

Asombro Insights

Science education for eager minds

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 19, Issue 2 (April - June 2010)

Continual Learning at the Asombro Institute

Learning is an ongoing process at the Asombro Institute. Find out how staff and volunteers stay up-to-date on the latest research discoveries. Read how you can participate too! **Page 2**

Nature Activity

Celebrate Earth Day and the spring and summer growing seasons by creating your own compost. Learn the steps to create a simple, effective compost bin. **Page 2**



Volunteer Spotlight

Meet Justin Van Zee, scientist, Board President, and volunteer extraordinaire for the Asombro Institute for Science Education. Find out how YOU can become a volunteer too! **Page 3**

Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park

New features and beautiful blooms await you at the Nature Park. **Page 4**



Many Thanks

See the list of donors and volunteers who make the Asombro Institute successful. Join these dedicated, talented individuals by showing your own support. **Page 5**

Map to the Nature Park

Meaning to get out to the Nature Park but have not yet made the trip? Use this map to get out there in no time. **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

CONTACT US

Asombro Institute for Science Education
 PO Box 891, Las Cruces, NM 88004
 575-524-3334 (voice)
 575-646-2315 (fax)
information@asombro.org
www.asombro.org

Nighttime in the Desert

Many people have explored the Chihuahuan Desert by day, but fewer have experienced the sights and sounds of the desert at night. In the evening on April 17, more than 80 people learned more about the desert at the Asombro Institute's "Nighttime in the Desert" public education event, held at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

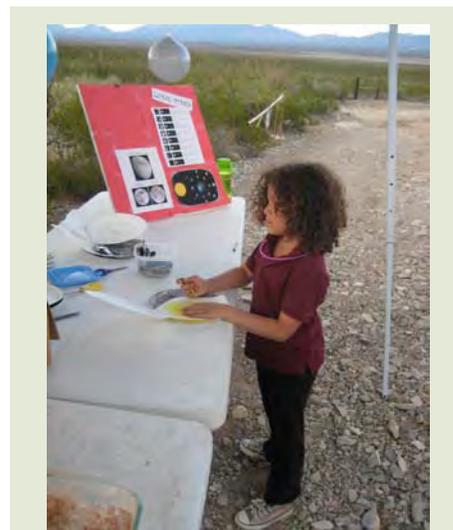
"I am so thankful to your staff and all the volunteers for putting on such a fun, informative event," said a new resident of Las Cruces who made her first visit to the Nature Park for the event.

This visitor and others participated in hands-on demonstrations to examine the phases

of the moon, learn how craters are formed, see fascinating snakes of the desert, and examine plants that bloom in the cool evenings.

At the "Senses" station, volunteers helped visitors explore their senses of smell and touch, senses that are critical for many nocturnal animals. Careful examination of the creosote bushes yielded some amazing insects and other arthropods. Another activity station allowed visitors to learn about nocturnal desert mammals and birds.

A highlight for many visitors was the guided walk to witness the wonders of the desert after dark.



A young Nighttime in the Desert participant learns about phases of the moon and the formation of craters.

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

“Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.”

This statement by John Dewey is one of my favorites. It embodies what we try to emphasize to all participants in our science education programs. Our staff and volunteers also model this lifelong learning by constantly searching out new information to improve our understanding of science and the desert.

In the past few months, for example, we offered a lecture at our new office for staff, volunteers, and members of the general public. McKinney Briske from the Bureau of Land Management introduced everyone to the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument, located just north of Las Cruces. We will follow up her lecture with a tour of the site in a few weeks.

We continued our learning on April 2 with a talk and tour by Board member and archaeologist Mark Sechrist. This informative training gave us information on local archaeological research that will allow us to answer more questions from the thousands of people we help educate each year.

Education truly is part of “life itself” for our staff and volunteers. Keep learning

Stephanie Bestelmeyer
Dr. Stephanie Bestelmeyer

Calendar of Events

May 29 - Full Moon Nights at White Sands National Monument. Hear guitarist Felipe Ruibal and the soothing sounds of Quemosos, live vocals accompanied by Spanish guitars. 8:30 PM at White Sands National Monument amphitheater. \$3/person for ages 16 and up. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/wghsa.



