

# FORT ROSS NEWS

May 2024 Newsletter | Fort Ross Conservancy



## Foreword

IAN TAYLOR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



To our valued Community,

As the new Executive Director of Fort Ross Conservancy, I am thrilled to extend my warmest greetings to you all. My name is Ian Taylor, and it is with great excitement and honor that I step into this role. As I embark on this journey, I am deeply committed to upholding the rich legacy of Fort Ross Conservancy and advancing its mission to preserve, educate, and inspire.

First and foremost, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the incredible community that has made Fort Ross Conservancy what it is today. Your dedication, passion and support have been the cornerstone of our success, and I am eager to build upon this foundation together.

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I see Fort Ross Conservancy as much more than just a champion for cultural and natural preservation. In 2024, I envision us becoming a hub of educational innovation, and a catalyst for positive change in our community. Through our diverse programs and initiatives, we will strive to foster a deep connection to the past while empowering present and future generations to shape a brighter tomorrow.

From our Cultural and Historical Living Education program to our immersive workshops and events, we provide opportunities for individuals of all ages to engage with history and the environment in meaningful and transformative ways. By fostering a deeper understanding of the past, we hope to empower our community to become stewards of our shared heritage and champions of the future of the Sonoma Coast. Whether through our community outreach initiatives, collaborative partnerships, or volunteer opportunities, we are committed to creating a welcoming space where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to participate. Our commitment to educational excellence now lies at the heart of everything we do.

Looking ahead, I am excited to embark on this journey with each and every one of you. Together, we will continue to foster meaningful connections and leave a lasting legacy for generations to come. As we navigate the road ahead, I am confident that our collective passion and determination will propel us to new heights of success.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the Fort Ross Conservancy community for your support and dedication. Let us embark on this new chapter with optimism, enthusiasm, and a shared commitment to preserving the cultural history and natural beauty of these important public lands. Together, we can truly make the most of the Sonoma Coast!

With warm regards,

Ian Taylor  
Executive Director  
Fort Ross Conservancy



## Updates

### Winter storms

We are back up and running after a tumultuous winter. A few Fort windows were blown in, we lost water for nearly a month, and a big eucalypt is down in the Call House picnic area. The impressive winter swells were so big they washed over the sea lion rocks.

### Whale, pup, and flower season

Spring is an exciting time to visit the coast. Grey whales on their annual migration north and even orcas have been seen swimming by. Harbor seals are pupping in the cove and new flowers are blooming every day creating a carpet of color on the bluffs. Douglas Iris (pictured), goldfields, and seaside daisies are some of the many in flower.

### North Bay Science Discovery Day Santa Rosa, March 9th

Ian and Dione set up a table of ‘Guess Who: what is that specimen?’ meeting over 300 parents, children, and people who just love science. We had sea otter, harbor seal and sea lion pelts as well as shells, and whale bones to identify and look at down the microscope. For those who signed up for our newsletter, welcome to the Fort Ross community!

### Fieldguides Outdoor Education

We are excited to announce a new partnership with Fieldguides to offer a fun and educational family-style camping trip for schools combined with our Marine Ecology Program! *Book now for Fall!*



**Keep an eye out for an exciting update about the State Park soon...**



## FRC programs

A few hours, day or overnight programs for schools families and other groups! Visit our [website](#) for more information and pricing.

### Environmental Living Program ELP

The ELP is a hands-on interpretive program about the people and cultures that comprise the history of Metini/Fort Ross. This program is designed for students in grades 3-5 to explore Californian history on the coast and the interaction between people and their environment.

### Marine Ecology Program MEP

Explore the coast and learn about ocean ecosystems and wildlife in a hands-on educational program. Activities include tidepooling, surveying harbor seals, learning about the 1800s fur trade, and hiking to see California and Steller sea lions. Have fun doing science outside of the classroom!

#### **NEW:**

1-*The MEP in your classroom!* Enquire now for a MEP instructor to hold a program at your school (available to elementary schools between Fort Ross and the Bay Area).  
2-*Camping on the coast!* Combine the MEP with an overnight camping program for schools or youth groups with **Fieldguides Outdoor Education!**

### Educational Opportunities

Interested in a shorter program? Would you like to personalize your program and combine elements of both the ELP and MEP? Educational opportunities are 1-4 hour programs suitable for schools, adult professional groups, and college classes.

