

## Birds and Beasts

### *Course Syllabus*

#### **Course Overview:**

This course offers a creative twist on the practice of nature journaling, encouraging participants to reimagine what a "Book of Nature" can be. Through a blend of hands-on journaling and a three-part discussion series via Zoom, we'll explore how humans have recorded the natural world across history—from prehistoric cave art to modern field guides. Participants will be empowered to think flexibly and creatively about how their own approaches, experiences, and interests can shape their interactions with nature through journaling. By the end of the course, each student will have created their own personalized "Book of Nature" while gaining inspiration from the diverse ways others have documented the environment across time and place, and in various mediums.

Our last class session will be an in-person nature journaling session at San Luis Obispo Botanical Gardens. Nestled in the heart of San Luis Obispo County, this serene sanctuary showcases a stunning array of native and Mediterranean plants, winding trails, and vibrant seasonal blooms, offering an ideal setting to connect with nature and let creativity flourish. We hope its tranquil beauty and inspiring landscapes will make it the perfect place to bring your 'Book of Nature' to life.

#### **Module Descriptions**

##### **1. Introduction to the Course (Online Module) — opens on February 1st**

Students are invited to introduce themselves, share their personal connections to the natural world, and reflect on what they associate with the concept of a "Book of Nature." This module also provides an overview of the course structure, objectives, and how we will explore the human tradition of recording the natural world. Log on, take a spin through the module, and start getting to know your classmates and instructors!

##### **2. February 18, 7:00 PM via Zoom — Live Discussion/Exploration Prehistory and Antiquity**

This session explores early depictions of the natural world, focusing on prehistoric cave art at Lascaux and Chauvet, where animals were often rendered with extraordinary detail. We'll examine birds (such as Athena's owl) in Greek and Roman art and culture, and consider how such symbols function simultaneously as emblematic ways of recording and understanding human nature and culture, and also as ways of expressing their understanding of and reverence for the natural world.

##### **3. February 25, 7:00 PM via Zoom — Live Discussion/Exploration Medieval to Early Modern**

Dive into the medieval fascination with nature through such genres as the Bestiary, in which birds and other creatures were imbued with highly symbolic meanings. Transitioning to the early modern era, we'll consider how the advent of print culture brought new scientific genres like taxonomies and illustrated herbals, which emphasized detailed observation and categorization of the natural world.

##### **4. February 27, 7:00 PM via Zoom — Live Discussion/Exploration Enlightenment to Modern**

This session highlights the Enlightenment's vision of collaborative knowledge, exemplified by Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. We'll trace the development of modern field guides, rooted in earlier scientific illustrations, and study the contributions of naturalists like John James Audubon and Mark Catesby, whose works

combined artistry and science. We will also explore the various ways in which the period reflects a growing effort to document and share the intricacies of the natural world more thoroughly and systematically, and compare earlier nature guides with their modern counterparts.

### **5. February 28 – March 7 — Independent Field Work w/ Supporting Online Module Planning Your “Book of Nature”**

Students will begin brainstorming and planning their final "Book of Nature" projects. This module encourages participants to spend time observing and journaling in natural spaces of their choosing—whether a nearby park or their backyard. We'll share practical tips on organizing entries, drawing techniques, and creating a visually engaging narrative.

### **6. March 8, 9:00AM – 12:00 PM or 1:00–4:00 PM at San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden Guided Nature Journaling**

Gather with your classmates at SLO Botanical Garden to practice nature journaling together under the expert guidance of Mary Sturm. Participants will immerse themselves in the landscape, observing, sketching, and reflecting. This session concludes with an informal sharing of insights and inspiration, fostering community and creativity.

### **7. Beyond the Page: Final Projects, Reflections, and New Directions (Online Module)**

Our community doesn't have to end just because the course did! In this module, students will share their ongoing (or maybe even completed) "Book of Nature" projects with the group in an online showcase. We'll celebrate the creativity, effort, and wonder behind each project while encouraging everyone to continue their journey of intellectual and artistic exploration and connection. This is a chance to reflect on what you've learned, ask questions, and be inspired by others' work. And don't forget—the Central Coast Nature Journaling Club meets each month! Stay connected, share your discoveries, and continue to explore the natural world through journaling. Please join us and keep the conversation going!

