

2026-27 Naturalist Training

Schedule and Requirements Overview

Newport Bay Conservancy's Naturalist Training course has been offered annually since 1990 with the goal of providing volunteers interested in leading programs the knowledge they need to be able to do so successfully. The course features classes and field trips on a range of topics led by experts in their field as well as program-specific trainings to prepare volunteers to share their newfound knowledge with students and the public. Our Naturalists go on to guide public kayak and walking tours in the Bay, educate students from elementary school through college, lead restoration projects, and share our story with the broader community of our watershed.

DATES: This year's course runs from August 29, 2026 through June 3, 2027.

PREREQUISITE: For those not yet volunteers with us, the prerequisite for this course is Volunteer Orientation. You may choose to attend the full orientation on Saturday, August 22nd from 8:30am-3:30pm, or to attend a one-hour meeting on Saturday, August 29th and complete the orientation in the Spring.

COST: The course costs \$35 and includes a manual of reference materials. Refunds are not available after the second week of classes. If you decide to drop the course after the second week, your registration fees will be applied towards next year's training.

TESTING: Short weekly quizzes are administered throughout the fall season to help you assess your understanding of key topics. At the end of the fall season, each trainee will present a program idea. The spring season will include collaboration with other trainees to run a new program.

TRAINING COMPONENTS: Training consists of 2 components: Knowledge Acquisition and Skills-Building & Practice. The Knowledge Acquisition Component takes place primarily in the fall, while the Skills Building & Practice Component spans from fall through spring.

1. **Knowledge Acquisition Component**

From August 29th through December 5th, 2026, class meets on Thursday evenings and Saturdays. Thursday evening lectures will be from 6-8pm, presented via Zoom with closed captioning. Saturday class times and locations vary. All Saturday classes will be presented in-person only, a mix of indoors and outdoors. The fall season concludes with a holiday party on Saturday, December 12, 2026 from 1-3pm.

***ATTENDANCE:** Attendance and participation in the activities is vital to ensure that you have the breadth and depth of knowledge necessary for our naturalists. Therefore, if you miss any Thursday meetings, you will be expected to watch the recording of the session. If you miss any Saturday meetings it is important that you speak with the program administrator as soon as possible to discuss how to make up missed material to complete your training. In cases where a participant encounters significant emergencies/challenges that prevent them attending more than 3 Saturday meetings, we may ask them to complete the training the following year.*

2. **Skills-Building & Practice Component**

Trainees are expected to attend at least two 4-5-part trainings (8-10 meetings total), including shadowing selected programs which can begin as early as fall, with trainings and followup meetings in spring. Trainees also work collaboratively in groups to develop and run a new program.

GRADUATION: Training concludes with a celebration on June 3, 2027 from 6-8pm, during which graduates receive Newport Bay Naturalist name badges and certificates.

TENTATIVE
Fall 2026 Naturalist Training Schedule
 Knowledge-Acquisition Component

Day	Date	Time	Location	Topic	Speaker(s) & Affiliation
Sat	8/29/26	9:00am-11:30am	Muth	Intro & Welcome to Naturalist Training	Hilary Cunningham, NBC Julie Ferguson, NBC & UCI
Thu	9/3/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Estuary Ecology & Endangered Species	Dick Zembal, NBC & OCWD
Sat	9/5/26	Labor Day Weekend	NO CLASS		
Thu	9/10/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Post-Colonial History of the Bay & Our Watershed	Gwenn Abrams, NBC
Sat	9/12/26	9:30am-4:00pm	Muth	Native Peoples Discussion & Activity	Lazaro Arvizu
Thu	9/17/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Coastal Cleanup Day logistics Plastic Pollution: Science & Solutions	NBC Staff Trina Miller, Algalita
Sat	9/19/26	9:00am-12:00pm	NAC	Water Quality Walk & Testing Coastal Cleanup Day at the Bay	NBC Staff
Thu	9/24/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Plants of Newport Bay & Orange County	Ron Vanderhoff, CA NPS
Sat	9/26/26	9:00am-12:00pm	TBA	Plant Walk	Chuck Nichols, NBC
Thu	10/1/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Climate Change: Science, Impacts, Solutions	Shahir Masri, UCI
Sat	10/3/26	9:00am-12:00pm	Muth	Geology	Phil Hughes, NBC & SAC
Thu	10/8/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Mid-point Check-in + Designing a Program	NBC Staff
Sat	10/10/26	9:00am-12:00pm	Muth	Know Your Audience Workshop	Emma Arago, OCP
Thu	10/15/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Reptiles & Amphibians Lecture	Barry Nerhus, ICRE
Sat	10/17/26	9:00am-12:00pm	Muth	Restoration: Lecture & Field Work	NBC Restoration Team
Thu	10/22/26	6:00-8:00pm	Muth	Diversity & Environmental Justice	NBC Staff
Sat	10/24/26	9:00am-12:00pm	TBA	Mammals Lecture	Don Millar, OC Trackers
Thu	10/29/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Insects & Spiders Lecture	Bob Allen, author of Wildflowers of Orange County
Sat	10/31/26	9:00am-12:00pm	Muth	Insects & Spiders Hands-On Workshop	Bob Allen, author of Wildflowers of Orange County
Thu	11/5/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom & Muth	NBC Annual Meeting	NBC Board of Directors
Sat	11/7/26	11:00am-3:00pm	TBA	Marine Biology Lecture & Tidepool Exploration	TBA
Thu	11/12/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	How to Look at a Bird	Bettina Eastman, NBC & Sea&Sage Audubon
Sat	11/14/26	7:30am-10:30am	San Joaquin Marsh	Birding Walk	Bettina Eastman, NBC & Sea&Sage Audubon
Thu	11/19/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Fishes & Tides Lecture	TBA
Sat	11/21/26	9:00am-12:00pm	BBSC	Marine Life Inventory	CDFW Staff
Thu-Sat	11/26-28/26	THANKSGIVING	NO CLASS		
Thu	12/3/26	6:00-8:00pm	Zoom	Student Proposal Presentations	Naturalist Trainees
Sat	12/5/26	9:00am-12:00pm	Muth	Putting What You Learned Into Practice	Hilary Cunningham Mariah Sabo
Sat	12/12/26	1:00pm-3:00pm	Muth	Holiday Party & Winning Proposals Announcement	

