



# Asombro Insights



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*Asombro Insights is published quarterly by the Asombro Institute for Science Education, a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing scientific literacy by fostering an understanding of the Chihuahuan Desert. Please direct all inquiries to:*

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*Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Ph.D., Director  
Rink Somerday, Program Coordinator  
Paul Harper, Site Coordinator*

## Asombro Institute - A Real Class Act

Many people know about the Asombro Institute for Science Education's widely praised field trips for schoolchildren. However, fewer people know that Asombro Institute staff members also spend a lot of time giving hands-on classroom programs all over southern New Mexico and western Texas.

"As gas prices increase and teachers are able to take fewer field trips, they are requesting more in-class science programs," said Asombro Institute Executive Director Stephanie Bestelmeyer. "While we would prefer to bring every child out to experience the desert first-hand, we know that students can still learn a tremendous amount through our one-hour, hands-on science programs."

The Asombro Institute's classroom programs have been developed over the past eight years. Programs were originally focused on desert plants and animals, but the topics have expanded considerably based on teacher requests.

"We have programs on the scientific method, weather, the solar system, soil, desert animal adaptations, and much more," said Asombro Institute Program Coordinator Rink Somerday.

Regardless of the topic, all programs share several traits. All are hands-on and inquiry-based, allowing students to learn by doing. All programs are also tied directly to state science and math education standards, thereby assisting teachers with their required curriculum.



*During the "Soil - It's Not Just Dirt" class program, students conduct an experiment investigating water infiltration rates into different soil types.*

A full list of classroom programs, arranged by grade level, can be found at the Asombro Institute's web site ([www.asombro.org](http://www.asombro.org)).

For the 2008/09 school year, individuals, businesses, and clubs can sponsor these classroom programs. For \$120, you can bring three, one-hour programs to deserving students. Call the office today (575-524-3334) for more information.

*"My students really benefited from this hands on approach. Thank you!"*

*3rd grade teacher; Hermosa Heights Elem.*

*"Great reinforcement of concepts covered in class. Great integration of math and science. Thank you!"*

*4th grade teacher; Sunrise Elem.*

*"Thanks again for helping us in the field and at Mayfield. I appreciate all that you guys do!"*  
*Science teacher; Mayfield High*

# Notes from the Director

## Your Donations Are Now More Important Than Ever

By Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Ph.D.

At least once a week, I am asked how the economic crisis affects nonprofit organizations, especially the Asombro Institute for Science Education. While predicting the future has proven difficult for even the most well respected financial experts, we do know one fact from previous economic downturns - philanthropy is directly tied to the overall health of the economy. As people face increasing prices for food, gas and other basic needs, their charitable contributions decrease. Also, many foundations give grants based on their investment income, so these grants will likely be severely reduced in 2009.

While we do expect difficult times ahead, the Asombro Institute for Science Education is as well poised as possible to weather this crisis while maintaining our programs. After years of practice,

we are excellent at running a lean organization with extremely low overhead. We have tremendous partners in the World Wildlife Fund and the USDA-ARS Jornada Experimental Range. Their in-kind contributions allow the Asombro Institute to consistently put at least 90% of all income directly into programs rather than into administration or fundraising costs.

Nonetheless, providing award-winning science education programs for more than 12,000 children and 4,000 adults each year takes money. So now, more than ever, we need your support.

The Board of Directors and I will soon create the 2009 budget, so donations now help us plan for the future. Please consider giving as generously as you are able. You may use the membership form at the back of this newsletter. Current members may also make a contribution through an end-of-year

funding request that will be mailed to you soon.

If you've already donated, please go the next step and invite a family member, friend, or colleague to donate to our organization too. Every donation is valuable as we work toward our mission of increased science literacy.

In addition to knowing that you are bringing the wonder of science and the desert to children, membership has other privileges too. Donors contributing \$100 or more are invited to a VIP event at the Park. For a donation of \$250 or more, you are also invited to a special tour in 2009. The 2008 tour treated members to a personal tour of a remarkable archaeology site.

