

Asombro Insights

Science education for eager minds

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 19, Issue 1 (Jan - March 2010)

Exciting Year Ahead

2010 goals and objectives are set, and each of them will help the Asombro Institute reach its mission of scientific literacy for all. Read more about specific plans for 2010. **Page 2**

Nature Activity

Learn about our desert with an activity in celebration of National Bird Feeding Month. **Page 2**



Volunteer Spotlight

Volunteers are the heart of the Asombro Institute. Meet Donna Yargosz, one of our 100 volunteers who collectively donate 2,000 hours annually. Find out how YOU can become a volunteer too! **Page 3**

Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park



Find out what is happening now at the Nature Park. **Page 4**

Appreciation

More than one hundred people showed their support of the Asombro Institute in the last quarter of 2009 by making a donation. See the list and learn how you can contribute too. **Page 5**

Map to the Nature Park

This is a great time to make your first or 100th visit to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Use this map to get there. **Page 6**



Board & Staff

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Justin Van Zee - President
- Mary Beth Harper - Vice President
- Mark Sechrist - Secretary
- Donna Yargosz - Treasurer

STAFF

- Stephanie Bestelmeyer, Ph.D. - Exec. Director
- Rink Somerday - Program Coordinator
- Paul Harper - Site Coordinator
- Cate Schneider - Education Technician

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2009 - A Record Year

In 2009, the Asombro Institute for Science Education set a record for the highest number of K-12 students worked with in a single year. **14,319 students experienced the excitement of science and the wonder of the desert through field trips, classroom programs, schoolyard ecology investigations, and other events!** In addition, staff hosted programs for 474 teachers and public events for 2,080 other adults.

The quality of these programs was recognized once again in 2009. The Asombro Institute for Science Education received the Rio Grande Award for Excellence in Education from the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico.

After nine years of efforts, the 935-acre Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park officially became property of the Asombro Institute in 2009! Our organization has had an easement allowing us to conduct education programs and construct facilities on the property since 1998. However, the new property status now opens great possibilities for future educational facilities.

The most amazing fact of 2009 is that all of these accomplishments were done on a budget that was nearly 30% less than the 2008 budget.

We anticipated the tough economic times and tightened our belts more than ever before. This points to the incredible dedication and hard work put in by Asombro Institute for Science Education staff members.



14,319 students got hands-on experience with science through Asombro Institute programs in 2009. This set a new record for the organization!

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

You may have noticed our revised newsletter format. As we enter a new decade, it seemed appropriate to update our look yet still provide you with the same exciting news you have always found in the Asombro Insights newsletter.



One thing we have not changed this year is our dedication to increasing scientific literacy for the students, teachers, and other adults we work with. At our annual membership meeting on January 21, we unveiled our ambitious goals and objectives for 2010. These plans were put in place following careful consideration by the entire staff and Board of Directors. No one has ever accused our organization of resting on its laurels, and this year is certainly no exception!

In 2010, we will focus on continual staff training and volunteer recruitment to ensure we can continue to grow and improve. We will also explore new strategies to publicize our efforts.

We will continue and improve our most successful education programs, like field trips, the Experience Science Program (which includes monthly classroom presentations for 3rd graders), and teacher workshops. In addition, four public education programs at the Nature Park and a new lecture series will offer opportunities for learning at every age.

At the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, we will add facilities like new benches and signs to expand the comfort and learning opportunities for visitors.

We need your help to reach these goals. Please give a donation, volunteer time, and/or tell a friend about our organization. Together, we can make 2010 a great year!

Stephanie Bestelmeyer

Dr. Stephanie Bestelmeyer

Calendar of Events

February 24 -

"The Rosetta Stone in the Robledo Mountains: Prehistoric Trackways National Monument"



talk by BLM Park Ranger McKinney Briske. 7:00 PM at the Asombro Institute for Science Education office (401 E. College, Las Cruces). Come learn about the newest national monument, a 5280-acre site 5 miles north of Las Cruces. There will be fossil education activities for kids in the room next door to the talk, run by Asombro Institute for Science Education staff.

March 10 - Talk on comparisons between the Negev Desert of Israel with the Chihuahuan Desert by Phil Alkon (NMSU) for the Native Plant Society of New Mexico. 7:00 PM in the Conference Room of the Social Center at University Terrace Good Samaritan Village (3011 Buena Vida Circle, Las Cruces).

March 13 - Field trip to examine local wildflowers (locations TBA) with Las Cruces Chapter of Native Plant Society of New Mexico. Meet at east parking lot of K-Mart on Highway 70 in Las Cruces at 8:00 AM.



Environmental Education Association of New Mexico

Asombro Institute Director Dr. Stephanie Bestelmeyer has been elected to the Board of Directors of the Environmental Education Association of New Mexico. This statewide professional organization provides, promotes, and enhances quality environmental education by offering New Mexicans opportunities for professional development, communication, and partnership. The Asombro Institute looks forward to expanding our collaborations with other science education providers throughout New Mexico as part of this organization.

Nature Activity

By Rink Somerday, Program Coordinator

February is National Bird Feeding Month, so celebrate by trying this fun activity!

