

The Nature Park News

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The Nature Park News is published quarterly by the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, 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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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Justin Van Zee, President

Mary Beth Harper, Vice President

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Donna Yargosz, Treasurer

Michael Ferguson, Board Member

Sally Hunt, Board Member

STAFF

Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Ph.D., Director

Rink Somerday, Program Coordinator

Paul Harper, Site Coordinator

2007 Annual Membership Meeting Held Jan. 25

Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park staff and volunteers are busy all year providing education programs around the region. We represent our members in these venues and put their generous donations to use daily.

While we are always happy to talk with our members about the Park, we make it official each year by inviting all 400 members to the annual membership meeting. The meeting gives members a chance to celebrate the accomplishments of the organization in the previous year and discuss plans for the upcoming year.

This year, the annual meeting was held on January 25 on the



Nature Park members Bill Munro, Alice Ward, and Gene Ward peruse silent auction items. All proceeds benefited Park education programs.

New Mexico State University campus in Las Cruces. Members came from around the region. They bid on silent auction items and got to see an educational display focusing on desert animal adaptations.

The highlight of the evening was a touching, and often funny, photographic look back at the history of the organization by Program Coordinator Rink Somerday. The final words of the presentation sum up what we are all about, "But when all is said and done, it's all about kids learning science, teachers learning how to enhance their science programs, and our desert."



Board President Justin Van Zee discusses the Park with longtime member and volunteer Arlene Tugel.

Notes from the Director

2006 In Review



By Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Ph.D.

2006 was one for the record books. A record dry spring gave way to a record wet summer. Despite less than an inch of total precipitation from January through May, we ended up with 16.9 inches by year's end at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, close to double the long-term average.

While the weather certainly complicated some Nature Park events during the summer and fall, we made significant gains toward our mission of increased scientific literacy. In fact, we provided 39 field trips, 273 classroom presentations, 2 days of the Chihuahuan Desert Expo, 18 days of teacher workshops, 10 public programs, and 15 other outreach events during 2006. These programs reached more than 12,400 kindergarten through 12th grade students, 900 teachers, and 1,600 other adults.

2006 also brought great expansion in the reach and influence of Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park programs. We were contracted to develop and provide professional development workshops to teachers throughout New Mexico as part of the New Mexico Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research. Teachers from 48 towns throughout New Mexico attended these workshops. We are also now partners on two national science education programs that will continue through 2007.

Staff and volunteers also stayed busy in 2006 with the addition of two new display areas at the Nature Park site. The Desert Experience Mini-Trail is a series of paths near the parking area that allow visitors who lack the time or physical ability to take the longer Desert Experience Trail to learn about the desert. Interpretive signs installed in 2006 help visitors learn about the archaeology, geology, soil, plants, and animals of the desert. Adjacent to the Desert Experience Mini-Trail is the Xeriscape Memorial Garden which shows more than 30 species of local plants that can be used to create a beautiful, low-water-use landscape.

Fortunately, we had additions to our staff and Board of Directors that helped make all of this progress possible. Paul Harper joined the staff in May 2006 to fill a newly created staff position of Site Coordinator (see previous newsletter for Paul's biography). More recently, Sally Hunt was added to the Board of Directors (see page 4).

Even more excitement is in store for 2007, including several developments at the Nature Park site (see page 4). Rain or shine, with the help of our members and volunteers, we will once again provide quality science education programs in classrooms, schoolyards, and at the Nature Park site to help everyone learn about science and our beautiful desert.



Board member Donna Yargosz helps students learn about volcanoes, earthquakes, and erosion during a field trip to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park in 2006.



Carlene Burns and Aida Castorena from the El Paso Independent School District learn about vertebrate skulls during a November teacher workshop.



New interpretive signs help visitors learn about xeriscaping, archaeology, desert animals, and other topics along the Desert Experience Mini-Trail.

Weather Or Not

By Rink Somerday
Program Coordinator

New Mexico is renowned for its sunny, mild weather. The winters here draw retirees and vacationers looking for sunshine and blue skies.

Here in the southern part of New Mexico, the weather has been a topic of great interest this year. The winter of 2005-06 was the second driest winter in recorded history. The month of March 2006 had no recorded precipitation at the Jornada Experimental Range's Doña Ana weather station, located just north of the Nature Park. The word "drought" was on everyone's mind. The monsoon season, typically said to start in early July, was late in coming. Water resources were the topic of many news reports.

Then August rains fell. And fell. And fell. Rain totals for August reached 8.19 inches at the Doña Ana rain gauge. In an area that gets an average of approximately 9 inches of rain a year, flooding was now the hot topic in the news. More strange weather happened with hail and tornados in October. Most recently, we had several snow occurrences that closed roads and local schools.