Thank you for your continuing support. Together we will survive whatever the economy brings next, while still bringing quality science education to thousands in our region.

## New Asombro Institute Web Site - [www.asombro.org](http://www.asombro.org)

Finding online information about the Asombro Institute for Science Education and the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park just got easier! Over the past several months, Sandra Pletschett from HomeSpun Webs worked with Asombro Institute staff members to create a more user-friendly site, full of information for donors, teachers, Park visitors, and more.

The new site ([www.asombro.org](http://www.asombro.org)) contains all of the information found on the old site, but it also contains new sections. One new feature is the Virtual Tour, a wealth of information on the geology, soil, archaeology, plants and animals of the northern Chihuahuan Desert. This information was adapted from the popular Self-Guided Tour Booklet that is available for visitors to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Written by Arlene Tugel, Walt Whitford and other prominent local scientists, this booklet is a fantastic introduction to the region. The Virtual Tour brings some of this information to people who don't have the opportunity to go to the Nature Park themselves.

Teachers can also use the new web site to find a full listing of classroom programs, field trip stations, teacher workshops, and other education opportunities. Programs are divided into grade ranges, allowing teachers to quickly access the information they need.

The site also contains information on upcoming family educational events, biographies of staff members and Board members, and much more. Visit [www.asombro.org](http://www.asombro.org) to see all that the Asombro Institute has to offer.



# No Child Left Inside

**By Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Ph.D.**  
*Executive Director, Asombro  
Institute for Science Education*

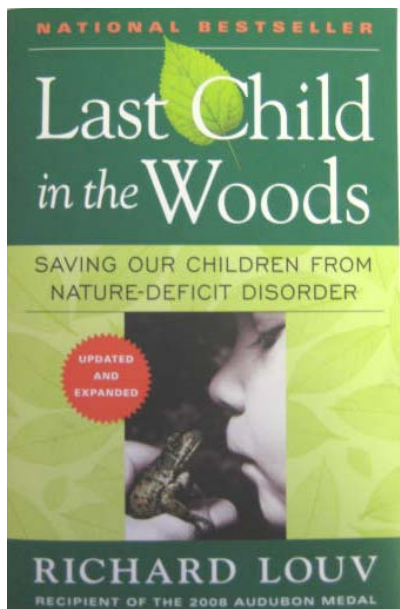
This fall, as the media focused on the upcoming election, a remarkable bill was slowly making its way through Congress.

The “No Child Left Inside Act of 2008” (H.R. 3036) passed the House of Representatives with a vote of 293-109, including yes votes from New Mexico representatives Steve Pearce and Tom Udall and El Paso representative Silvestre Reyes. Following passage in the House, the Bill was introduced into the Senate and referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works on October 2.

The purpose of the No Child Left Inside Act is to support local and state efforts to enhance environmental education, the study of relationships between natural and human systems. Specifically, the bill would reauthorize and enhance the National Environmental Education Act of 1990 by increasing capacity for environmental education and teacher professional development opportunities.

Unfortunately, the term “environmental education” has been misinterpreted by some to be simply the promotion of “tree-hugging” ideals, politically motivated and devoid of scientific content. The No Child Left Inside Act, however, requires that all curriculum developed under the program be aligned with state standards. It also requires that all teacher training be based on scientifically valid research. This focus may explain why the bill passed the House with bipartisan support, even during a politically charged election cycle.

Representative John Sarbanes from Maryland first introduced the bill, in



*Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv brought together evidence showing the importance of getting children outside to experience nature.

part, to address multiple factors limiting the teaching of environmental education. Over the past several years, teachers have been forced to reduce the amount of time they spend teaching about environmental issues because they must spend more time teaching math and reading, subjects covered on standardized tests.

The results of this reduction in time spent teaching about the environment as well as the reduction in time children are spending outdoors exploring nature have been serious. In his book Last Child in the Woods, Richard Louv coined the phrase “nature deficit disorder” to describe the generation of children who are growing up without an understanding of nature.

