



2026 Naturalist Training Program **Fairfield Region**

Program Purpose

The Fairfield Region's 2026 Naturalist Training Program will give participants skills to help them identify the common flora and fauna of New England. The classes will teach the basics of plants, amphibians, reptiles, birds, insects, mammals, marine ecosystems, foraging and wild edibles, and the history of The Connecticut Audubon Society (CAS).

Meeting Dates: Wednesdays, September 9 – November 4th

Meeting Places: Fairfield Nature Center, 2325 Burr Street, Fairfield, CT
Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary, 314 Unquowa Road, Fairfield, CT
Coastal Center at Milford Point, 1 Milford Point Road, Milford, CT

Wednesday, September 9: History of The Connecticut Audubon Society and Intro to the Natural World

Time: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Location: Fairfield Nature Center, 2325 Burr Street Fairfield CT

This class covers the purpose of the Naturalist Training Program, an overview of the Connecticut Audubon Society's (CAS) mission and management strategies, plus a brief history of CAS and a look at the centers. We will spend the second half of the day exploring the Sanctuary.

Wednesday, September 16: Marine Ecosystems

Time: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Location: Coastal Center at Milford Point, 1 Milford Point Rd., Milford, CT

Students will meet at our Coastal Center on Milford Point to explore the marine coastal environment. We will also learn about the incredibly productive salt marsh and Long Island ecosystem habitats and their contribution to our ocean food webs.

Instructor: Dr. Diana Payne, Ph.D., Associate Professor and the Education Coordinator with Connecticut Sea Grant, based at the University of Connecticut's Avery Point campus in Groton.

Wednesday, September 23: Intro to Birding

Time: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Location: Coastal Center at Milford Point, 1 Milford Point Rd., Milford, CT

The session will also provide an overview of bird anatomy, field identification, migration and ecological impacts on shorebird populations. We will spend the day looking for migrating birds. The Coastal Center at Milford Point is a hot spot on the Atlantic flyway. Binoculars should be brought to class or can be provided upon request.

Stefan Martin, CAS Conservation Manager (Intro to Birding). Well-known and respected in birding and butterfly communities, Stefan is also a Certified Master Gardener with extensive knowledge of both native and invasive plant life. His current role on the Sanctuary Management Team involves habitat restoration and enhancement of sanctuary properties with a focus on increasing biodiversity.

Wednesday, September 30: World of Insects

Time: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Location: Fairfield Nature Center, 2325 Burr St., Fairfield, CT

Insects potentially represent over 90% of the life forms on earth! We will learn the basics of insect identification and their importance in the food chain. A field exploration follows as we “unearth” these incredible creatures in the forest, meadow, stream and pond habitats.

Instructor: Stefan Martin, CAS Conservation Manager

Wednesday, October 7: Bird Banding Demonstration & Field Study

Time: 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Location: Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary, 314 Unquowa Rd., Fairfield, CT

Connecticut Audubon’s team of banders at the historic Birdcraft site in Fairfield will introduce students to the science of bird banding. Students will learn about the purpose and method, as well as have an opportunity to release newly banded migratory species.

Instructor: Judy Richardson, Master Bander and team leader at Birdcraft’s bird banding station.

Wednesday, October 14: Mammals of Southwestern Connecticut

Time: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Location: Fairfield Nature Center, 2325 Burr St., Fairfield, CT

An overview of the diversity and ecology of the mammals of southwestern Connecticut. In the classroom we’ll examine the major groups of mammals, from those that are abundant and familiar (squirrels, deer, raccoons) to those that are more shy or rare (shrews, bats, moles and mink). For each, we will briefly cover their habitat and niche, and discuss some ecological concepts vital to understanding their role in the ecosystems in the northeast. We will conclude with a walkabout along the trails in the Larsen Wildlife Sanctuary to view the direct and indirect signs of critters in action.

Instructor: Dr. James Biardi, Professor of Ecology at Fairfield University.

Wednesday, October 21: Habitats/Ecosystems/Plant Identification

Time: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Location: Fairfield Nature Center, 2325 Burr St., Fairfield, CT

We will visit a variety of habitats within the Larsen Wildlife Sanctuary and learn to identify the most visible plants within them. Participants will gain an understanding of the vital connection between the plants and diverse ecosystems of our Sanctuary.

Instructor: Bill Kenny, Landscape Architect, Wetland and Soil Scientist

Wednesday, October 28: Foraging and Wild Edibles

Time: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Location: Fairfield Nature Center, 2325 Burr St., Fairfield CT

This class will include visiting a field in the Larsen Sanctuary looking for wild edibles.

Instructor: Joe Ross is the owner of eattheplanet.org, which focuses on foraging and wild edibles. He has set up a foraging database on the website with the goal of helping people find foraging classes and groups in all 50 states. Joe is also a Connecticut-licensed arborist and a tree warden.

Wednesday, November 4: Wrap Up

Location: Fairfield Nature Center, 2325 Burr St., Fairfield, CT

Time: 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Participants will gather to explore the Larsen Wildlife Sanctuary and use their new skills to identify birds and other wildlife while looking for signs of change as the season begins to move from late fall to early winter. Participants will discuss volunteer opportunities and enjoy a potluck lunch.

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What to bring to class: On most days we will spend at least a portion of the class outside. Bring your enthusiasm for the great outdoors, a water bottle, lunch/snacks, sun hat, binoculars, sunblock and insect repellent; wear comfortable walking shoes and clothes appropriate for the day's weather.