But where does all this weather come from? Are we isolated with our weather events or are we part of something more global? The El Niño Southern Oscillation cycle is the main source of climatic variation on the planet from year to year. This oscillation has two effects - El Niño and La Niña. The oscillation between El Niño and La Niña has irregular timing, but it typically

occurs once every 3-6 years. Blowing trade winds from east to west in the Pacific affect the warm and cold seawater, which in turn affects the atmospheric pressure systems. When El Niño starts, the weakened trade winds shift the rain zone toward the eastern Pacific. The rains shift to the western coast of South America and the western and southern areas of North America. This creates drought conditions in Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.



Snow and fog blanketed the Chihuahuan Desert near Las Cruces in January 2007.

With La Niña, the opposite happens. The trade winds are stronger than normal, and the rain zone shifts to the far west Pacific area. Less rainfall and drier months are now evident in the Americas.

All this changing weather has a delayed effect on the plant and animal populations. The year after an El Niño effect, many plants that had been dormant or in the seed bank start to grow and propagate. When La Niña occurs, the plants in this area start to die due to the lessened rainfall. Wildfires are prevalent in La Niña years in the Americas, while flooding is more common in Australia.

El Niño oscillations also bring more varied types of precipitation. Hail, sleet, and freezing rain can occur in areas that normally are too warm for such things. *Hail* is falling ice in ball shapes at least 0.20" in diameter. It forms when upward moving air keeps pieces of graupel (ice pellets) from falling. Super cooled water collects on the piece of graupel, causing it to grow with layer upon layer of ice. The hailstone finally falls when the wind is not strong enough to keep it in the air. *Sleet*

consists of drops of rain that freeze into ice as they fall. They are usually less than 0.30" in diameter. The outside of the raindrop is frozen while the center can still be liquid. Imagine an ice cube that is not entirely frozen. *Freezing rain* is precipitation that is super cooled (it cools below 32°F but does not turn into ice). When these super cooled water drops hit anything, they instantly turn into ice. With freezing rain you get the trees, roads, and power lines coated in ice.

Perhaps the best advice for coping with the strange weather in New Mexico this year is to sit back and enjoy. As the saying goes, "If you don't like the weather, just wait five minutes."

About the Author

Rink Somerday has been the Program Coordinator at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park since March 2003. She spends much of work day with kindergarten through 12th grade students, leading them on field trips, schoolyard investigations, and interactive classroom studies.

Site Development Corner

By Justin Van Zee

President of the Board of Directors and Chair of the Site Development Committee

The new year is here, and there are lots of projects planned for the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park site.

The Nature Park staff and Board of Directors have planned for several additions and improvements to the site this year. Workers from Victory Construction are already underway constructing a low rock wall around the parking area. This will serve several functions, including helping to aesthetically define the parking area, preventing illegal off-road driving, and directing foot traffic to appropriate areas. We are grateful to Toro Rock for giving us a great price on the rock, which enabled us to start the project right away.

Another exciting addition to the Park will be the development of an existing soil pit for educational purposes. In 1996, the late Dr. Robert Gibbens, a plant and soil scientist from the Jornada Experimental Range, dug a soil pit near the lower shade ramada to study how roots of native plants grow in desert soils. Except for some minor natural erosion, this pit

remains unaltered. Through a grant received from Doña Ana County, we are planning to work with soil scientists to develop a permanent educational display on soil horizons, and how it relates to the landscape in that vicinity of the Nature Park. Planned completion for this project is early summer.



Fifty tons of rocks line the parking area in anticipation of rock wall construction in 2007.

Because the Park site is used heavily for education programs during the school year, there is a need for more “outdoor classroom” areas within the Park itself. To accommodate the number of students that visit the Park during field trips, extensions to existing shade structures will be made. These will be added before hot weather arrives. Also, a shade ramada will be added to the Xeriscape Memorial Garden.

The Desert Discovery

Mini-Trail will also see improvements this year. Included in this will be development of the archaeology and wildlife sections. More Chihuahuan Desert native plants and identification signs will be added to the cactus and native plant loops as well.

All of this work will require lots of help. If you're interested in volunteering, or feel that you can contribute to projects like those listed above, please contact the Nature Park office about scheduling.

Welcome New Board Member Sally Hunt

The Board of Directors and staff would like to welcome the newest member of the Board, Sally Hunt. Sally moved to Las Cruces last year from Austin, Texas. She is a licensed vocational nurse who has worked most recently with newborns. She is also a registered massage therapist and ran a private part-time massage practice for ten years.

Sally is excited to bring her love of nature and her experience teaching adults to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. She has already helped with several Nature Park field trips for students.

We are excited to add her energy and enthusiasm to the Board of Directors. Welcome, Sally!