His book and many additional studies have shown the benefits of environmental education and outdoor experiences. Just a few of the positive impacts of these programs include increased achievement in science and other core subjects; increased enthusiasm for learning; decreased discipline problems; decreased child obesity; and decreased symptoms of attention deficit disorder.

So where does the Asombro Institute for Science Education fit into this new movement? Since the establishment of our organization in 1991, we have been a regional leader in science-based environmental education. We use our vast experience and award-winning programs to get students outside to learn about their local environment and to learn how to apply critical thinking skills to local and global environmental issues. Our programs are models of the No Child Left Inside Act goals, and we are well poised to compete for the additional resources this bill would bring to environmental education.

For more information on the No Child Left Inside movement, including progress of H.R. 3036, please visit the No Child Left Inside Coalition’s web site (<http://www.cbf.org>).



*For several years, students in the Sierra Middle School Science Magnet program have learned about science and the desert by collecting data on plant restoration at the Asombro Institute’s Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.*



## Site Development Corner

The Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park's 150-seat amphitheater can't be beat. It offers spectacular views of the Jornada Basin to the north, the Doña Ana Mountains to the west, and the Organ Mountains to the east. Many visitors find that it is a wonderful place to take a short break during a walk along the Desert Discovery Trail.

In late August, the amphitheater got even better following the installation of a large shade structure. Now visitors can enjoy even the hottest days of summer at the Park.

"We are really excited about the new programs we will be able to offer at the amphitheater," said Asombro Institute Site Coordinator Paul Harper.

He said, "We waited a long time for this structure, but it was worth the wait."

Funding for the project came from a capital outlay from the New Mexico State Legislature, organized by Senator Lee Rawson. Doña Ana County served as the fiscal agent, approving the bid by Exerplay (a distributor of SunPorts shade structures).



*A beautiful new shade structure was installed above the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park amphitheater in late August.*

The structure was put to the test just a few days after installation during an evening reception for donors who had given \$100 or more to the organization in 2008. Although it was still quite warm when the reception began at 5:00 PM, guests were comfortable sampling appetizers and perusing silent auction items under the shade.

Look for more events at the amphitheater soon. In the meantime, admire the new and improved amphitheater yourself during a walk at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Enjoy!

## Jornada Basin Tour Highlights Local Research

On September 20, Justin Van Zee (Asombro Institute Board President and Jornada Experimental Range scientist) gave some lucky members a tour of the Jornada Experimental Range highlighting desert research.

The tour made two stops at dirt tanks to investigate local aquatic life, including tadpole shrimp and insect larva. After that, it was on to several research sites to discuss ongoing research, including a grasshopper survey.

The change of the landscape from grassland to mesquite-dominated areas was an important theme of the day. Justin talked about ongoing Jornada Experimental Range and Jornada Basin LTER research on this topic, and visitors got to see examples of both grasslands and mesquite dunes.

A catered lunch in an alkali sacaton grassland offered guests a spectacular view of the basin.

No tour highlighting field research would be complete without vehicle trouble of some kind. Fortunately, this tour included only a van stuck in wet, clay soil. Tour participants simply enjoyed the views and the huge diversity of wildflowers while the van was pulled to drier ground. Nothing like a little excitement to make for a memorable trip!

*"It's a great way to get up close and personal with the Chihuahuan Desert."*

*Marcella Newman,  
tour participant*

## Calendar of Events



**December 13** - Asombro Institute's booth at the Las Cruces Farmer's Market. Visit our booth at the popular Farmer's Market in the Downtown Mall in Las Cruces from 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM. There will be a fun science activity for kids. Free.

**December 20** - Winter Nature Walk. Is the holiday rush getting to you? Need some fresh air? A jaunt through the desert is a great way to relieve the holiday stress and start to enjoy the peace of the season. The event begins at 9:00 AM at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Free.

