

Asombro Insights



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 33, ISSUE 1, JAN. 2024

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Many Reasons to Celebrate 2023

A new year means new plans, new resolutions, and making new memories. But as excited as we are about the new year, we want to reflect on 2023, as last year was full of things to celebrate at Asombro.

“How many students did Asombro reach?” you might be wondering. Over 24,000 in 1,174 hours of education. “Any teacher workshops?” you may ask. Eighteen, across New Mexico, and visiting Arizona, Oklahoma, and Utah as well.

Our Schoolyard Field Trip program took flight last year, allowing students and teachers to have nature-based, hands-on lessons outside without having to set foot off school grounds. Asombro’s Executive Director, Dr. Stephanie Bestelmeyer reflected, “These schoolyard field trips bring us back to our early roots while capitalizing on all we have learned in our 30-year history.” Ingenuity and innovation are not the least among the talents of the Asombro staff.

Speaking of staff, three new members joined the team in 2023: Marissa and Jeremy as Science Educators, and William as Park Manager. Be sure to head over to asombro.org and visit the Staff section to learn more about all staff members, new and veteran.

William’s joining the team marks the first time the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park (our outdoor classroom) has had a dedicated employee in

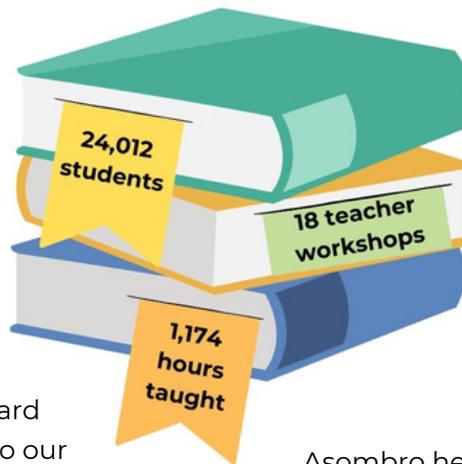
Asombro’s history. With the help of Will and others, the nature park now has a complete border, thanks to two miles of additional fencing, a new gate, and a new cattle guard.

If you have not visited the nature park in a while, do yourself a favor and go see the two new murals, located on buildings near the restrooms. Their Chihuahuan Desert subject matter helps us celebrate the desert and our partnership with the Long-Term Ecological Research Program. Asombro hosted a celebration for the new

murals in 2023 that was well-attended, offered fun activities like sand art and a visual scavenger hunt, allowed patrons to meet the artists, and even featured a mariachi group performance. Keep an eye out for 2024 events; we would love for you to share in the fun.

Asombro held two, large events at the nature park in 2023: a solar eclipse viewing in October and our much-beloved luminarias event in December. Each of those events saw over 200 visitors!

To cap off a tremendous year, Asombro also reached its end-of-year fundraising goal, helping to fund all of the incredible work above. We are busy planning for 2024, but we hope you will agree 2023 was a memorable year.



Happy
New Year!



Meet Asombro's New Intern, Benji Torres

Asombro is delighted to welcome Benji Torres, our undergraduate intern for the Spring 2024 semester. Benji hails from Lovington, New Mexico in the southeast corner of the state. He is currently attending New Mexico State University, majoring in Microbiology, but he has not ruled out adding a second major in Biology, owing to a love of the outdoors.

What is your favorite thing about Las Cruces?

So far, I have fallen in love with the jagged Organ Mountains and the several pecan orchards found throughout Old Mesilla.

What is your favorite Chihuahuan Desert critter?

I like barn owls and kangaroo rats.

How did you hear about Asombro?

Before the end of my third semester, I didn't know that the Asombro Institute existed until I received an email from my Department Head about an internship opportunity. After reading about Asombro's goal of bringing the outside world into the classroom, I felt a strong pull to become a part of this team and inspire kids, just as I was.



Did you know?



One difference between our black-tailed jackrabbits and desert cottontails is that jackrabbits are hares. Their young are born precocial with eyes open, hair on their bodies, and are quickly ready to run. A cottontail's young are altricial and are born hairless with eyes closed and are relatively helpless in their nest for around three weeks.