Background

What a bird consumes is largely dependent on its beak size and shape. Bird beaks come in different types: cone, shredder, chisel, probe, tweezer, multi-purpose, strainer, and spear.

The type of bird feeder you provide determines the species of bird you attract. Seed feeders are good for attracting sparrows, finches, and towhees. Suet feeders are a great supplement for insectivores like warblers, chickadees, and woodpeckers.

What To Do

Place a seed feeder and a suet feeder in a safe spot that can be observed by your family from an unobtrusive location. The two feeders should be located close enough to each other so all the birds can be observed at the same time.

For the first three days when the feeders are out to acclimate the birds, observe the birds to learn the different species visiting each type of feeder. The suet will likely have a limited number of different birds species attracted to it, while the seed feeder will likely have a greater diversity of birds.

Observe the feeders for two weeks during 15-minute observation periods at the same time each day. Be very quiet and still while doing observations so that you do not affect the birds' behaviors.

Record the species and the number of individuals visiting the feeders. Having a bird identification book handy will assist with identifying your visitors. There are also several on-line bird identification sites.

Remember to keep your feeders clean and offer a source of fresh water if possible. This will entice feathered friends to your avian restaurant on a regular basis.



Real World - Real Science Project Returns this Spring

Thanks to a grant to the Asombro Institute from the Wolslager Foundation, more than 700 5th-8th grade students will be learning about the desert this spring.

The Real World - Real Science Project is designed to go far beyond the traditional school field trip. The project begins on February 6, when seven teachers from six schools will participate in a one-day workshop at the Asombro Institute office and at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. During the workshop, teachers will be introduced to the project and choose one of the four topics to focus on for the remainder of the year. Topics include soil, global climate change, arthropods, and vertebrates.

Teachers will guide their students through pre-field trip activities related to the topic they chose. Then students will attend a field trip to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park where they will participate in activity stations that allow them to collect and analyze data. Finally, Asombro Institute for Science Education staff members will visit each classroom in the weeks following the field trip to help students run parallel studies that relate to what they learned on the field trip.

Students will gain knowledge throughout the project about how to do "real" science and how science relates to the rest of their world. In this way, the one-day field trip will truly open students' eyes to the wonder of science and the desert.

Volunteer Spotlight

"Discover why some of the richest people in the world are not millionaires, they are volunteers."

Author unknown

The Asombro Institute for Science Education is fortunate to have an incredible group of talented, dedicated, generous volunteers who assist with all aspects of the organization.

No one personifies these traits more than Donna Yargosz (in photo above) who began volunteering for the Asombro Institute in 2003. Since then, she has donated 5,317 hours, including 879 hours in 2009 alone!

Donna serves on the Asombro Institute Board of Directors, helping set the direction of the organization. In addition, she assists with hundreds of field trips, classroom programs, and public events annually. She also creates science kits and science souvenirs that students purchase on field trips, with 100% of the profits donated to the Asombro Institute. We consider Donna part of the staff and are delighted and honored that she shares her talents with us.

Even if you have only a few hours per month to volunteer, please consider joining Donna and the hundreds of other volunteers. There are always tasks to be done, from education programs to prepare and deliver to trails to maintain to office tasks to complete. Please contact Program Coordinator Rink Somerday (575-524-3334 or rink@asombro.org) to find a volunteer opportunity that is just right for you!

Education Programs

Here are the programs run by Asombro Institute for Science Education staff members during the last quarter of 2009. Many thanks go to our members for helping support these programs!

- Oct 6 Sunrise Elem. - desert plants
- Oct 7 El Dorado HS, Socorro - field trip
- Oct 7 Sunrise Elem. - desert plants
- Oct 8 Mesquite Elem. - field trip
- Oct 9 Deming HS - field trip
- Oct 13 Central Elem - desert plants
- Oct 14 LC Catholic School - scientific process
- Oct 15 Booker T Washington Elem - desert plants
- Oct 16 Central Elem - field trip
- Oct 17 Don't Know Much About the Desert
- Oct 19 Camino Real MS - vegetation measurements
- Oct 20 Camino Real MS - vegetation measurements
- Oct 21 Camino Real MS - vegetation measurements
- Oct 22 Valley View Elem - desert plants
- Oct 29 Tech20, El Paso - Water Festival
- Oct 30 Tech20, El Paso - Water Festival
- Nov 3 Sunrise Elem - desert animals
- Nov 4 Sunrise Elem - desert animals
- Nov 5 Desert Hills Elem - field trip
- Nov 7-8 Renaissance Faire
- Nov 10 LC Visitors Bureau - nature park tour
- Nov 11 Mayfield HS - teacher workshop
- Nov 12 Valley View Elem - desert animals
- Nov 13 Desert Hills Elem - field trip
- Nov 16 Camino Real MS - water infiltration
- Nov 17 Camino Real MS - water infiltration
- Nov 18 Camino Real MS - water infiltration
- Nov 19 Booker T Washington Elem - desert animals
- Nov 19 Sunrise Elem - Science Night
- Dec 2 Sunrise Elem - arthropod identification
- Dec 7 Camino Real MS - soil compaction
- Dec 8 Camino Real MS - soil compaction
- Dec 8 Sunrise Elem - arthropod identification
- Dec 9 Camino Real MS - soil compaction
- Dec 10 Booker T Washington Elem - arthropod identification
- Dec 14 Deanna Davenport Elem, Canutillo, TX - field trip
- Dec 15 Central Elem - arthropod identification
- Dec 17 Valley View Elem - arthropod identification



Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park

Help Needed at Nature Park



Are you interested in helping Asombro Institute staff members maintain and improve the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park?