May 29 - Lake Lucero Tour. Take a three-hour, ranger-guided tour to learn how the white sands are formed. \$3 for adults (age 16

and older) and \$1.50 for kids. Please call for more information and reservations (575-679-2599 ext. 236).

June 9 - Talk on native herbs of the Organ Mountains by herbalist Andy Stevenson for the Native Plant Society of NM. 7:00 PM in the Conference Room of the Social Center at University Terrace Good Samaritan Village (3011 Buena Vida Circle, Las Cruces).

June 12 - Field trip to identify native herbs with Las Cruces Chapter of Native Plant Society of New Mexico. Meet at east end of the Rio Grande Bank parking lot at the corner of University and Telshor in Las Cruces at 8:00 AM.

June 12 - Raft the Rio River Race and Festival sponsored by the Southwest Environmental Center. Please call 575-522-5552 for more information and to register.

Nature Activity

Celebrate Earth Day: Reduce, Reuse, and.....Compost!

By Cate Schneider, Education Technician

What better way to celebrate Earth Day than to recycle? We're not talking about your typical recycling involving aluminum, plastic, and glass. This kind of recycling involves food scraps and yard waste - composting! Compost is decomposed carbon-rich materials such as leaves, and nitrogen-rich materials such as kitchen scraps. Worms, bacteria, and insects decompose matter to turn it into compost. It serves as a great fertilizer for your garden, encourages healthy root development, and increases water retention in the soil.

There's no need to buy fancy composting bins when you can make your own. Find a plastic storage bin with a lid. Many of us already have an extra; otherwise, it is likely a friend is eager to get rid of one! Be sure it's 18 gallons or larger. Have the little ones decorate the outside of the bin with craft paints; use alphabet or leaf shaped stamps. Be creative! Consider spraying the finished art with an acrylic sealer spray to protect the design from the weather.



Turn your kitchen and garden waste into compost.

Composting requires adequate air circulation. Drill holes spaced 1 to 2 inches apart on all sides of the bin including the bottom and the lid. Store the bin outside, preferably in a shady area. Once your bin is ready, begin adding the ingredients to make compost. Ideally, your compost should have an even mix of “browns” to “greens.” Your “greens” include fruits, vegetables, egg shells, coffee grounds, tea bags, and grass clippings. Your “browns” include leaves, newspaper clippings, and sawdust. If possible, break down egg shells and chop items into small pieces to help the items decompose faster in a small space. Do not add meat, bones, fish, dairy, high fat foods and oils, or pet droppings.

The contents of the bin require the right balance of heat, air, and moisture to speed up the process and to kill plant diseases and weed seeds. Let the pile cook; ideal temperatures range from 104-131°F. Insert a thermometer into the compost through two holes in the bin twice per week and record the temperature. Aerate the compost by giving the bin a good shake daily. Check the compost to be sure it is moist, not wet or dry. It should be the consistency of a wrung-out sponge. Add moisture rich “greens” or moisten with a spray bottle if dry. Add sawdust or newspaper clippings if wet.

After six weeks or longer (depending on how well the bin is managed), the compost should be ready. It will be dark brown and crumbly like soil. Sift through the compost and throw any large pieces or particles that still need to decompose back into the bin. Store the rest in a bucket. Use the compost as mulch, or mix it with the soil to fertilize your garden or potted plants. Composting is fun, easy, practical, and serves as a great teaching tool about recycling!



Follow Asombro Institute on Facebook

Get connected to the latest news, upcoming events, and workshops by following Asombro Institute on Facebook. Don't have a Facebook profile yet? It's easy, and it's free! Log on to www.facebook.com to sign up and create your profile.

To find our Facebook page, type "Asombro Institute" in Facebook's search engine at the top of the "home" page. Click "Asombro Institute" to access our page. Click the button, "Like," at the top of our page, next to the header. This will allow all updates to be posted to your "Live News Feed" without having to navigate to the page itself. You can also post and share comments, questions, and photos related to Asombro's programs and the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

Spread the word about Asombro Institute and invite your Facebook "Friends" to join and follow our page as well!