Asombro Presents Seven "Wildlife Wonders" in 2024

Mark those calendars for a fun series of seven educational events at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park this year. Grants from the "Share with Wildlife" program from the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and the Carroll Petrie Foundation are generously funding these events.

- **March 16th** (9 AM – Noon) – **Mammal Madness**
- **April 20th** (9 AM – Noon) – **Bird Bonanza** (Part 1)
- **May 18th** (9 AM – Noon) – **Radical Reptiles**
- **July 27th** (7 PM – 9 PM) – **Going Batty**
- **August 24th** (9 AM – Noon) – **Butterfly Flutterby**
- **September 28th** (9 AM – Noon) – **Bird Bonanza** (Part 2)
- **October 19th** (9 AM – Noon) – **Dive into Playas**

Each event in the series will share the same activity topics, but each will be focused on the taxon of the day:

- **Meet the Expert** (Walk and talk with a subject matter expert)
- **Tools of the Trade** (See actual equipment used by scientists afield)
- **Dive into the Data** (Asombro's signature style of taking actual research numbers and turning them into a fun activity)
- **Conservation Heroes** (Learn about species of conservation concern and what management/research is doing to help)
- **Wonders Cards** (Collect three trading cards, unique to each Wildlife Wonders event)

Follow us on social media, email lists, etc. to stay on top of more event details as they are announced.

As with all Asombro programs, count on the "Wildlife Wonders" series to be hands-on, interactive, and geared toward increasing participants' knowledge of New Mexico flora and fauna.



Bob Tafanelli: Wonder Award Recipient of the Quarter

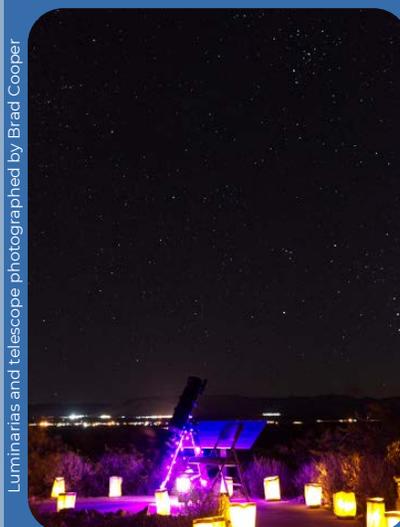
While many volunteers stick to a single role at Asombro, sometimes we find someone who likes to dabble in a bit of everything. This month's Wonder Award recipient is one of those people who is up for anything at Asombro: Bob Tafanelli!



Bob has been a regular at Asombro's monthly volunteer gatherings for many years where he has stapled thousands of student workbooks and completed many other projects to keep our education programs running smoothly. Over the pandemic lockdown, he was always picking up materials to put together student kits at home.

Bob also has been known to join us at the Nature Park to help set up Luminarias, and this month he's trying out supporting our team in elementary classrooms. Thanks for all the help, Bob. We think you're WONDERful!

At Holiday Luminarias Event, Fun is in the Bag



Luminarias and telescope photographed by Brad Cooper

Over 200 people visited the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park for our annual Luminarias: Light Up the Desert event on December 8. Windy conditions precluded actual candles because of safety concerns, but an audible to battery-operated, LED candles saved the day. Winds may have been high, but holiday spirits were higher.

Visitors enjoyed cookies (from our amazing supporters), hot chocolate, "marshmallows for roasting," and holiday tunes. In addition to the beautiful scenery of the trails accented by the warm glow of luminarias, participants could also admire beauty in the night sky via guided star-gazing.

THANK YOU!

We are grateful to our generous donors from October to December 2023.

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TrailKeepers to Become “Friends of the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park”

Our TrailKeeper group, a dedicated assemblage of supporters who help maintain trails, repair fences, and much more at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, is being renamed the Friends of the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. New meetups every other month will still include park maintenance, but will now also offer fun training and presentations.

Date: Saturday, February 10th (and continuing to meet every other month on 2nd Saturdays)

Time: 8 AM – 11 AM (future meeting times will stay the same)

Location: Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park (visit asombro.org/nature-park for directions)

Training: How to use the iNaturalist app (how we document species seen at the park) and nature photography tips for your mobile device

For more information on the Friends group or its monthly meetups, email william@asombro.org.



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