



**Muagagana:**

*E le falala fua le niu, 'ae  
falala ona o le matagi.*

“The coconut tree does not sway on its own but sways in the wind.”

Everything happens for a reason or a purpose, things are affected by what is around them.

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**Mission:** *To expand public appreciation and stewardship of the environment, Samoan culture, and self through place-based education and collaborative partnerships.*

**Vision:** *To be a prominent science place-based educational support organization in American Samoa.*



## Vai o le Ola (Water of Life) Summer Camp

The 2024 *Vai o le Ola* (VOLO) summer camp focused on wetlands and their importance. It combines cultural traditions with scientific learning to foster a deep connection between the Samoan community and its natural environment. Through a series of activities, NELAS educates youth about the critical role of wetlands emphasizing the need for their conservation as well as the overall well-being of individuals and communities. By nurturing

self-development through environmental education, we empower participants to cultivate a sense of responsibility and stewardship toward their ecosystems which align with cultural practices. This holistic approach not only enhances ecological knowledge but also promotes mental, emotional, and physical well-being, reinforcing the idea that a healthy environment is

vital for the health of the people who depend on it. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the American Samoan Environmental Protection Agency (AS-EPA), Natural Resources Conservation Service US Department of Agriculture (NRCS-USDA), National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NMSAS-NOAA), National Park of American Samoa (NPAS) and American Samoan Community College, Land Grant (ASCC, Land Grant) for their invaluable contributions in dedicating their time to support the program. A special thanks also go to the American Samoa Telecommunications Authority (ASTCA), Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG) for generously donating items for the students.

## Wetlands and Their Importance?

A wetland is a unique area where water is present at or near the surface for long enough to affect the soil and support special plants that grow in wet conditions. Three main things make it a wetland:

**Water:** Wetlands have water either all year or during certain seasons.

**Soil:** The soil is soggy, dark, and rich in nutrients, called "hydric soil."

**Plants:** Only certain plants, like mangroves and taro, can live in the wet, soggy soil of wetlands. On an island like American Samoa, wetlands are crucial for flood control, water filtration, and shoreline protection. They provide critical habitats for native wildlife like the

toloa (duck) and marine species (nursery for fish and crabs) while supporting cultural subsistence. Wetlands help fight climate change by slowing down sea-level rise and making the island stronger against storms, capturing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, and storing them in the soil and plants. Taking care of wetlands helps sustain the biodiversity of animals, plants, and our way of life. Let us work together to keep them healthy.

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*COME and GROW with  
US!*

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## Toe Fo'i i le Lau'ele'ele Program

### ASCC Teacher Workshop

As part of the continuation of the Teacher Science Education class at American Samoa Community College (ASCC), NELAS provided a field trip to Olovalu Crater in Futiga for these student teachers. Even though it rained, the teachers still wanted to experience the outdoors and see the local fauna. It was hosted by the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources. The teachers learned about the local birds and wildlife. Special thanks to Brandy Shimasaki Barber and KJ Ameperosa of ASCC for allowing us to share our program with the class.



### American Samoa Department of Education Division of Curriculum and Instruction (ASDOEDCI) Teacher Workshop

NELAS brought hands-on science activities to Matafao and Coleman Elementary Schools, showcasing the types of engaging programs they offer. One of the highlighted activities focused on native plants, teaching students about different plant parts and exploring leaves using their senses. Teachers measured leaf width and length, felt the texture of leaves, and identified key characteristics to recognize each plant. They also learned and shared their experiences about the cultural significance and traditional uses of these plants in Samoan culture, connecting science with heritage.

### Parents of Children with Special Needs Network (PCSSNN) Activities

NELAS and PCSNN collaborated at Lions Park for an engaging event focused on local bird species. Participants learned to identify various birds, recognize their calls, and explore their habitats. The event also included wellness activities. These activities are aimed at fostering personal growth, cultural stewardship, and environmental awareness. As a creative highlight, each participant crafted a duck (toloa) chick hatching from an egg.



### Pea o le Vao (fruit bats of the forest)

There are a few species of mammals in American Samoa. Can you name one mammal (see below for answers)? American Samoa has two species of fruit bats. The Tongan bat (*Pteropus tonganus*) and the Samoan bat (*P. samoensis*). There is a third species of bat (*Emballonura semicaudata*), but it is small and insectivore (eats only insects) and looks like one of our native birds (white-rumped swallow, pe'ape'a). This bat may be extinct in American Samoa. The two fruit bats as the name indicates eat fruits such as fa'i (bananas) and maki (fig species) and have a foul smell (hence the name pe'a). They used to be hunted. They are also important for spreading seeds of native plants. (Ans = pigs, rats, mice, whales, dolphins, cats, dogs). Source: <http://npshistory.com/publications/npsa/natural-history-guide-2002.pdf>



### Partnerships

Our program is made possible through the support of our partners, including the ASDOEDCI, Department of Criminal Justice, DMWR, Amerika Samoa Humanities Council, STEAM Coalition, Career Education Training Association, Inc., PCSNN, Cost.U.Less, Bluesky, Back on Track, AS-EPA, NRCS-USDA, NMSAS-NOAA, NPAS, DPR, CRAG, and ASTCA. Special thanks and appreciation to our volunteers who contributed to the success of our program.