### **Synchronous Meeting Schedule (a mix of virtual and in-person events):**

Date & Time	Class	Zoom Link & Passcode
Tuesday, February 18th, 7:00 PM	Zoom	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/ACE-birds-beasts-Session-1">https://tinyurl.com/ACE-birds-beasts-Session-1</a> Passcode: aves-ACE25
Tuesday, February 25th, 7:00 PM	Zoom	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/ACE-birds-beasts-Session-2">https://tinyurl.com/ACE-birds-beasts-Session-2</a> Passcode: aves-ACE25
Thursday, February 27th, 7:00 PM	Zoom	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/ACE-birds-beasts-Session-3">https://tinyurl.com/ACE-birds-beasts-Session-3</a> Passcode: aves-ACE25
Saturday, March 8th, 9AM–12PM OR Saturday, March 8th, 1PM–4PM	In Person: San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden	N/A

### **Class Format:**

Our three Zoom classes will be highly interactive sessions structured around images and text shared ahead of time with all participants via Google Classroom. Participants are highly encouraged to ask questions and contribute actively to our discussions. Not familiar with Zoom, and would like some guidance? Please reach out! We are here to help you get the most out of this instructional format! **Please note: These Zoom sessions will be recorded and made available to participants afterwards.**

The trips will be in-the-field experiential-based learning that will include interactive, observational, instructional, documentation-based, and reflective components. **This field trip is ADA accessible.**

**Recommended Reading/Resources:**

Specific readings and links will be provided via Google Classroom.

**Field Trip Information:**

**Location: San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden**

**What to Bring:**

Bring a hat, water, snacks / lunch, sunscreen, binoculars or a hand lens, and portable journaling materials. Dress in layers to accommodate wind and changing weather. MCAS may be able to provide you with binoculars if needed. Wear sturdy hiking shoes. Binoculars, hand lenses, and cameras are welcomed—even encouraged! There is a restroom available at the Botanical Garden.

**Instructors:**Mary Sturm

Mary is the founder of the Central Coast Nature Journal Club, a welcoming community for those looking to connect with the natural world through the art of nature journaling. She especially loves introducing newcomers to this practice, encouraging those who might feel nervous about drawing to embrace the process. Mary emphasizes that nature journaling can be whatever you need it to be—scientific, meditative, or somewhere in between.



Mary has designed and led many different classes for various groups such as Volunteers In Parks (VIP), the Land Conservancy, and Camp KEEP. She also teaches nature journaling courses for the MCAS ACE program, and offers her instructional expertise to the Morro Bay Bird Festival. As a registered dietitian, she has also taught numerous nutrition courses for healthcare providers, blending her passion for education with her commitment to helping others.

Dr. Marcella Munson

Marcella serves as the co-director of the MCAS ACE Program, and is passionate about helping people connect with nature in creative ways. She holds a BA in French from Pomona College and a PhD in French from UCLA, and has over 30 years of experience teaching at the university level—most recently as department chair and professor at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida. Her teaching and research has spanned the entire literary tradition, with particular emphasis on the medieval through early modern traditions and translation theory. She is fascinated by the intersections between literature, art, science, and nature, and brings this curiosity to our course.



Marcella also has extensive experience in hands-on, interdisciplinary teaching: she worked as a docent at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, volunteered in K-5 classrooms throughout Palm Beach County with the Audubon Society of the Everglades, and designed and co-led FAU's first-ever study abroad program in France—which blended architecture, studio art, art history, and French Studies. A particular highlight of the program was exploring some of the world's most iconic prehistoric caves—Les Eyzies-de-Tayac, Rouffignac, Lascaux, and Chauvet—several of which we will also explore together in this course.

Marcella lives in Atascadero with her husband and their two sons. Her favorite adventures take place in nature, and combine her lifelong love of birding with her passion for photography, art journaling, writing, and hiking.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:**

We are committed to treating every individual with respect. Diversity can refer to a wide range of identities, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religion. These diverse identities are important, and shape the way we learn, experience, and interact. We make every effort to ensure that classes are a safe and comfortable place for all.

**Costs & Fees Breakdown:**

Up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the proceeds generated by Morro Coast Audubon trips goes **directly** to expanding Morro Coast Audubon's programs designed to increase access to environmental education for underserved students and underrepresented communities on the Central Coast. These funds may be used to cover things such as bussing fees or insurance costs, or may go to administrative costs or hiring new personnel. An additional  $\sim\frac{1}{4}$  of the proceeds go toward providing community educational courses at no cost to those without the financial means to take one of these classes otherwise. Finally, a small portion of the proceeds are used to compensate our instructors for their time (though many of our instructors are volunteers) and to cover administrative and logistical costs.

**Cancellation:**

Rain cancels. If the trip is canceled, we will do our best to reschedule. If you're unable to make a rescheduled trip, then a class credit will be issued for a future class.

**FAQ/Help:**

If you have questions, send us an email at [mcasclasses@gmail.com](mailto:mcasclasses@gmail.com).