

Asombro Insights

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



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CONTACT US

Asombro Institute for
Science Education

PO Box 891
Las Cruces, NM 88004
(575) 524-3334

information@asombro.org
<https://asombro.org>



Shrimp in the Desert?

At Asombro, we delight in showing the wonders of the desert to people of all ages. Over the last couple of months, this has included teaching students, teachers, and the general public about shrimp that live in the desert!

Several species of shrimp, including tadpole shrimp, fairy shrimp, and clam shrimp, live in temporarily flooded wetlands in the desert, which are known as "playas." The eggs of these species can live in the soil for years, and they hatch and go through their entire life cycle very quickly, before the playa dries up again.

On October 2, we invited 3rd-5th grade teachers to learn more about playas at a teacher workshop supported by the Jornada Basin LTER program. We visited a playa with Dr. Shawn Salley, a soil scientist with the NRCS. We then headed to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park where teachers each received a copy of One Day in the Desert, written by former Asombro staff member Anna Keener Kimtis. The book is set in and around the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park and features the main character and her class visiting and learning about playas.

The wonders of playas and shrimp were on display again on October 19 with Asombro's

seventh public education event in the Wildlife Wonders series. Funded by a grant to Asombro from the NM Dept. of Game & Fish's Share with Wildlife Program, visitors got to see tadpole shrimp, learn about other animals in the food web in and around playas, investigate data about playas in the Jornada Basin, and collect special-edition trading cards for the Endless Forms game: asombro.org/endlessformsgame/



Tadpole shrimp, one of several species that live in "playas" in the desert.



Dr. Steve Loring shows live tadpole, clam, and fairy shrimp to visitors at the Wildlife Wonders event at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park on October 19.

"Best workshop ever! Everyone is so informative and passionate about playas. I am going to share this with my students, and thank y'all so much for having us."

- Desert Ecology teacher workshop participant on anonymous evaluation



Workshop participants on the edge of a dry playa learn about it from scientist Shawn Salley.

Talented Educators Join the Asombro Team

Asombro welcomed two fantastic Science Educators to the team in August and September. They both bring experience and passion to their new jobs. Read more about LuAnn and Bonnie below, and help welcome them to Asombro.

LuAnn Kilday

LuAnn is originally from Nebraska (Go Huskers) where she grew up on the family farm. She has a bachelor's degree in biology and minors in agriculture and chemistry from Chadron State College. In 1997, LuAnn moved to Guadalupe



Mountains National Park where she found that she loved the desert. In 1999, she started working for the state of New Mexico and served in many roles including park ranger, marine enforcement officer, game warden, and informal educator for the past 14 years. Throughout her career, she has educated the public on topics such as wildlife, agriculture, hunter education, boating safety, and the Rio Grande Bosque.

What led you to your new position at the Asombro Institute for Science Education?

After retirement, I was missing the best aspect of my job as an educator at the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, outreach education. I stumbled on the science educator advertisement with Asombro and jumped on it. For the past twenty years, I have been aware of Asombro, often bumping into them at educational events or asking them to participate in activities I was organizing. I am excited to continue my journey of lifelong learning and share this new knowledge with others. From day one, the staff has welcomed me with open arms and truly made me feel like one of the team.

Red or Green? Green of course, but sweet red is growing on me.

Bonnie Jean Knighton

Bonnie Jean was born in a small mountain town in Utah where she grew up hiking, camping, fishing, canoeing, and having great outdoor adventures. She received a degree from Utah State University where she focused on Anthropology while also working on a Museum Studies certificate. Being in a museum program made her realize how much she loved to learn about the natural world, but also how much she loved sharing those discoveries with others. After college, Bonnie Jean found work that she loved as an informal educator in various Museums. For over 15 years she has shared her love and wonder of the natural world with thousands of students and hundreds of teachers from multiple states. She's been an educator for many organizations: Utah State University, Yale Peabody Museum, The Natural History Museum of Utah, and just recently with New Mexico State University. In her free time, Bonnie Jean likes to camp, hike, and explore with her spouse and three adorable dogs.

What do you like best about your new position? For nearly 8 years, I had the joy of teaching about Utah's three deserts, and now I'm excited to share the wonders of my new home, the Chihuahuan Desert. Desert habitats are always exciting and, when you look close enough, there's much more to them than people realize. I'm excited to keep exploring and learning about this desert and sharing all that amazing new knowledge with others.

Red or Green? Green all the way!



Asombro Board Members Wanted

Are you passionate about the Asombro Institute for Science Education, the desert, and science education?



If so, consider applying to become an Asombro Board member. We have a special opportunity to welcome new Board members to our team this quarter.

Asombro's Board members develop and maintain a link to the community, promoting the work of the organization. At meetings approximately once a month, the Board establishes policies, monitors the organization's performance, and helps raise funds to support the organization and its programs.

Board service is a great way to give back to the community, work with fantastic Board members, and help share the wonder of science and the desert with children.

If you are interested in learning more about Board service and receiving a job description and application, please contact Board President Justin Van Zee (information@asombro.org) or call the Asombro office (575-524-3334).

Activities Raise Funds for Science Education

On September 7, local artist Kay Gross donated her time, talent, and expertise to lead a fundraiser for Asombro. Eight lucky participants got a watercolor lesson from Kay, and went home with their very own whimsical roadrunner painting.

Many thanks to Kay and to Asombro Board members Donna Yargosz and Carrie Hernandez for helping with the fundraiser!



The Greater Federated Womens Club Progress Club of Las Cruces has supported Asombro for more than a decade, and we are so grateful for their contributions!

Their members assist at our monthly volunteer gatherings, participate in Asombro public events, and even help Asombro staff with classroom and schoolyard lessons.

In October, Progress Club members presented Education Director Kelly Sayanagi (center) with a check and a set of 30 calculators we will use in several schoolyard and field trip programs. Thank you, Progress Club!

Thank you!

We are grateful to our generous donors from July through September 2024.

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Asombro
means



Luminarias in the Desert

Date: Friday, December 13, 2024

Time: 5:00 – 7:30 PM

Location: Asombro's Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park (56501 N. Jornada Rd., Las Cruces)

Celebrate the holiday season with several hundred luminarias lighting the short, paved trail at the Nature Park. Enjoy hot cocoa and cookies as you stroll the trail and view the stars through a telescope.

A pop-up gift shop will feature desert-themed stocking stuffers and gifts for all ages.



YES! I want to support the
Asombro Institute for Science Education!

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Have you considered putting Asombro in your estate plan? Please contact Steph Bestelmeyer (575-524-3334) if you are interested in learning more.

Asombro Institute for Science Education
P.O. Box 891, Las Cruces, NM 88004