### Family Camp

Stay over night in the Fort with your family and friends. Incorporate our guides to learn about the history and wildlife on the coast.





## Tours

Explore the natural and cultural history both inside and outside the fort compound walls under the guidance of a knowledgeable tour guide.

### Public Tours

#### Fort Tours

Tours start at the visitor center  
Cost = \$15/person  
Children 10 and under are free.

Call or email us ahead of time to verify availability and timing.

### Private Tours

#### Book a tour to suit your schedule

Available in Fort Ross State Historic Park (FRSHP) or at Salt Point State Park (SPSP).  
Tell us what you're most interested to see and we'll customize your tour.


Cost: \$25/person per hour (\$100 minimum)  
Children 10 and under are free.

### Call House Tours

#### Free to the public. Donations appreciated!

The first Saturday and Sunday of every month from 1 pm-4 pm.

#### Contact us to book:

 707-847-3437

 [info@fortross.org](mailto:info@fortross.org)

#### Visitor Center:

19005 Coast Highway One,  
Jenner, CA 95450  
Open 10 am – 4:30 pm daily



# Upcoming Events

## ALASKA NATIVE DAY WEEKEND

May 18 – 19

The Alaska Native Community at Metini-Fort Ross welcomes all to Alaska Native Day this spring. Please join us as we continue to honor our Alaska Native history in the California lands of the Kashia Pomo. We will be celebrating our cultural practices through the sharing of our traditional foods and stories from our elders.

Alaska Natives have a long history of relationship to Metini through the Russian hunting expeditions in the 1800's. Alaska Natives were forcefully brought from their homelands by the Russian American Company to build Fort Ross and hunt sea otters for the benefit of the Russian American Company and at great cost to the Alaska Natives

The Alaska Native community is grateful to the Kashia Pomo for welcoming us on their lands so we may pay tribute to our ancestors and continue to strengthen our community. A special thank you to Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, The Aleut Foundation, Pacific Northwest Aleut Council, Ounalashka Corporation, and Fort Ross Conservancy for their generous support.

**Please join us to learn more of our Alaska Native history and continuing cultural practices <https://alaskanativeday.com/>**



# Upcoming Events

## ALASKA NATIVE DAY WEEKEND SCHEDULE

### Saturday May 18

<b>10 am</b>	Presentation of seal hunt by Unangax elders Vincent Tutiakoff and Moses Dirks
<b>11:30 am</b>	Prepare traditional foods- salmon, seal stew, alaadax (fry bread) and begin crafts. Crafts led by artists Danielle Larsen and Nikkita Shellikoff. <i>Sign up ahead of time for craft*</i>
<b>1 pm</b>	Potluck lunch of traditional foods, please bring something to share
<b>2 pm</b>	History of Alaska Natives at Metini led by Unangax, Tlingit, and Haida elders Continue crafts
<b>3-4 pm</b>	Trade History Presentation led by Tlingit elder Bob Sam and Haida elder Robert Kennedy Continue crafts

### Sunday May 19

<b>10 am</b>	Walk to cemetery
<b>10:30 am</b>	Ceremony at cemetery
<b>12 pm</b>	Return to Fort for Lunch (lunches provided for volunteers, highly recommend others pack lunch in as restaurants, cafes, etc are a considerable drive)
<b>1 pm</b>	History and Current Day Alaska Native traditional food practices discussion at the Fort Continue crafts
<b>2-4 pm</b>	Story sharing from elders Continue crafts

Reach out to [alaskanativedayatmetini@gmail.com](mailto:alaskanativedayatmetini@gmail.com) with any questions, accessibility needs, and to sign up for crafts\*

\*Beaded Glass Balls led by Nikkita Shellikoff is limited to Unangan participants. Craft led by Danielle Larsen open, priority will go to Alaska Native participants.

