

# Asombro Insights



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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## Last Year's Accomplishments Give Way to Anticipation for the Year Ahead

As we say goodbye to 2022, we're reflecting on the exciting year. School doors reopened, and Asombro regained the opportunity to do what we do best: class science lessons, field trips, teacher workshops, and the oh-so-beloved public events at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. And we tallied them all! Just look at these numbers!

Our science education team delivered 1084 classroom lessons, hosted 27 field trips, and worked with 1075 teachers. **In total, we devoted 1157 hours to working directly with 23,266 students!** Our Asombro Anywhere lessons developed during the pandemic were shipped across the state, engaging students in Animas, Aztec, Lovington, and more.

It was a big year for new lesson development and teacher workshops. We developed 11 lessons for 1st-grade

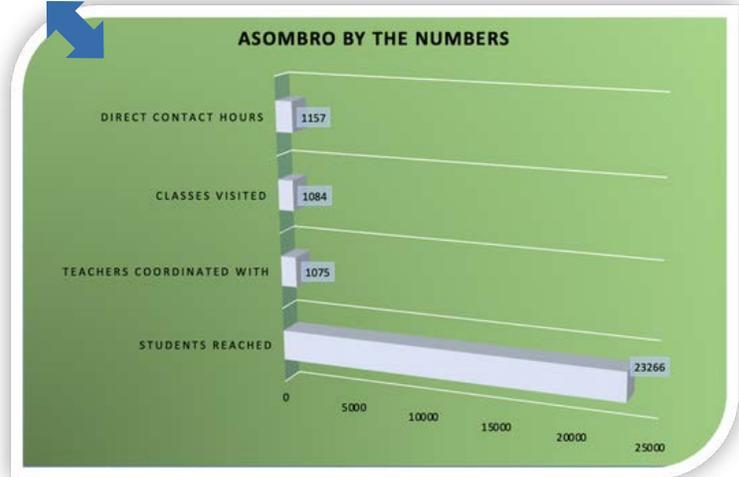
through high school students. A few highlights include the "Wildlife Wonders" 2nd-grade classroom lesson, the "Restoring Connections" middle school schoolyard and field trip lessons on desert restoration, and timely lessons on climate change and wildfire and disease transmission for high school students. We hosted 11 teacher workshops and gave sessions at educator conferences in Socorro, New Mexico, and Tucson, Arizona.

Additionally, 2022 brought the creation of Gateway to the Desert (see the next page of this newsletter) and our first public programs at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park in more than two years. On December 9, we re-established proof that the most beautiful place to light luminarias is along our trail under the desert night sky.



*Kindergarteners create a mock playground to aid in understanding temperature differences in Sun and Shade.*

There is a lot to be excited about as we begin 2023. So join us in what will no doubt be another remarkable new year of science education!



Amy and Natalie joined the team in August, and our undergraduate internship program got off to a great start this fall. Accessing information about Asombro also got a lot easier in 2022 with the complete update of our website.

All these accomplishments served as inspiration during our Board of Directors and staff planning retreats. We have wonderful plans for 2023, including a new "Schoolyard Field Trip" program for elementary teachers and students, 13 (!) teacher workshops, Scientist Saturday guided hikes at the Nature Park, and taking our show on the road for teacher workshops in neighboring states. Helping make this possible will be two interns in the spring semester and a new Science Educator in February.

# Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park Gateway is Open!

This time last year, Gateway to the Desert was just a plan for eight new features at the entrance to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, detailed in a successful grant proposal to the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division's Trails+ Program.

Visitors to the Park in 2022 might have noticed these features as they became a reality, thanks to the hard work of Asombro's staff and outstanding volunteers. In May, the parking lot was created, and a monitoring project for a remediation experiment was added. A few months later, the 0.6-mile Gateway to the Desert Trail and 0.5-mile Yucca Trail were raked into existence. Throughout the fall, rocks were added to the trail edges, and benches, bridges, interpretive signs, and a welcome kiosk were installed. Finally, on December 3, Asombro cut the ribbon to officially open Gateway to the Desert and welcome visitors of all ages to explore.

