

California Naturalist Training Program Coming to Central Sierra

by Rebecca Miller-Cripps

For those of you who appreciate the outdoors and are interested in California's vast and abundant natural resources, a new opportunity for volunteer training will be offered in Central Sierra counties, beginning in fall 2014. Sponsored by the University of California, "The California Naturalist Program is designed to introduce Californians to the wonders of our unique ecology and engage the public in study and stewardship of California's natural communities" (<http://calnat.ucanr.edu/>).

UC Cooperative Extension Central Sierra (covering Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado and Tuolumne counties) has received a Renewable Resources Extension Act grant to bring the program to the Sierra foothills. UCCE will host the first training class in Tuolumne County in September, October, and November of this year.

Active or developing Master Naturalist programs exist in 35 states, ranging from Arizona and Arkansas through Montana and Nebraska to Virginia and Wisconsin. In California, "the California Naturalist Program promotes environmental literacy and [stewardship](#) through [discovery](#) and [action](#). Many other states have similar naturalist programs, but this is the first statewide program in California."

Aldo Leopold—naturalist, forester and professor at the University of Wisconsin—who is credited with being the father of the modern study of ecology, said, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." The California Naturalist program seeks to provide information designed to enhance understanding of and create respect for the breath-taking diversity of California's natural communities. The training class will offer field discovery opportunities along with classroom lectures about various natural resources. Topics presented in a typical training program include: California geology, climate and soils; water; plants; forest and range management; animals; energy; and citizen science.

What is citizen science? It is the involvement of non-professional (unpaid) naturalists in observation, monitoring, reporting or participation in projects that provide quantifiable information. Some citizen scientists participate in stream monitoring for water quality; volunteer birders can provide information for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Volunteers engage in weed control in National Parks such as Yosemite. Locations range from Año Nuevo to alpine peaks ("The Pica Project"), with enticing names such as Beach COMBERS in the Monterey area to the "Lost Ladybug Project" and "Otter Spotter."

Aspiring California Naturalists complete 40 hours of classroom and field training designed to increase personal connection to the natural world. They create and complete a capstone project, such as an interpretive presentation, during the course of the training class. Upon completion of training, California Naturalists may apply for four educational credits offered through the UC Davis Extension program. California Naturalists are encouraged to complete 40 hours of community volunteer service in one of four areas:

program support, interpretation/education, restoration/conservation and/or citizen science.

Once you are certified, you will have opportunities to volunteer all over the state with various federal, state, local and non-profit organizations. Naturalists can get involved in many different kinds of activities:

- Scientific research—plant identification or data collection
- Environmental monitoring—bird counts, stream sampling, invasive species monitoring
- Restoration or conservation plans—seed collection, native plant propagation and planting
- Education—developing signs or brochures or leading nature hikes to help make science more accessible to others through support for the Naturalist Program, or other outreach activities.

Check out other news articles about the California Naturalist program at http://calnat.ucanr.edu/CA_Nat_News/ If the California Naturalist program sounds like fun, find out more about it at <http://calnat.ucanr.edu/> (our program is not on the calendar yet). If you're interested in applying to the program, email rmillercripps@ucanr.edu to be added to an interest list, or leave a message at the Tuolumne County UC Cooperative Extension office at (209) 533-5695.

Information adapted from the UC California Naturalist program website, <http://calnat.ucanr.edu>, provided by Adina Merenlander, UC Berkeley Associate Cooperative Extension Specialist, supported by a National Science Foundation grant.