We have several exciting projects on tap for 2010, and we need YOUR help. We will be installing a new bench near the amphitheater, adding a UV-protective coating to existing structures, and repairing signs throughout the Park. Two new displays will be installed to showcase some of the research conducted by students who visit the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park on field trips. We will also design and install another interpretive sign on the Desert Experience Mini-Trail; this sign will explain the rainout shelter experiment installed last year.

Also in 2010, we will plan and design a new seating area near the parking area and restrooms. Fundraising will start this year, with plans for installation in 2011.

To accomplish these tasks, we need your help. If you are interested in donating one hour or 100 hours, please contact Site Coordinator Paul Harper (paul@asombro.org or 575-524-3334). We look forward to seeing you at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park!

2009 Precipitation

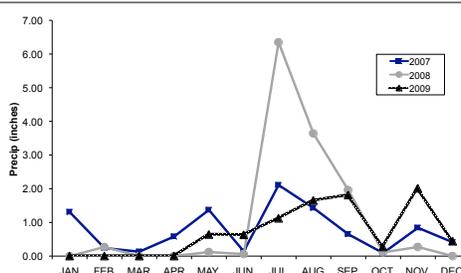


We are fortunate to have a rain gauge close to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, so we can keep detailed records of monthly precipitation totals.

Total precipitation in both 2007 (9.30 inches) and 2009 (8.57 inches) was slightly below the long-term average of 9.38 inches. 2008 was a very wet year, with a total of 12.78 inches. As you can see in the graph below, almost 50% of this precipitation fell in July.

In 2009, there was no measurable precipitation until May. The unusual rain and snow storms (pictured above) brought considerable precipitation in November and December.

What will 2010 bring? We don't know, but we'll be sure to keep our eyes on the data being collected near the Nature Park.



Other Ways to Give



Every dollar donated helps us reach our goals! In addition to financial contributions, here are some other ways you can contribute:

Albertsons Community Partners - If you grocery shop at any Albertsons in the country, a percentage of your purchases will go to the Asombro Institute. Call the Asombro Institute office (575-524-3334), and we will mail you a card. Show this card at check-out, and Albertsons will donate money to our organization.

iGive.com - When you shop online, please visit your favorite store through the www.iGive.com web site first. By doing so, a percentage of your purchases go to the Asombro Institute. More than 700 stores can be accessed through iGive.com.

GoodSearch.com - Doing a search online? Use GoodSearch.com as your search engine. This powerful search engine (powered by Yahoo) will help you find what you are looking for while simultaneously generating money for the Asombro Institute with each search.

Donate Used Printer Cartridges, Cell Phones, Digital Phones, and More - The Asombro Institute sends these items to two companies who recycle the components and make a small donation to the Asombro Institute for every item. You can feel good knowing your items will stay out of a landfill and will also generate revenue for the Asombro Institute. Call the Asombro Institute for information.



Asombro Institute for Science Education
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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. Please sign me up in the following category:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Quartz (\$15 +) | <input type="radio"/> Obsidian (\$250 +) |
| <input type="radio"/> Gypsum (\$50 +) | <input type="radio"/> Peridot (\$500 +) |
| <input type="radio"/> Jasper (\$100 +) | <input type="radio"/> Turquoise (\$1000 +) |

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: _____
 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 Asombro Institute publications _____

Many Thanks

Our sincere thanks go to the following individuals and businesses that made contributions in the final quarter of 2009.

Turquoise (\$1000 +)

Mary Beth Harper
Clifford Pelton
Anonymous

Peridot (\$500 - \$999)

Full Circle Heritage Services, LLC
Jon Havstad
Lynn & George Mulholland
Southwest Kettle Korn
Arlene Tugel & Neil Fuller
Justin Van Zee

Obsidian (\$250-499)

John Bunn
Courtright Family
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GFWC Progress Club
Las Cruces Tour of Gardens
Greg & Julie Magee
Mark Sechrist and Beth Morgan

Heather Throop
Anonymous

Jasper (\$100 - 249)

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Bill & Zanah Stotz
Daisan Taylor-Glass & Mark Glass
Jim & Kathy Vorenberg
Anonymous (5)

Quartz (\$15 - 49)

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Lorraine Bridges
Doug Burke
Marcia Corl
Godfrey Crane & Johanna Binneweg
Jim Dowding
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J. Paul Taylor
Dick & Sherry Thomas
Geri & Rob Tillett
Bob & Jan Vance
Mrs. Joy Van Zee
Alonzo Wright
Eunice & John Zemek

Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park

Open Tuesday - Saturday, 7:00 AM - 5:00 PM

- 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.