Now it's your turn! Grab your two- and four-legged family members and hit the new trails. Along the way, contribute to the photo-monitoring project, learn about unique plant and animal adaptations, enjoy a breathtaking view of the San Andres Mountains, watch birds from the new benches, and document your time by taking a photo at the new kiosk.



48 volunteers contributed over 200 hours to help Asombro staff complete Gateway to the Desert, which included lining the new 0.5-mile Yucca Trail and 0.6-mile Gateway Loop Trail and building a welcome kiosk.

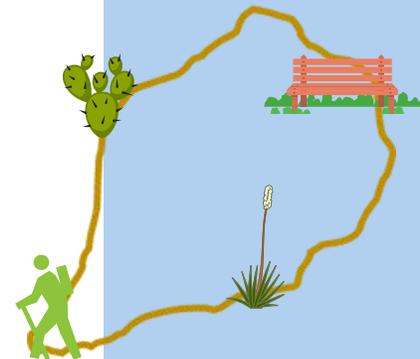


Students discover what types of amphibians live in the desert while circling various species on data sheets.



**KID QUOTE**  
"SPEAKING OF THE CHUHUHUAN DESERT, I HAVE A CHIHUAHUA AT HOME!"

2nd Grade Student During Wildlife Wonders Lesson



A total of 1.1 miles of new hiking trail for you to discover!

## 11th Desert Data Jam Off to a Great Start

What's not to love about a middle school competition that increases students' data literacy, teaches them about desert science, and encourages and rewards creativity? Desert Data Jam, now in its 11th year, holds a special place in the hearts of Asombro staff because it accomplishes all of this plus more. It's such a successful program that other science educators have replicated it in Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Puerto Rico.

We kicked off this year's Desert Data Jam with an introductory meeting for all 7th-grade science teachers in Las Cruces on January 3. New teachers got an introduction to the Desert Data Jam. Experienced teachers learned about the changes we've implemented to support students this year. Teachers even got to unleash their own creativity as an example of the Desert Data Jam; we created a poem to represent data collected by the Pew Research Center on social media use by different age groups.

The Desert Data Jam final competition will occur in person in late April. If you are interested in helping to judge this unique competition, please contact [kelly@asombro.org](mailto:kelly@asombro.org). No experience is needed.



## Annual Membership Meeting - Monday, January 30th

Join Asombro's Board of Directors and staff for Asombro's annual membership meeting on Monday, January 30 at 6:00 p.m. at the Asombro office (401 E. College Dr., Las Cruces). There will be a videoconference option for those who wish to join remotely. Email [information@asombro.org](mailto:information@asombro.org) for the Zoom link.

We will accomplish a few business items and then celebrate the organization's many successes of 2022. Staff will also share the plans for 2023 that have us excited! Learn what your time and donations have helped us achieve.



The proposed slate of officers for 2023:

- o President – Gene Gant
- o Vice President – Justin Van Zee
- o Secretary – Donna Yargosz
- o Treasurer – Mark Sechrist

*We hope to see you there!*



### Wonder Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service: Amy Slaughter

We are delighted to present this quarter's Wonder Award to Amy Slaughter, a research technician at the USDA-ARS Jornada Experimental Range.

Amy has volunteered for Asombro for more than 15 years! She brings her calm, cheerful demeanor and vast scientific knowledge into classrooms to help Asombro staff with lessons. When we have last-minute schedule changes and need a volunteer quickly, Amy often steps in to save the day.

Recently, Amy also contributed her GIS skills to help us create a new trail map for the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

Thank you for all your help, Amy. We think you are wonderful!



## THANK YOU!

We are grateful to our generous donors from the fourth quarter of 2022.

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On December 3, Asombro volunteers, staff, board members, community members and visitors gathered at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park to celebrate the opening of the new Gateway to the Desert Trail.



After a two-year hiatus, over 100 visitors attended Asombro's "Luminarias: Light Up the Desert!" event held on the evening of December 9.

YES! I want to support the  
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