CITY NATURE CHALLENGE IS ORGANIZED BY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:
Emma Rhoads
Director of the Pismo Beach Stewardship and Educational Outreach Program
321-209-3020
emma@tjaadvertising.com

San Luis Obispo County Joins City Nature Challenge, Encouraging the Community to Become Citizen Scientists

[April 1, 2026 – San Luis Obispo County, California] – For the second consecutive year, San Luis Obispo County will take part in the City Nature Challenge (CNC), a global citizen science initiative that invites anyone with a smartphone to help document local wildlife. This year's observation window runs April 24–27, 2026, followed by an identification period from April 28 through May 10.

What Is the City Nature Challenge?

The City Nature Challenge began in 2016 as a friendly competition between the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles and the California Academy of Science. It has since grown into a worldwide movement, with hundreds of cities and regions participating each year. During a four-day window at the end of April, community members use the free iNaturalist app to photograph and log as many wildlife observations as possible, including plants, animals, fungi, and more (domestic animals excluded).

Despite its name, the challenge extends well beyond city limits. Research shows that bioblitzes like the CNC give local governments a cost-effective way to build real biodiversity data, illuminating understudied groups like insects and fungi, informing land management decisions, strengthening community stewardship, and supporting evidence-based policy.

SLO County Partners

This year's effort is coordinated by a coalition of local organizations:

- Pismo Beach Stewardship and Educational Outreach Program / Pismo Beach Conference and Visitors Bureau
- Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP)
- San Luis Obispo Chapter of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS-SLO)
- California Central Coast Chapter of The Wildlife Society (CCCC TWS)

Together, these organizations are bringing programming to communities across the county for the second year of SLO County's participation in the challenge.

Why It Matters on the Central Coast

San Luis Obispo County sits at one of California's most ecologically diverse crossroads, where the cold Humboldt Current meets warmer southern waters and coastal dunes give way to oak woodlands. The Central Coast is home to overwintering Monarch butterflies, nesting snowy plovers, native bunchgrasses, and an extraordinary range of pollinators, many of which are poorly documented in scientific literature.

The City Nature Challenge gives everyday residents the tools to change that. Every photo submitted through iNaturalist becomes a verified, permanent record that researchers, land managers, and conservation planners can draw on for years to come. For a region navigating habitat loss, drought, and wildfire recovery, that kind of community-generated data isn't just interesting, it's actionable.

> *"Citizen science is one of the most powerful tools we have for understanding and protecting the places we love. When someone photographs a native plant in their backyard or spots an unusual bird along the bluffs, that observation doesn't just belong to them — it becomes part of a living record of our natural heritage. The City Nature Challenge turns that everyday curiosity into real, meaningful data that helps us make better decisions for this coastline and the communities that depend on it."*
>
> **— Emma Rhoads, PR and Stewardship Manager, Pismo Beach Stewardship and Educational Outreach Program**

Building on Last Year's Success

In 2025, SLO County's first year of participation, the challenge produced impressive results:

- 5,261 Observations
- 1,345 Species
- 532 Identifiers
- 221 Observers

This year, organizers are aiming to build on that momentum by expanding reach, increasing species diversity, and welcoming more first-time observers into the iNaturalist community.

In-Person Events

Four community events are planned for the weekend. More details on all of these events will be posted on the SLO County CNC project journal page.

Fire Scar Hike | Saturday, April 25 — Time TBD

Led by Kristen Nelson of CNPS-SLO, this moderate-to-hard hike explores fire-affected landscapes and the wildlife rebounding within them. Details and meeting location to be announced. Check the SLO County CNC project journal page for updates.

Pismo Beach Earth Day | Saturday, April 25, 12:00 – 2:00 PM | Pismo Beach Pier

Join Emma Rhoads from the Pismo Beach Stewardship and Educational Outreach Program for an Earth Day celebration that doubles as a CNC observation event. Families and first-time iNaturalist users are especially welcome.

Paso Robles BioBlitz | Sunday, April 26, 11:30 AM – 3:30 PM | Paso Robles

Join The Land Conservancy of SLO and Team Learning Among the Oaks to participate in a guided bioblitz in the heart of Paso Robles. This free event includes guided

instruction and lunch. RSVP on Eventbrite.

Santa Rita Ranch BioBlitz | Monday, April 27, 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM | Santa Rita Ranch

Join The Land Conservancy of SLO for a guided bioblitz at the Santa Rita Ranch. RSVP on Eventbrite.

How to Participate — From Anywhere

You don't need to attend an in-person event to take part. Participation is open to everyone, wherever you are:

- Download the free iNaturalist app (iOS or Android).
- Search for and join the "City Nature Challenge 2026: San Luis Obispo County" project.
- Between April 24–27, photograph any wild plant, animal, or fungi you encounter — in your backyard, neighborhood, or out on the trail.
- From April 29 to May 10, help identify observations submitted by others. If you have expertise in birds, plants, insects, or any other group, your identifications make the dataset more valuable for researchers and land managers alike.

All planned events and tips will be posted on the SLO County CNC project journal page at: **inaturalist.org/projects/city-nature-challenge-2026-san-luis-obispo-county.**

Learn more about the global challenge at: **citynaturechallenge.org**

About the Partners

About the Pismo Beach Stewardship and Educational Outreach Program

The Pismo Beach Stewardship and Educational Outreach Program works to protect and celebrate the natural and cultural resources of Pismo Beach through community engagement, conservation programming, and education. The program operates in partnership with the Pismo Beach Conference and Visitors Bureau to connect residents and visitors with the coastal environment they share.

About the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP)

The Morro Bay National Estuary Program is dedicated to protecting and restoring the Morro Bay estuary — one of California's last undeveloped coastal wetlands — through science, stewardship, and community partnerships. MBNEP works with local agencies, organizations, and residents to ensure the long-term health of this nationally significant ecosystem.

About the San Luis Obispo Chapter of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS-SLO)

The San Luis Obispo Chapter of the California Native Plant Society promotes the appreciation, protection, and scientific understanding of California's native flora. Through hikes, restoration projects, and educational programs, CNPS-SLO connects community members with the remarkable plant life of the Central Coast.

About the California Central Coast Chapter of The Wildlife Society (CCCC TWS)

The California Central Coast Chapter of The Wildlife Society supports wildlife professionals and enthusiasts in the stewardship and scientific management of wildlife and their habitats. The chapter fosters collaboration between researchers, land managers, and community members across San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.

###