**January 7** - Native Plant Society of New Mexico, Las Cruces Chapter Meeting. Join members to share nature images from 2008. The meeting will be held at 7:00 PM in the conference room of the Social Center at the University Terrace Good Samaritan Village in Las Cruces (3011 Buena Vida Circle).

## Recycle Cell Phones and Printer Cartridges

Getting a new cell phone or printer for the holidays? Don't forget to recycle your old phone and/or printer cartridges with us. Bring them to the Asombro Institute office, and we will recycle them for you. Not only does this simple action keep them out of the landfill, but it also generates donations for the organization. Call the office (575-524-3334) for more information.



## Do Your Online Shopping Through iGive.com

Before you shop online, please check [www.iGive.com](http://www.iGive.com). When you enter the more than 700 name brand store web sites through iGive.com, a percentage of every purchase goes directly to the Asombro Institute. Log onto the web site and choose "Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park" as your cause. These donations cost you nothing, but they really add up!

Thanks for your support.

## Education Programs

Here are the programs your donations helped us provide from July - October 2008.

12-Jul	Farmer's Market - rock collection activity	25-Sep	Sunrise Elem. - I'm A Scientist, Too
19-Jul	Useful Plants of the Southwest	27-Sep	Native Plant Society of NM - tour of Nature Park
21-Jul	UTEP/ICE - Best Practices in Education	26-Sep	Deming Agtoberfest - Sort Like a Scientist
24-Jul	RASEM - archaeology tour	2-Oct	Desert Hills Elem. - field trip
2-Aug	Casa Carnival - Sort Like a Scientist activity	3-Oct	Desert Hills Elem. - field trip
2-3 Aug	Frog Fest - amphibian sorting booth	3-Oct	Vista Middle School - field trip
5-Aug	National Night Out - desert animal skulls booth	3-Oct	Percha Dam State Park - Migration Sensation
9-Aug	Farmer's Market - butterfly life cycle activity	7-Oct	Sunrise Elem. - Plant Adaptations
16-Aug	Butterfly Flutterby	8-Oct	Sunrise Elem. - Plant Adaptations
3-Sep	Booker T Washington Elem.- I'm A Sci., Too	8-Oct	Hermosa Heights Elem. - Arthropod ID
10-Sep	MacArthur Elem.- I'm A Scientist, Too	9-Oct	Valley View Elem. - Plant Adaptations
10-Sep	Central Elem. - I'm A Scientist, Too	10-Oct	Hillrise Elem. - field trip
11-Sep	Valley View Elem. - I'm A Scientist, Too	11-Oct	Farmer's Market - bird wheel activity
13-Sep	Farmer's Market - ceramic butterflies activity	15-Oct	Sonoma Elem. - I'm A Scientist, Too
17-Sep	Mayfield High - soil compaction field research	16-Oct	Desert Hills Elem. - I'm A Scientist, Too
18-Sep	Elephant Butte State Park - bears & mountain lions	17-Oct	Munson Senior Center - nature walk
18-Sep	Mayfield High School - data analysis	18-Oct	Early Morning Birding
19-Sep	Conlee Elem. - Animal Adaptations	20-Oct	Sunrise Elem. - Animal Adaptations
20-Sep	Wildlife of the Jornada Basin	21-Oct	Sunrise Elem. - Animal Adaptations
20-Sep	Chihuahuan Desert Fiesta - desert animal skulls booth	22-Oct	MacArthur Elem. - Plant Adaptations
22-Sep	Mayfield High School - data analysis	22-Oct	Central Elem. - Plant Adaptations
23-Sep	Sierra Middle School - field trip	23-Oct	Sierra Middle School - field trip
23-Sep	Sunrise Elem. - I'm A Scientist, Too	25-Oct	VIP Archaeology Tour
24-Sep	Sunrise Elem. - I'm A Scientist, Too	27-Oct	Jornada Elem. - Animal Adaptations
25-Sep	Hillrise Elem. - Animal Adaptations	28-30 Oct	El Paso Water Utilities/WERC - water festival
		29-Oct	Booker T Washington Elem. - Plant Adaptations
		30-Oct	Sierra Middle School - Veg. measurements