\*\*\***Accessibility:** the event will be primarily outdoors, weather permitting, with possibly an indoor component. The outdoor locations (excluding cemetery) will have seating, shade structures, wheelchair accessible bathrooms, relatively flat packed but unpaved walkways, accessible parking options for those who need it. Walk to cemetery is roughly 20 minutes each way on hilly terrain on a narrow path, there is another option to park nearby on flat location please contact email for further directions for this option. Cemetery is mostly flat and grassy, a few hundred feet from the road and limited parking, no bathroom or packed walkways, there is a bench for seating, additional seating could be arranged ahead of time if needed.\*\*\*

# Upcoming Events

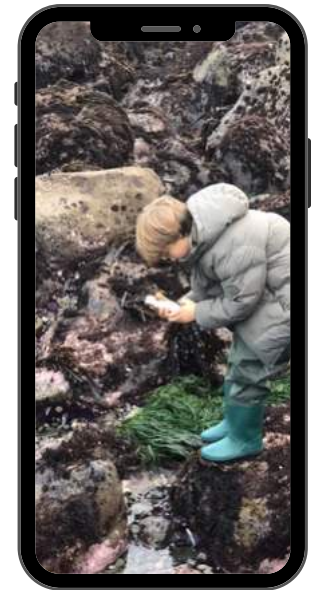
## SNAPSHOT CAL COAST: HELP DOCUMENT COASTAL BIODIVERSITY

Saturday June 1st, 11:30 am

Fort Ross will be holding a ‘bioblitz’ event for [Snapshot Cal Coast](#) this summer! Bring your family, kids, and friends with a smart phone or camera to help us spot and take photos of wildlife on the bluff tops and tide pools.

Meet us at the visitor center at 1:30 am to walk down to Sandy Cove for low tide at 12:58 pm (0.7 ft) where we will take photos of all the species we can find over 1 – 2 h. Help us find these [most wanted species](#). We will then have a tutorial on uploading photos to iNaturalist over lunch (BYO).

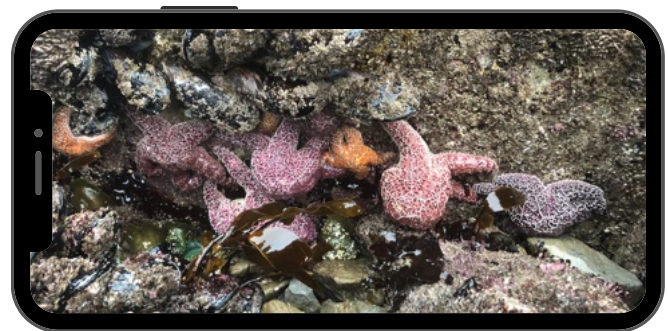
Every year, the California Academy of Sciences holds a state-wide survey using iNaturalist to take a ‘snapshot’ of california’s incredibly diverse coastal wildlife. This project is a massive community effort with 8,732 species observations since 2016. From this data, scientists can see trends in distribution and populations of different species. This year the event is running for the whole month of June!



Join us or take photos in your own time!

### How to get involved:

1. Create an account with [iNaturalist](#)
2. Download the phone app: iNaturalist or Seek (ideal for kids)
3. Join the Snapshot Cal Coast 2024 iNaturalist project
4. Bring your phone, family and friends
5. down to Fort Ross or elsewhere on the coast
6. Take photos of all the coastal/intertidal species you find
7. Upload your photos to iNaturalist



CALIFORNIA  
ACADEMY OF  
SCIENCES



To register email [dioned@fortross.org](mailto:dioned@fortross.org)



# Volunteer Opportunities

## Fort Ross State Historic Park

Volunteering is a great excuse to get outdoors and come down to the coast. If you are a bird nerd, love hiking the coast, interested in marine mammals, or enjoy tidepooling and gardening, we have a number of opportunities to get involved with.

**The perks** | Log your hours as a California State Parks Volunteer  
 40 hours = a district day use pass for the next year.  
 200+ hours = a statewide day use pass for the next year.



## DOCENTS

Volunteers help inspire our visitors and students to appreciate the cultural and natural history of the spectacular Sonoma Coast.

Volunteer to help with hands-on activities in our education programs, lead tours, or to interact with visitors inside the Fort or within the park. Fort and harbor seal docents are especially welcome.

## HARBOR SEAL SURVEYS

Harbor seal moms are starting to give birth to very cute, big-eyed pups all along the coast.

Every year, Fort Ross volunteers help Point Reyes National Seashore Marine Ecologists with fortnightly harbor seal surveys. This is a great excuse to walk along the FRSHP coast with a pair of binoculars. Bring family or a friend along with you! The extra pair of eyes will be helpful. The spotted seals are surprisingly good at camouflaging against the rocks.

To get started, there is a 1 h training video. The walk along the coast for the survey is also ~ 1 h. Fortnightly surveys are scheduled every year between March and July\*.



