SEEK, Merlin Bird ID.
- Suggested but not required: hand lens and binoculars.

Suggested Supplemental reading:

- Braiding Sweetgrass, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Milkweed Editions: 2013
- Secrets of the Oak Woodlands, Marianchild, Kate. Heyday Press. 2014
- An Island called California, Bakker, E., University of California Press. 1984

Schedule

August 16, Saturday. Arrive, settle in, and introductory lessons. Community of Practice activities: Alumni reports, CalNat staff reports, and a Campfire Story Slam: "A Natural Perspective" hosted by Dean Thompson	
1-3 PM	Arrival Time: relax, find your cabin, settle in, set up camera traps.
3:00 PM	Class Welcome: Introduction and course review - Chris Cameron
4:00 PM	Science concepts - Chris Cameron
4:30 PM	CA Bioregions: Introduction to California's biodiversity - Chris Cameron
5:00 PM	iNaturalist practice- Chris Cameron
5:30 PM	Dinner
6:30 PM	Special Presentations: Community of Practice activities: Alumni progress reports. CalNat Staff reports. Story Slam: "A Natural Perspective" hosted by Dean Thompson
August 17, Sunday. By Kayak, you will learn about estuaries, watersheds, mariculture, state leases of resource areas. Take an afternoon hike to learn about Naturalist Interpretation. Evening lecture on Geology.	
7:30 AM	Breakfast (make your own sack lunch)

8:00 AM	Leave for Morro Bay
9:00 AM	Kayak in Morro Bay National Estuary. Learn the formation, function, and importance of estuaries. Visit an Oyster Farm to learn about mariculture. Drive/walk up Black Hill for Geology Overview , observing a watershed, estuary, Morro Rock and 7 Sisters, dunes, marine terraces. Chris Cameron. Low tide at 12:30am (0.2), 10:30am (3.0), High tide 7:30am (3.3), 5:30pm (5.8)
12:00 PM	Lunch on Black Hill
1:00 PM	Interpretation Field Study: Learn how to interpret nature with Dean Thompson in the Elfin Forest
5:30 PM	Dinner at Camp
6:30 PM	Atmosphere/Water Lecture. All about water! From the water molecule to the water cycle, atmospheric rivers, snowpack, water law, CA's water problems, a bit about ocean currents - Bill Selby
August 18, Monday. Visit Piedras Blancas Light Station to learn plant restoration and animal recovery stories. Learn the background and basics of Nature Journaling, then practice at the elephant seal rookery. Learn about water from creek to aquifers to wells to waste water treatment plant and back into nature. Evening lecture on water and the Atmosphere.	
7:30 AM	Breakfast (make your own sack lunch)
9:00 AM	Arrive at Piedras Blancas Light Station to learn plant restoration. Outside walk to observe nearby projects. Quick review of condor, peregrine, and elephant seal recoveries. Jodie Nelson, Chris Cameron
11:00 AM	Importance of Nature Journaling. Cindy Roessler
12:00 PM	Lunch at Lighthouse
1:00 PM	Drive to elephant seal rookery for journaling sketch practice. Cindy Roessler
2:00 PM	Riparian Field Study at Washburn Creek then onto the Greenspace reforestation planting project, and possibly at their Creekside Reserve. Quick stop near the Cambria Wastewater Treatment Facility to learn what happens to the water once it is used. Toni Artho, Karin Argano
5:30 PM	Dinner
6:30 PM	Geology Lecture. Formation of the universe, the earth, geological processes that create landforms, rock, and soil - Dr Dave Chipping
August 19, Tuesday. Marine Intertidal study, Community Science project, Stewardship Projects begin, Plants	
7:30 AM	Breakfast (make your own sack lunch)
8:00 AM	Field Study: Marine Inter-Tidal zone. Explore rich and challenging intertidal environments. Practise Community Science here and at San Simeon Pier. Chris Cameron. Low tide 2:30am (-0.6), 1:30pm (2.9), High tide 9:30am (3.9), 7:30pm (6.2)
12:00 PM	Sack Lunch in the field
1:00 PM	Stewardship Project Time. Begin work on stewardship projects
5:30 PM	Dinner
6:30 PM	Plant Lecture. Plant communities, parts of a plant, pollination, seed dispersal, Mediterranean climate, fire, climate change and plants. - Cindy Roessler

August 20, Wednesday. Animals, Range management, Traditional Environmental Knowledge. Field trip under ancient oaks to learn about animals and indigenous use of natural resources. Field trip to indigenous mortars to discuss Native American life and changing land uses over time. Evening lectures on function and issues in CA forests.

