The Kids in Nature Program (KIN) at the Cheadle Center for Biological Diversity and Ecological Restoration is a Nature and Science education practicum dedicated to connecting elementary school children with our natural world. This past year, CCBER staff and students at UCSB worked with fifth graders from Adelante Charter School, Isla Vista Elementary and dozens of other schools to bring the wonders of our region's biodiversity to light in their classrooms and in the field. KIN worked with 34 schools this year and had a total of 764 fifth grade students enrolled. Every Tuesday and Thursday, fifth grade teachers set aside 3 hour blocks to allow CCBER staff and UCSB undergraduate students to educate their students through creative lesson plans, field trips, workshops, educational tours, and even planting days. The fifth graders also spent a significant amount of time on the UCSB campus, which helped to demystify the university and empowered the students to reach for higher education.

Students at UCSB signed up for EEMB 189/ENVS 191 to become teachers to these fifth grade students during fall and winter quarter. Through this program, UCSB students gained hands-on experience teaching ecology and environmental science while receiving instruction from professionals on topics ranging from science education, teaching strategies, lesson plan development, and public speaking. During spring quarter, students from these classes were invited to come back and pursue paid internships to continue working with the program.

The professionals who run the Kids in Nature program are the reason for its excellency. Janet Myers is the KIN Education Coordinator and Andy Lanes is the Kids in Nature Associate. Together, they organize the materials for the class and create the fifth grade student curriculum. Bridget Lewin is the EEMB 189/ENV S 191 instructor. Bridget is a continuing lecturer in the Environmental Studies Department at UCSB and she teaches the UCSB students in her class how to develop lesson plans for the 5th grade students, how to understand and use the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and how to identify different learning styles, amongst many other topics.

The fifth grade students enrolled in KIN went on two field trips each academic quarter. Every student was given a science notebook and nature journal to work through in order to reinforce their knowledge. After each field trip, the students got a chance to revisit what they learned in a classroom setting. During fall quarter of 2018, the first trip brought the 5th grade students to the Cheadle Center for a tour of the collections.

Their eyes widened at the vast cases of insects of different lengths, shapes, and colors as staff taught them the basics of insect anatomy. Students also studied flower structures, learning the locations and functions of the ovaries, anthers, stigma, petals, and sepals. The day was commemorated with nature printed backpacks, created by each student to have as a keepsake.
The second trip in fall quarter was to Ellwood Beach where students looked for beach hoppers under the kelp, counted them, and graphed their own data. As they strolled along the beach, they identified birds using binoculars and observed the famous Western Snowy plover. The Ellwood Beach trip introduced students to different types of algae and the importance of native kelp forest habitats. Students also participated in journaling circles to share the different treasures they had found and talk about the array of smells and sounds they experienced during their trip.

During winter quarter, students went on a trip to North Campus Open Space to learn about wetlands and the flora and fauna that inhabit them. Wetlands are incredibly diverse habitats that act as sponges during flooding events and help filter toxins in the environment. Students got a chance to simulate a miniature wetland model to learn about ecosystem functions. An important theme of this trip was identifying native plants and how they evolved to adapt to local conditions.

The second field trip of winter quarter took the students to the Botanical Garden in Santa Barbara to explore California’s native flora. Students learned about the kinds of plants that grow in different parts of California - from the Chaparrals to the Redwood forests and Riparian habitats. Special attention was given to the symbiosis in lichens and the importance of wildfires for ecosystem renewal.

In spring quarter, the students visited the Arroyo Hondo Preserve on the Gaviota Coast - the jewel of Gaviota. As they hiked throughout the preserve, they observed newts, turtles, snakes, bear prints, lizards, and numerous birds. Along the way, they stopped by the stream to look under rocks for invertebrates and attempted to catch them with nets. Students even learned how to conduct water testing to note the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water.
The academic year culminated with Celebration Day back at the Cheadle Center. This was a day to present the most interesting materials students learned about throughout the KIN year in the form of group PowerPoint presentations and each student's accomplishments were honored with a certificate of completion. Students made bookmarks out of native pressed flowers, made clapper sticks and a herpetologist came in later to show them live reptiles. The highlight of the day arrived when Santa Barbara’s very own Eyes in the Sky (EITS) educational speakers came in to show the students live raptors and owls. EITS is Santa Barbara Audubon’s wildlife education program that features birds of prey that were rescued and rehabilitated. KIN students learned about local birds, particularly how to identify them by sight and sound, approach them respectfully, and assist with their future survival.

For more information about the Kids in Nature Program, please visit https://www.ccber.ucsb.edu/KIN.