Volunteer Spotlight

"Time is money," is an age-old cliché that we all understand. But for volunteers, giving time is priceless. For Asombro Institute, volunteers are priceless. We give a heartfelt "Thank you" to all of our volunteers because we know just how valuable your time is.

This quarter, we'd like to recognize the president of the Asombro Board of Directors, Justin Van Zee, for his outstanding dedication and service. Justin has donated his time and energy to the mission of Asombro since 1995. A USDA soil scientist by day and volunteer extraordinaire by night, Justin has been involved with many aspects of the organization. He began facilitating field trips for students on the Jornada Experimental Range 15 years ago, and has since helped with special events, extensive trail work and facility development at the Nature Park, and has served on the Board of Directors since 2002.

Justin became involved with Asombro because he believes building a solid foundation of science in youth will serve them well in the future. Although Justin has a demanding work schedule, he makes volunteering a priority because he is motivated by "those moments of surprise, awareness, and understanding when a student discovers something new." He finds rewards in working with students, staff, and volunteers.

Justin encourages others who have yet to make the leap into volunteering to "think about what you can offer, give it selflessly, and think in the future. Sometimes results are immediate and sometimes they're quite prolonged, but they're always rewarding." To find out more about volunteering with Asombro Institute, please call 575-524-3334.

Get Outside in June

In honor of National Get Outdoors Day on June 12, Governor Richardson has declared June "Get Outdoors Month" in New Mexico.

Being outside decreases stress, boosts physical health, and allows us all to experience the beauty of the ecosystem outside our doors. Hope to see you all outdoors!

Education Programs

Here are the programs run by Asombro Institute for Science Education staff members during the first quarter of 2010. As of March 31, we had already worked with 5,245 students and 627 adults! Many thanks go to our members for helping support these programs!

Jan 5 Jornada Elem - Asombro Institute
 Jan 7 NM Soc. for Range Man. - Asombro
 Jan 7 Booker T Washington - weather
 Jan 11-13 Camino Real MS - microclimates
 Jan 13 Munson Senior Center - nature walk
 Jan 14 MacArthur Elem - scientific method
 Jan 14 Valley View Elem - weather

Jan 15 Jornada Elem - biomes
 Jan 19 - 20 Sunrise Elem - weather
 Jan 21 Zia MS - field trip
 Jan 21 Annual Membership Meeting
 Jan 25 Vado Elem - arthropod id
 Jan 26 Desert Hills Elem - earth movers
 Jan 26 LCPS principals - Asombro Institute
 Jan 26 Central Elem - weather
 Jan 27 MacArthur Elem - animal adaptations
 Jan 29 Camino Real MS - science fair
 Feb 1 Sunrise (GISD) - animal adaptations
 Feb 2 - 3 Sunrise Elem - solar system
 Feb 6 Real World - Real Science tchr wrkshp
 Feb 8-10 Camino Real MS - trackplates
 Feb 9 Sunrise (GISD) - weather
 Feb 10 MacArthur Elem - biomes
 Feb 11 East Picacho Elem - animal adaptations
 Feb 11 Booker T Washington - solar system
 Feb 16 Sunrise (GISD) - weather
 Feb 16 Central Elem - solar system
 Feb 17 Jornada Elem - weather
 Feb 17 Las Cruces Catholic - weather & biomes
 Feb 19 Sunrise Elem - field trip
 Feb 22 Sierra MS - field trip
 Feb 24 Las Cruces Catholic - weather
 Feb 24 Sunrise (GISD) - career day
 Feb 24 Lecture@401 - Prehistoric Trackways
 Feb 25 Valley View Elem - solar system
 Feb 26 Valley View Elem - field trip
 Feb 26 Mesilla Elem - health fair
 Mar 3 - 4 Sunrise Elem - earth movers
 Mar 3 MacArthur Elem - solar system
 Mar 4 Booker T Washington - earth movers
 Mar 4 East Picacho Elem - science fair
 Mar 4 East Picacho Elem - science night
 Mar 5 Vista MS - career day
 Mar 8 - 10 Camino Real MS - pitfall traps
 Mar 9 Sonoma Elem - weather
 Mar 11 Sierra MS - field trip
 Mar 11 Valley View Elem - earth movers
 Mar 12 Sonoma Elem - field trip
 Mar 13 AAUW Girls Can! - career day
 Mar 16-18 Camino Real MS - field trip
 Mar 19 Sierra MS - vegetation measurements
 Mar 19 Sunrise - field trip
 Mar 29 - 30 Zia MS - field trip
 Mar 30 Central Elem - earth movers
 Mar 31 Vista MS - field trip
 Mar 31 Jornada Elem - science night



Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park

New Bench - Spectacular View



There's a new place to rest and enjoy the view at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Follow the trail up past the amphitheater, and you will discover a new bench with sweeping views of the area.

The bench was installed by Asombro Institute Site Coordinator Paul Harper and Site Development Committee Chair and volunteer Justin Van Zee.

Nineteen volunteers also attended the trail work day on March 27. They added rocks to line the edges of the Desert Experience Mini-Trail and repaired sections of the trail.

If you would like to donate some time to help keep the Nature Park looking its best, there will be plenty of opportunities this summer. Paul will be leading efforts to UV-coat all our existing wood structures, add plants and signs to the Xeriscape Memorial Garden, and install data display cases to showcase data collected by students visiting the Nature Park on field trips. Please call Paul at 575-524-3334 or e-mail him (paul@asombro.org) for more information on how you can help.

Desert In Bloom



A wet winter has resulted in a gorgeous bloom of flowers at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. A few of the staff and student favorites include:

Red flowers

Claret cup hedgehog cactus (*Echinocereus triglochidiatus*)

Orange & yellow flowers

Mexican poppy (*Eschscholzia californica mexicana*)

Arizona jewelflower (*Streptanthus carinatus*)

Hairyseed bahia (*Bahia absinthifolia*)

Twin-leaf senna (*Senna bauhinioides*)

Purple flowers

Indigobush (*Dalea formosa*)

Scorpionweed (*Phacelia* species)

White flowers

Desert chicory (*Rafinesquia neomexicana*)

How many can you spot on your next trip to the Chihuahuan Desert 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:

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.

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. By doing so, a percentage of your purchases go to the Asombro Institute. More than 700 stores can be accessed through iGive.com.

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 (575-524-3334).

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 first quarter of 2010.

Turquoise (\$1000 +)

Donna & Michael Yargosz

Bob Schooley
Michael Weiss

Gypsum (\$50 - 99)

Jo Banks
Leoniece Beatty
Terry & Ruth Branson
Gary & Nancy Goodger
Deb, Stacey, and Allie Peters
Jay & Martha Sharp
Elaine "Tillie" Tilghman
Naida Zucker & Rich Spellenberg
Anonymous

Peridot (\$500 - \$999)

Native Plant Society of NM
Justin Van Zee

Obsidian (\$250-499)

Laurie Abbott & Wayne Van Vorhies
Paul Bussan

Jasper (\$100 - 249)

Stephanie & Brandon Bestelmeyer
Michael & Diane Gilman
Hi Hopes Garden Club

Quartz (\$15 - 49)

Marilyn Brewer
Carolyn Gressitt & John Freyermuth
Kathy & Mike Groves

Paul & Susana Harper
Mary Lessman
James & Margaret Leverett
Bob & Pam Pick
Vera & Burt Schwartz

Volunteers

Craig Anderson
Mehgan Berver
McKinney Briske
Dawn Browning
John Bunn
Doug Burkett
Laura Burkett
Ryan Burkett
Cub Scout Pack 179, Den 2
Brad Cooper
Mike Ferguson
Kathy Groves
Mary Beth Harper
Susanna Harper
David Hutchinson
Brian Locke
Ron Lucero
Lynn Mullholland
Marcella Newman

Tom Packard
Paskadi Family
Mark Sechrist
Amy Slaughter
John Smith
Dia Taylor
Gerry Thompson
Justin Van Zee
Susan Vantress
Mike Weiss
Donna Yargosz



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.