## Many Thanks!

Blackstone Hot Springs Lodging and Baths - silent auction item  
Ericha Courtright - laser printer  
Duncan Noble Day Spa - silent auction item  
Michael Ferguson - silent auction item  
Randy Granger - performance at VIP event  
Courtney Harmon - silent auction item  
Hotel Encanto - silent auction item  
Jornada Experimental Range - logistical and site support  
New Mexico State Parks - silent auction item  
Rest Assured Massage Therapy (Renee Thomas) - silent auction item  
Sportsman's Warehouse - silent auction item  
Toucan Market - silent auction item  
World Wildlife Fund - office space

## Busy Summer of Programs at the Nature Park

### By Rink Somerday, Program Coordinator

Each month this summer, families gathered at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park to have fun while learning about their environment.

In July, families explored the plant kingdom at *Useful Plants of the Desert Southwest*. Grinding corn and mesquite beans gave people an appreciation for the convenience of modern flour. By using a mano (the piece of rounded rock held in the hand) against a metate (the flat base rock where the corn or mesquite beans are placed), people put their back into manually grinding their food.

Visitors learned that yucca plants have many uses. The roots can be ground into a soap-like substance, the flowers are edible, and the ends of the leaves are sharp enough to be used as needles. Then they had the opportunity to try weaving yucca fibers. Mountain View Market Co-op brought mesquite bean muffins and herbal teas for visitors to taste the flavors of the desert.

In August, we held our 6<sup>th</sup> Annual *Butterfly Flutterby*. Thirteen different booths located along the Desert Discovery Trail introduced guests to the delicate world of these winged creatures. Butterfly Trivia tested people's knowledge. At Pollination Station, visitors tried their hand at pollinating flowers, and the Butterfly Gardening station taught which flowers can attract butterflies to your own garden. New this year was making a butterfly water dish to give local butterflies a drink.

As the name implies, *Early Morning Birding* is just that - early. 6:30 AM! But participants were given coffee and had the opportunity to join local ornithologist, Brian Locke, to add avian species to their life list. Decoding local sparrow species took some skills and a bird identification book.



*A young visitor to the Butterfly Flutterby tests her butterfly knowledge with the help of volunteers from the Progress Club of Las Cruces.*

On December 20th at 9:00 AM, we will host a "Winter Nature Walk." Join us for a breathtaking stroll while learning about the flora and fauna of the Chihuahuan Desert. The calendar may say it is winter, but the Chihuahuan Desert can say otherwise. The temperature can be high enough to invite lizards and snakes out of their burrows to warm themselves in the sun. The jackrabbits can be out eating around the spines of a prickly pear cactus. Plants are interesting to view also. Barrel cacti are topped with their pineapple-looking fruit, and a Christmas cholla's red berries can get anyone into the holiday spirit.

More, exciting programs are in the plans for 2009. We hope to see you all at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park soon.



YES! I want to support the Asombro Institute for Science Education's efforts to increase scientific literacy by fostering an understanding of the Chihuahuan Desert. All donations are welcome; the minimum donation to receive a printed copy of the newsletter is \$10. Please sign me up in the following category:

- Quartz (\$15 +) One-year subscription to *Asombro Insights*.
- Gypsum (\$50 +) One-year subscription to *Asombro Insights* and tickets to the Butterfly Flutterby.
- Jasper (\$100 +) Everything above plus invitations to a VIP event at the site.
- Obsidian (\$250 +) Everything above plus invitations to a VIP tour.
- Peridot (\$500 +) Everything above plus a limited-edition print of the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.
- Turquoise (\$1000 +) Everything above plus a custom cactus garden planter.

I would like \$\_\_\_\_\_ of this donation to go to the Asombro Institute for Science Education endowment fund.