Muth = Peter & Mary Muth Interpretive Center

BBSC = Back Bay Science Center

NAC = Newport Aquatic Center

Attendance Policy

Attendance and participation in the activities is vital to ensure that you have the breadth and depth of knowledge necessary for our naturalists. Therefore, if you miss any Thursday meetings, you will be expected to watch the recording of the session. If you miss any Saturday meetings it is important that you speak with Hilary Cunningham as soon as possible to discuss how to make up missed material to complete your training. In cases where a participant encounters significant emergencies/challenges that prevent them attending more than 3 Saturday meetings, we may ask them to complete the training the following year.

Spring 2027 Naturalist Training Schedule & Requirements

Skills-Building & Practice Component

1. **Program Trainings:** Each trainee must **complete at least two (2)** of the following training options. For each option, trainees will need to attend a program or related training(s), assist or shadow a scheduled program between Oct-Mar, shadow again or co-lead a scheduled program between Apr-May, and attend a discussion/debrief meeting. Trainees must complete all 4 components in a series to receive credit. Training/meeting dates below are tentative and will be confirmed by the beginning of December.

	Attend/Train	Assist/Shadow	Shadow/Co-Lead	Discussion/Debrief
OPTION 1: K-5 Programs	<u>Attend Program Training</u> Tue, Sept 9th, 9am-12pm - or - Tue, Jan 12th, 9am-12pm	Any scheduled Tues, Oct-Mar	Any scheduled Tues, Apr-May	Sat, May 8th, 9-11am
OPTION 2: Walking Tours	<u>Attend Any Walking Tour</u> Sept-Mar (not restricted to UNB) - and - <u>Attend Land Guide Training</u> Sat, Feb 6th, 12:30-2:30pm	<u>Any UNB Walking Tour</u> Sept-Mar (run by NBC or OCP)	Any UNB Tour, Apr-May	
OPTION 3: Outrigger Tours	<u>Attend Steer Training</u> Fri, Oct 2nd, 9am-1:30pm - and - <u>Attend Water Guide Training</u> Sat, Feb 6th, 9am-12pm	Any scheduled weekday, Oct-Mar	Any scheduled weekday, Apr-May	Sat, May 8th, 11:30am-1:30pm
OPTION 4: Kayak Tours	<u>Attend Water Guide Training</u> Sat, Feb 6th, 9am-12pm - and - <u>Attend Kayak Safety Training</u> Sat, May 22nd, 2-5pm	Sweep Any Sat or Sun, Oct-Mar	Apprentice Any Sat or Sun, Apr-May	
OPTION 5: Restoration	<u>Attend three 3-hour restoration sessions at UNB</u> Scheduled depending on availability (run by NBC, OCP, or Project Grow)			Schedule individually with Education Manager

2. **Program Design & Implementation:** Each trainee will propose a program idea at the end of the fall season. Top programs will be selected and trainees will work in groups to produce these programs in the spring. This will include:
- Four meetings with staff (Education Manager and/or Education Specialist)
 - Meeting 1, Thu, 1/7/27, 6-8pm: review proposal & receive guidance on next steps
 - Meeting 2, Thu, 3/4/27 (6-7pm or 7-8pm): progress check-in
 - Meeting 3: confirm last remaining action items, scheduled 1 week before program date
 - Meeting 4: debrief scheduled within 1 week after your program date
 - Group members will work together to...
 - Determine ideal audience and how to recruit participants/attendees
 - Clarify and develop the curriculum & talking points
 - Obtain and/or create materials for any activities
 - Schedule a date for the program
 - Create flyers and advertising to potential participants/attendees
 - Train other volunteers on curriculum/activities if necessary

NOTE: If these requirements would pose personal or logistical challenges, alternative options can be discussed with the program administrator, such as additional volunteer shifts, committee involvement, or other projects.