Photo Tips in the Desert February 17

Have you ever wondered how the professionals get such perfect pictures of desert flowers? How do they create such a wonderful setting? Learn some tips and tricks from the experts on Saturday February 17, 2007 during "Photo Tips in the Desert" at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

Starting at 3:00 p.m., photographic experts will help you learn how to get that perfect picture. Bring your film or digital camera and explore the desert through your viewfinder. The event is free and open to the public.



Calendar of Events

February 24 - Trail workday at the Nature Park. Join staff and volunteers to do light trail work and other maintenance at the Park. For more information, call Site Coordinator Paul Harper (505-524-3334).

March 10 - Hike in the Franklin Mountains with author and naturalist Greg Magee. Difficult 6.0 mile round-trip hike. Sponsored by the Southwest Environmental Center; register with SWEC (505-522-5552); \$5 donation requested.

March 10 - Nature Park's booth at the Las Cruces Farmer's Market. Come visit the Nature Park's booth at the popular Farmer's Market in the Downtown Mall in Las Cruces. There will be a fun science activity for kids. Free.

March 14 - Talk on teaching students about Chihuahuan desert plants by Ray Bowers. Sponsored by the Las Cruces Chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Mexico. 7:00 PM at University Terrace Good Samaritan Village, 3011 Buena Vida Circle in Las Cruces.

March 17 - Dog Days at the Nature Park. Bring your four-legged friend(s) for a walk at the Nature Park. The event begins at 10:00 AM. Free.

March 31 - Hike to the Robledo Trackways with the Paleozoic Trackways Foundation. Sponsored by the Southwest Environmental Center; register with SWEC (505-522-5552); \$5 donation requested.

Education Programs

Here are the programs your donations helped us provide in late November and December 2006.

11/11/2006 Real World - Real Science Teacher Workshop	11/29/2006 Alameda Elem. - weather
11/13/2006 Doña Ana Elem. - desert animal adaptations	11/30/2006 Hermosa Heights Elem. - field trip
11/15/2006 Hermosa Heights Elem. - field trip	12/01/2006 EPSCoR State Conference - talk on teacher workshops
11/16/2006 Valley View Elem. - desert animal adaptations	12/04/2006 Sierra Middle School - field trip
11/16/2006 MacArthur Elem. - desert animal adaptations	12/06/2006 Central Elem. - arthropods
11/17/2006 El Paso School District - water festival	12/07/2006 Columbia Elem. - arthropods
11/17/2006 Central Elem. - field trip	12/07/2006 El Paso School District - teacher workshop on water
11/19/2006 Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum - arthropods	12/08/2006 Sonoma Elem. - weather
11/21/2006 Sonoma Elem. - field trip	12/11/2006 Doña Ana Elem. - arthropods
11/28/2006 Alameda Elem. - desert animal adaptations	12/12/2006 Alameda Elem. - arthropods
	12/13/2006 Hermosa Heights Elem. - arthropods
	12/14/2006 Valley View Elem. - arthropods
	12/14/2006 MacArthur Elem. - arthropods
	12/15/2006 Nature Walk at the Park

New and Renewing Members

We had overwhelming response to our year-end fundraising appeal! Many thanks to all of our new members, renewing members, and those who gave additional gifts last quarter.

Sustaining

Anonymous
Stephanie & Brandon Bestelmeyer
Arlene Tugel & Neil Fuller
Donna & Michael Yargosz

In Memory of David Rolston

Paul & Jo Ann Lyman

In Memory of Bob Gibbens

Leland H Gile
George & Anna Marie Bauman
Jornada Experimental Range Staff
Laverne & Ron Bush

In Memory of John Gannon

Charlie Geach
Mercy Guzman
Margaret Johnson
Mary Beth Harper

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Individual Members

Anonymous (5) Mrs. Alice Aylor Mrs. Jo Banks Leoniece Beatty Larry Brenner Bill Brown Doug Burke Benny & Judy Cole Mrs. Jackie Dillman Henry Drake Pam Egan Joanne Foster Bea Garrett Jane Hawk & Vern Hueske Tana Hemingway Joyce Johnson Joyce Knaus Samantha Lish Bob Long Lawrence Losleben Carol McCall	Joy Miller James Mooney Ray Pawley & Hedda Saltz Ceil & Jerry Phillips Earle Pittman Michele Reynolds Rex & Susan Sanders John Saunders Bob Schooley Susan Sechrist Mrs. Patty Shemenske A.D. Thomas Heather Throop Elaine "Tillie" Tilghman Geri Tillett Mrs. Mary Tucker Eunice Zemek
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Other Ways to Support the Park

- 1) If you shop at Albertsons, **link you Preferred Savings Card to the Community Partners Program.**
- 2) Recycle your **old cell phones or printer ink jet cartridges** by dropping them off at the Nature Park office.
- 3) **Use GoodSearch.com (powered by Yahoo) as your search engine**, and the Park receives a donation for every search.
- 4) Do your **online shopping through iGive.com**, and the Nature Park receives a percentage of your total purchases.