Please make checks payable to Asombro Institute for Science Education or charge to:

Visa     MasterCard    Account Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Signature as it appears on card: \_\_\_\_\_

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 E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_ Check here if you do NOT want to be listed in Asombro Institute publications \_\_\_\_\_

## New and Renewing Members

Our thanks go to these individuals, families, and organizations who became Asombro Institute for Science Education members or renewed their memberships in the last quarter. We are so grateful for your support!

**Turquoise**  
 Deb, Stacey & Allie Peters

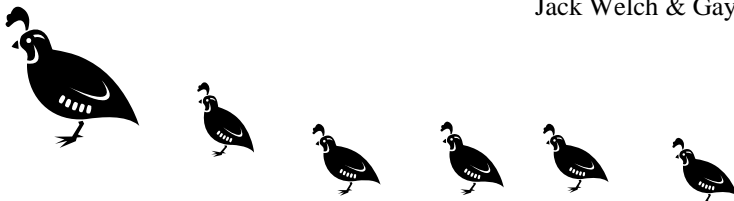
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 Native Plant Society of New Mexico  
 Michael C. Weland

**Obsidian**  
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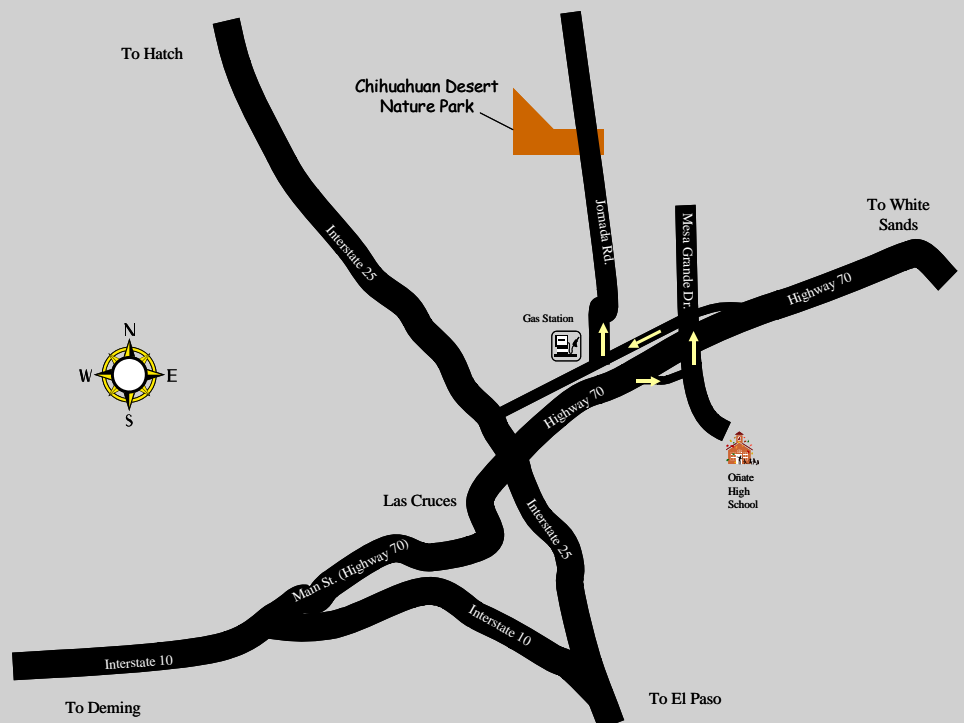
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## Directions to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park Open Tuesday - Saturday, 7AM - 5PM

- From I-25 in Las Cruces, head east on Highway 70.
- Take the Mesa Grande Drive exit (at Oñate High School).
- Make a U-turn under the highway to head west. After the U-turn, stay in the right lane.
- Turn right (north) on Jornada Road.
- Follow Jornada Road north for 6.5 miles. After approximately 1.5 miles, the road is unpaved.
- Turn left at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park sign.
- Follow the entrance road to the parking area and trailhead.



**ENJOY!**