



Notes from Meeting of San Diego Naturalists

Wednesday, November 13, 2013, 2:00 to 4:00 pm at South Coast Region Office, California Parks
Coordinated by the San Diego Children and Nature Collaborative

The meeting was attended by 14 naturalists. Discussions focused on the California Naturalists program, the possibility of training School Nature Consultants, and current naturalist programs.

California Naturalist Program

Jessica Chen provided an overview of the program; she is Southern California Representative for UC Cooperative Extension in Alhambra, and traveled by Amtrak to the meeting! The training covers habitats in all of California, information at <http://calnat.ucanr.edu/>, and those completing the course are certified as California Naturalists.

Course development was discussed at length:

- Curriculum is provided by UCCE, including a powerpoint presentation for each topic.
- Presentations need to cover the topics in the textbook, *The California Naturalists Handbook*.
- One of the ten class sessions is “open” and up to 50% of the other sessions may be adapted to cover local concepts and examples.
- The training must be taught in 40 hours (flexible, one week, over ten weeks, etc.).
- The course was recently taught at Tejon Ranch, supported by half-time biologist for six months.
- An Instructor of Record needs to be approved, with either a masters or a PhD in natural science, with enough general knowledge and experience to be able to answer participant questions, know whether what’s presented is scientifically valid, and act as a quality check for the course.
- If someone (or a group) wanted to offer the training in San Diego, Jessica would help review and finalize the syllabus, locating instructors (with Sabrina Drill, UC Extension Specialist).
- There are many qualified and experienced local instructors for most of the topics, depending on their willingness to prepare presentations that meet the course expectations
- There are online tools for those organizations who offer the course, including resources from instructors, homework assignments, and materials for outreach/marketing.
- Requirements participants must meet to graduate are: finish reading the entire textbook, complete a capstone project, complete a citizen science project, attend 3 field trips, and attend 40 in-class hours (make-up opportunities are decided by the instructor).
- A “capstone project” is required, with a nature-based organization overseeing and benefitting from the project; they can focus on restoration, citizen science, interpretation, or other topics.

Who is the target audience?

- Some naturalists can pay, some would need scholarship
- When the course has excellent lecturers and field trips, fee may not be an issue, and the course can be marketed as “it’s worth it”
- Consider charging a fee, then “forgiving” it when contributions of volunteer time

- This may supplement rather than compete with current docent/naturalist training programs

What will it take, to offer California Naturalist training locally?

- Outreach, registration and fee collection from students, maximum 30 and minimum 10-12
- Instructor of Record, instructors teaching sessions, and coordinator
- Adaptation of presentations for local habitats and issues, and review of materials by UCCE
- Instructor training, meeting place and field trips
- Identification and management of Capstone projects
- Volunteer records management (online self-reporting)

Next steps:

- UCCE San Diego is willing to host the California Naturalist program in San Diego, if funds are provided for staff. UCCE has considerable experience in similar training programs (Master Gardeners) and instructors to cover some of the topics.
- Cathy will draft a proposal to cover course development, and this group will meet to review and finalize proposal and identify potential funding sources.

Certified Interpretive Guide Training

- The 32-hour training (from the National Association for Interpretation-NAI) was offered October 28 to 31 at Mission Trails Regional Park, taught by instructor Tamara Bankson.
- Crystal De Soto, another local instructor, plans to offer the course in January 2014, and can be contacted at crystal@localpointofview.com.
- "The CIG program trains guides in interpretive techniques and acknowledges that training with an internationally-recognized certification.... [It] combines both the theoretical foundations of the profession with practical skills in delivering quality interpretive programming to visitors."

School-focused naturalists

- The Master Gardeners locally have a strong School Garden Consultant program, and this could be a model for a School Nature Consultant role and program
- Teachers need support from their principals, and easy ways to integrate outdoor lessons into their curriculum and soon the Next Generation Science Standards
- Crystal is offering professional development for teachers each month at Millennial Middle School, for their class activities at EarthLab (Groundworks Chollas Creek).
- Arne is familiar with 20 gardens and schoolyard habitats designed and installed, and virtually all failed because the key person left the school.

Other information

- In October, Anne Marie Tipton instructed the three-hour Interpretive Walks for Naturalists training as continuing education for the docents at Mission Trails Regional Park.
- There is interest in offering Birding for Naturalists and Interpretive Skills for Naturalists in 2014.
- Anne Marie has moved their volunteer training to the summer, as that is closer (time) to the assistance needed for fall activities and planting.
- US Fish and Wildlife Service has suspended funding for schoolyard habitats. There is a new Urban Wildlife Refuge Initiative (Chantal Jimenez), more information at <http://americaswildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Urban-Initiative-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

The next meeting will be held in January, on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday afternoon, 1:00 to 3:00 pm. Date and location were not set.

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