

California Naturalist Capstone Project

California Naturalists are required to complete a project prior to graduation from the course. It is designed to provide a bridge from class to service. California Naturalist Volunteers are encouraged to work in teams when appropriate, and upon the final class will present their projects to their peers. Presentations will be 5 minutes long per person (so 15 minutes for a 3 person group) and are to summarize the work that the group has done.

What is a Capstone Project?

A Capstone Project is designed to provide an opportunity for participants to improve their knowledge and abilities through a project. It also helps volunteers to come up with creative ideas for their 40 volunteer service hours in a structured setting with assistance from California Naturalist Instructors. The Capstone Project provides a transition from being a California Naturalist student to a full-fledged volunteer in the community.

Capstone Projects may be completed in one of four areas:

1. Citizen Science - involve data collection for researchers. Such projects could include:
 - Participating in the Audubon Bird Censuses
 - Helping monitor water quality in a local watershed
 - Collecting Monarch larval monitoring data

2. Program Support - engages the everyday operation of programming at a sponsoring center such as:
 - Working in a store or office of the California Naturalist or sponsor
 - Writing newsletter articles
 - Developing and distributing brochures promo material
 - Serving as a local chapter organizer

3. Education/Interpretation - involve the development and/or delivery of information such as:
 - Development of a public presentation on monarch butterfly migration in California
 - Design a self guided trail map
 - Design and teach a preschool program on the salmonid life cycle

4. Stewardship Projects - involve volunteers in natural resource management such as:
 - Removing non-native vegetation by hand
 - Collecting seeds for germination in a greenhouse
 - Planting seeds and tending plants in a native plants nursery
 - Planning and conducting a creek clean-up
 - Building or maintaining hiking trails and bridges

The 5-minute presentation of the Capstone Project demonstrates the application of the knowledge learned in the California Naturalist Program. Additionally, the participant shares how this knowledge was then expanded by experience or research beyond the class lectures, readings, and field trips. Consider the Capstone Project presentation an interpretative opportunity to speak to a group about a topic. This could include interacting with the class as if it were a city council or a school group for instance.