Call us (505-524-3334) for details on any of these easy ways to support the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park!

MANY THANKS!

Our thanks go to the following individuals and businesses for their donations of supplies last quarter.

Stephanie & Brandon Bestelmeyer
Cathy Boeker
Cliff & Julie Cunningham
Michael Gilman
Paul & Susana Harper
Mary Lessman
Steve Roach
Stonyfield Farms
Sally Thomas
Justin Van Zee
Donna Yargosz

Calling All Volunteers - It's Chihuahuan Desert Expo Time!

The 9th annual Chihuahuan Desert Expo will be held on Thursday May 3, 2006 on the Las Cruces Downtown Mall. We expect about 1,200 - 1,300 kindergarten through 3rd grade students this year. They will visit more than 20 hands-on activity booths where they can learn all about the desert where we live. Booths will once again include demonstrations, crafts, skits, displays, physical activities, and much, much more.

We will need 100 - 120 volunteers for this event. Volunteers will work from 7:30 AM until 2:00 PM.

No experience is necessary! All you need is enthusiasm and a willingness to help kids have fun as they learn about the desert. We will provide you with all of the background information and supplies for the station you will work (with other volunteers). We also give you breakfast, lunch, and a t-shirt to wear on the day of the event.

If you are interested, please contact Program Coordinator Rink Somerday (505-524-3334 or cdnp_rink@zianet.com) We look forward to another fantastic Expo - thanks to the help of people like YOU!



Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park
Las Cruces, New Mexico

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Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park
P.O. Box 891, Las Cruces, NM 88004-0891

YES! I want to support the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park'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:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quartz (\$15 +) | One-year subscription to the <i>Nature Park News</i> . |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gypsum (\$50 +) | One-year subscription to the <i>Nature Park News</i> and tickets to the Butterfly Flutterby. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jasper (\$100 +) | Everything above plus and invitations to a VIP breakfast at the site. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obsidian (\$250 +) | Everything above plus invitations to a VIP tour. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peridot (\$500 +) | Everything above plus a limited-edition print of the Nature Park. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turquoise (\$1000 +) | Everything above plus a custom cactus garden planter. |

I would like \$_____ of this donation to go to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park endowment fund.

Please make checks payable to Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park or charge to:

Visa MasterCard Account Number: _____
Expiration Date: _____
Signature as it appears on card: _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

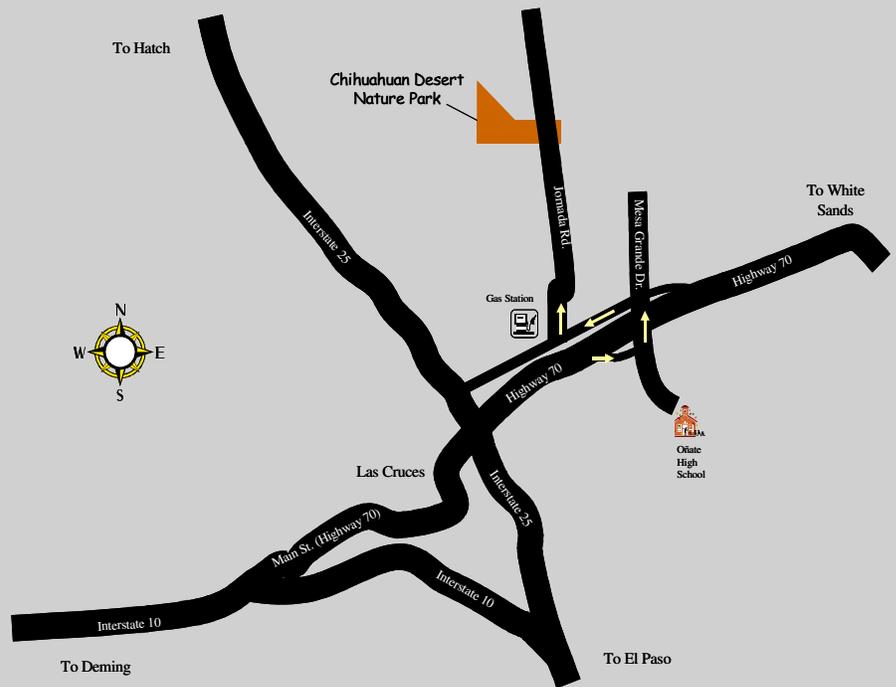
CITY _____ STATE _____ Zip _____ PHONE _____

E-MAIL _____ Check here if you do NOT want to be listed in Nature Park publications _____

Directions to the Nature Park

- 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!



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