7:30 AM	Breakfast (make your own sack lunch)
9:00 AM	Field Study: Animals. Arrive at Los Osos Oaks State Park. Sit under the ancient oaks home to the grizzly bear and indigenous tribes. Learn family trees, crazy facts, funny food webs, interdependence and real life adventures from a field botanist. Dean Thompson.
12:00 PM	Sack Lunch in the field
12:30-3 PM	Field Study: Traditional Environmental Knowledge. Visit a bedrock mortar with a Chumash instructor, to ask questions from a historical perspective - Beth Lucas. Ponder changing land uses from historic indigenous cultural and environmental uses to dairy, mining, military, parks, golf course, botanical garden, cattle grazing, and outdoor education.
3:30-5:30 PM	Stewardship Project Time. Continue work on stewardship projects
5:30 PM	Dinner
6:30 PM	Forest Lecture. The structure and functions of forests, ownership, management, issues and problems in CA's forests. Chris Cameron

August 21, Thursday The history and work of UC Reserves, our final field trip hike to wrap up what we learned, plus a summary of the "Good & Bad Environmental news", and time to wrap up your Stewardship Project.

7:30 AM	Breakfast
8 AM - Noon	UC Reserves: After a lecture, walk through Rancho Marino UC Reserve to learn cultural history, present science projects, and forest ecology of these Monterey pines and coast live oaks. Freshwater ecology activity in a pond. Keith Seydel, Chris Cameron
12:00 PM	Hot lunch at Camp
1-2 PM	Lecture and Discussion: "Good News/Bad News" on Global environmental issues. Integrating learning from the week in real life application to present environmental issues. Chris Cameron
2-5 PM	Stewardship Project Time. Afternoon and evening time set aside to complete your project
5:30 PM	Dinner
6:30 PM	Stewardship Project final touch up work

August 22, Friday. Stewardship Project presentations and Graduation!

7:30 AM	Breakfast
8 AM - Noon	Stewardship Project presentations
12:00 PM	Hot lunch at Camp
1:00 PM	Graduation celebration and depart
	Course Instructors and Guest Speakers