\*Survey dates are flexible and can be done two days either side of the specified date



## VISITOR CENTER GARDEN

The native garden for pollinators we started planting last year is growing. The mule ears that disappeared over the winter have just resurfaced and the blue dog violets are in full bloom.

Weeds have also loved the spring weather and are going gang-busters. Every week we pull out armfuls but it is no match for the fast-growing grasses. If anyone with a green thumb or is willing to learn has some spare time to lend a helping hand, on a regular basis if possible, we would greatly appreciate it.

Help us with our goal to create a garden space to promote native plant and pollinator conservation.



The blue dog violet, *Viola adunca*, are the larval food for the endangered Behren's Silverspot Butterfly

## SEA LION SURVEYS

Every month, volunteers meet to count the Steller and California sea lions on the islands off Fort Ross. We walk for about 1.5 hours along the coast (with a chocolate break) and then have lunch together at the visitor center.

Each month is different, the sea lions are endlessly entertaining. We see them swim, play, jump off cliffs, and seemingly have arguments with each other.

### Help us continue our 17 year dataset

Are you interested? Come along to a survey to see if you would like to sign up! The first surveys started in 1997 and the more data we collect, the better we understand our sea lions.



Photo: Susan Zerwick

Left: A steller sea lion mother nursing her pup  
Right: volunteers counting sea lions through telescopes

## JOIN US!

Email [dioned@fortross.org](mailto:dioned@fortross.org) for more information and to sign up!



# Pictured in FRSHP

## WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS ON THE COAST

Coastal naturalist, Dr. Dione Deaker

### >>> CALIFORNIA TORTOISESHELLS

March 13

A number of these butterflies (*Nymphalis californica*) were floating by Sandy Cove in mid-March. They were landing on the mud where the creek meets the beach – maybe for salt and minerals? This behavior is known as ‘puddling’.



### >>> ORCAS

April 3

A pod of three transient orcas were spotted heading North, not too far from shore! We believe the taller dorsal fin is the mother and the shorter fins are her two calves.

It is very possible these orcas are on the hunt for grey whale calves - we have seen a few grey whales recently.

The school doing an MEP were amazed by this special sighting!

## YOUR PHOTO IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER?

Send in a photo of wildlife (plant, animal, fungi etc) or a nice photo you took in FRSHP, Salt Point, or nearby. We will select a few of the submitted photos or photos posted to iNaturalist from the area to be in the next newsletter

Send to [mep@fortross.org](mailto:mep@fortross.org) with the subject “photo submission for newsletter”



### >>> NOBLE DORID NUDIBRANCH

March 15

Named after the flower like structure on their back nudibranchs are sea slugs. Nudibranch is derived from latin where ‘nudi’ = naked, ‘branch’ = lungs.

# Thank you for your support

As you reach the end of our spring newsletter, I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for your continued support of the Fort Ross Conservancy. Your passion for preserving Metini/Fort Ross and Salt Point is truly inspiring, and it is because of donors like you that we are able to carry out our mission.

These lands hold a special place in the hearts of many, serving as a tangible link to California's past and a beacon of cultural exchange and understanding. However, the work of the conservancy is ongoing and requires sustained effort and resources.

Your donations play a vital role in our ability to:

- Engage with local communities and stakeholders.
- Protect and steward the natural environment, preserving and restoring critical habitats.
- Develop educational programs and resources that foster a deeper appreciation for the diverse history and ecology of the area.
- Maintain and restore historic structures.

No matter the size of your contribution, know that it makes a real difference in our ability to safeguard this cultural and ecological treasure. Your support allows us to continue our work with dedication and passion, ensuring that Metini/Fort Ross and Salt Point remain places of discovery, learning, and connection for all who visit.



To contribute to our efforts with a cash donation, please visit [fortross.org/donate](https://fortross.org/donate) or contact me directly at [IanT@fortross.org](mailto:IanT@fortross.org). Every dollar is deeply appreciated and directly contributes to our growth and success. If you'd like to join the conservancy during these new and exciting times, please visit [fortross.org/frc/join](https://fortross.org/frc/join) to become a member.

Thank you once again for your generosity and commitment to the Fort Ross Conservancy. Together, we are writing the next chapter in its storied history.

With gratitude,

*Ian Taylor*

Executive Director  
Fort Ross Conservancy