Chris Cameron	Chris Cameron is a naturalist who helps people discover this amazing world. Chris actively shares a lifetime of skills teaching UC California Naturalist programs, guiding in Yosemite & Sequoia National Parks for Road Scholar, and has helped lead the Morro Bay Bird Festival. As a birder/falconer, pastor/scientist, is comfortable leading lively discussions from diverse perspectives, encouraging thoughtful interaction and immersive experiences in nature. Chris has ignited the “nature spark” in many people of all ages.
Cindy Roessler	Cindy Roessler is an ecologist who has worked for decades with agencies and non-profit organizations to preserve and restore natural lands. She has designed, installed, and maintained hundreds of acres of oak woodland, evergreen forest, native bunch grasses, riparian forest, freshwater marsh, and salt marsh restoration projects in coastal California and Florida. She likes weeding, spys on wildlife with trail cameras, is fanatical about native bees, and makes pinwheels for kids to encourage them to not release balloons outdoors. She shares her natural history observations with thoughtful writing and beautiful photographs at dipperanch.blogspot.com .
Dean Thompson	Dean Thompson is a naturalist who also happens to enjoy birding. Trained as a wildlife biologist, he has worked with a variety of raptors in California, Arizona and Wyoming for The Peregrine Fund and the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Group. He traveled to Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji before finally settling down here in SLO county. Since then, he has worked as an outdoor science school instructor in Montana de Oro State Park. For the last 35 years he has led natural history tours along the central coast, conducted Least Tern surveys, raised 2 children, coached, and managed to stay sane by spending as much time as possible outdoors . Dean's skill as a professional storyteller makes his tours both entertaining and educational.
David Chipping	Dr. David Chipping was born in Scotland in 1943. He has a BA from Cambridge University (1965), came to the U.S., and earned a MS (1967) and PhD (1971) in Geology at Stanford University. He has taught at U.C Davis (1968 -1971), and Cal Poly State University (1971-present), where he is Emeritus Professor of Geology. He joined California Native Plant Society in 1987 as Conservation Chair and has served as Chapter President, on the Executive Council, and as Conservation Director. Dr Chipping is also involved with The Friends of the Carrizo Plain.
Jodie Nelson	Jodie Nelson is a plant ecologist and Outdoor Recreation Planner for the Bureau of Land Management at Piedras Blancas Light Station in San Simeon. Using a wide variety of methods, Jodie has led many plant restoration efforts, restoring native plants, enhancing the biodiversity and ecological health of several coastal sites. Jodie collaborates with volunteers and community members on restoration projects, ensuring long-term conservation of native species. She also plays a key role in public engagement, managing volunteer programs that involve plant care, building restoration, and educational tours. Her dedication to both ecological preservation and community involvement helps protect the natural and historical significance of Piedras Blancas for future generations.
Karin Argano	Karin Argano is the Executive Director of Greenspace–The Cambria Land Trust, dedicated to preserving Cambria and San Luis Obispo County’s North Coast, overseeing 45 acres. After 25+ years in Ag business, she shifted to conservation, driven by her passion for the outdoors and climate action. She leads efforts in land conservation, native Monterey pine preservation, STEM-based environmental education, and ecosystem advocacy. Karin oversees grant writing, volunteer programs, reforestation, docent training, and fundraising, building partnerships to expand environmental awareness and engagement. With expertise in business development, land project management, education, and nonprofit leadership, she is a dedicated advocate for sustainability and conservation.

Toni Artho	Toni Artho is a Wastewater Operator III and an integral part of the Cambria Community Services District's wastewater treatment team since 2016. In this role, Toni is responsible for operating and maintaining the wastewater collection, treatment, disposal, and recycling systems that serve the Cambria community. This includes monitoring system performance, conducting routine maintenance, and ensuring compliance with environmental regulations. Toni's role is crucial in providing essential services, including water, wastewater treatment, and solid waste disposal, to the Cambria community, safeguarding both public health and the local environment.
Bill Selby	William Selby, a native Californian, has spent his life exploring and studying the Golden State. With degrees in geography and earth sciences, he taught for over 30 years at Santa Monica College and served as a Visiting Professor at the University of California. He authored Rediscovering the Golden State and The California Sky Watcher, highlighting California's landscapes and weather patterns. In "retirement," he presents at conferences, leads workshops, and shares his California Sky Watcher Show at schools, parks, and museums. An avid adventurer, William continues to explore, volunteer, and inspire others with his deep knowledge of California.
Keith Seydel	Keith Seydel is the Reserve Director of the Kenneth S. Norris Rancho Marino Reserve, part of the University of California Natural Reserve System. He oversees 500 acres of diverse ecosystems, including coastal prairie, Monterey pine forest, and 1.5 miles of coastline, supporting research, education, and conservation efforts. Keith manages facilities for researchers and students, fostering collaboration through programs like the California Naturalist course. His leadership enhances public outreach, research opportunities, and sustainable management practices. With a deep commitment to ecological stewardship, Keith plays a vital role in preserving and studying this unique coastal environment.
Becca Lucas	Becca Lucas Thomas is a member of yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tiłhini Northern Chumash Tribe and cultural burn practitioner, born and raised in San Luis Obispo County. She brings over a decade of experience in nonprofits, sustainable agriculture, climate change policy and communications. With an M.A. in Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning and an M.S. in Agriculture Food and Environment from Tufts University, she also lectures in Cal Poly SLO's Ethnic Studies department on Indigenous fire and land caring practices.