

# 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](mailto:information@asombro.org)  
<https://asombro.org>



## Students Get Creative in 13<sup>th</sup> Desert Data Jam

When you see a diorama showing data on leaf litter decomposition or hear a rap song presenting data comparing the grazing time of two types of cows in the desert, you know it must be Desert Data Jam time!

Asombro's 13<sup>th</sup> annual Desert Data Jam wrapped up on April 24, 2025. This unique competition that was created by Asombro has now been replicated by other education groups for students in Puerto Rico, New York, Massachusetts, and beyond!

The heart of the Desert Data Jam is data interpretation and communication. 7<sup>th</sup> grade students choose from four datasets collected near Las Cruces. They learn about the study design, pore over the data, and identify a pattern. Then their creativity is put to the test as they design and present a creative project that shows the data trend to scientists and non-scientists.

This year's data jam featured creative projects like a papier-mâché coyote, poems, crocheted cows, video games, a welded metal model, and a robot.

Congratulations to the more than 300 students who participated and to the 98 students whose project made it to the finals on April 22-24.

These projects were carefully judged by 37 judges (thank you all!), and the top prizes went to:

- 1<sup>st</sup> place - Angela Perez, Vista Middle School, "**Leaf it to Robots!**"
- 2<sup>nd</sup> place - Kira Hammond, J. Paul Taylor Academy, "**A Beaded Desert**"
- 3<sup>rd</sup> place - Maliyah Richardson and Gaby Torres, Sierra Middle School, "**Rabbits in Action**"

We are incredibly grateful to our partners in all 13 Desert Data Jams: the USDA/ARS Jornada Experimental Range and the Jornada Basin Long-Term Ecological Research Program. We also thank the Las Cruces Public School Districts, students, family members, teachers, and judges who made the 13<sup>th</sup> Desert Data Jam possible.



*1st place winner Angela Perez with her project "Leaf it to Robots." In a data jam first, Angela's creative project used eraser robots to show leaf litter decomposition in three locations across four years.*

## Summer Teacher Workshops

**Asombro is hosting two exciting workshops for teachers this summer.**

### Agrivoltaics: Engineering Sustainable Solutions to Food & Energy Production

- June 25, 2025 from 9 AM - 4 PM
- For middle school science and ag. teachers
- \$100 stipends plus free kit of supplies for a three-lesson module developed by Asombro

### New Mexico Wildlife Conservation through Engineering Design

- July 15, 2025 from 9 AM - 4 PM
- For 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers
- \$100 stipends plus free kit of supplies for four new lessons developed by Asombro

**Application information:**  
<https://asombro.org/teacher-workshops/>



## A Home for Pollinators at Asombro's **CHIHUAHUAN DESERT NATURE PARK**

Exciting additions are taking flight at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, all thanks to the hard work of two exceptional young conservationists!

Local Boy Scouts, Wesley Bartoszek from Troop 173 and Ryan Schrader from Troop 68, were working to achieve scouting's highest rank of Eagle Scout. They each contributed projects to enhance the Nature Park's biodiversity and attract more pollinators for our native flora.

Wesley built and installed three bat nursery boxes. Using guidance from Bat Conservation International, the boxes are crafted to provide a secure and comfortable environment for bats to raise their offspring. This will encourage bats to spend more time at the Nature Park, pollinating nocturnal flowers and naturally controlling insect populations.

Ryan focused his efforts on beneficial insects, particularly solitary bees and wasps. Unlike their social cousins, these insects often nest in tunnels in the ground or within plant material. Ryan built and installed pollinator boxes, which use simple materials like pinecones, bamboo sticks, and paper straws that insects can use as refuges or nesting sites. The pollinator boxes expand the habitat available for these essential pollinators.

These wonderful additions, spearheaded by the initiative of young leaders, underscore the power of community science and conservation.

Please come visit the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park and enjoy the buzz around these new additions to our park.



*Above: New bat boxes at the Nature Park provide roosting sites for local bats..*



*Left: Pollinator boxes use a variety of simple materials that solitary bees and wasps can use as refuges or nesting sites.*



## BUTTERFLY FLUTTERBY - MAY 17, 2025

Asombro invites you to spread your wings and celebrate the wonder of butterflies at the annual **Butterfly Flutterby!** This family-friendly celebration will take place on **Saturday, May 17, from 9 AM to noon** at Asombro's outdoor classroom, the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park (56501 N. Jornada Road, Las Cruces).

The Butterfly Flutterby offers a variety of engaging activity stations designed to delight and educate visitors of all ages:

- Interactive displays and presentations by butterfly experts
- Creative arts and crafts activities
- Results from the New Mexico Butterfly Monitoring Network's recent surveys at the Nature Park
- Fun butterfly-themed games
- Valuable information on butterfly conservation
- Attendees can also collect four free trading cards featuring local butterfly species to take home!

"Learning about our local butterflies and how we can protect them is more important than ever," said Asombro's Executive Director, Stephanie Bestelmeyer. "A recent study published in Science found that butterfly populations declined by 22% between 2000 and 2020.

Butterfly Flutterby participants will learn how Asombro monitors butterfly populations at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park and how restoring native landscapes — even in small spaces like backyards — can provide vital support for these beautiful and essential pollinators.



The Butterfly Flutterby is made possible, in part, by generous support from the Carroll Petrie Foundation. While the event is free, a suggested donation of \$5 per person or \$10 per family is appreciated to support Asombro's educational programs. Carpooling is encouraged.



## Thank you, T & E, Inc.

In December 2024 and January 2025, Asombro was the proud recipient of the donation of more than \$65,000 in stocks and cash from T&E, Inc.

T&E, Inc. was started almost 30 years ago by Thomas H. and Eleanor Wootten. They dedicated the work and research grants of the foundation to promoting appreciation and preservation of native flora and fauna.

The Wootten's children, Marianne, David, and Margaret, all got involved in the organization, and Marianne called it, "a labor of love by the whole family."

When the family decided to close T&E, Inc., they looked for like-minded charities to carry on their decades of great work.

Asombro was honored to be selected for such a generous gift. We will steward these funds carefully to honor T&E, Inc. and instill wonder about our natural world to all we serve.



## New Asombro Program Extends Field Trip Learning to the Schoolyard

Each year, more than 1,200 students attend field trips hosted by Asombro. These full-day trips expose students to the wonder of the natural world through nature walks and hands-on activity stations that focus on local, current ecological research.

Our dream has been to extend this learning after the field trip is over and help students recognize nature that surrounds their schools and homes too.

Thanks to a grant to Asombro from the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division's **Outdoor Equity Fund**, our dream is becoming a reality this spring!

More than 60 classes of 2nd-5th grade students will receive a packet of post-field trip activities that can be done in the schoolyard. Each class will also receive a tote bag with a class set of materials to complete all the activities.



*Above: Students on an Asombro field trip at the Nature Park.*

*Below: New post-field trip activities and supplies will extend learning to the schoolyard.*



The new activities are a mixture of science, math, and language arts, helping elementary teachers cover multiple subjects. And the activities extend the research themes covered on the field trip - erosion for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades and conservation research for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades.

## THANK YOU! We are grateful to our generous donors from January - mid April 2025.

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PO Box 891  
Las Cruces, NM 88004-0891



### More Parking Available at the Nature Park

The popularity of several public programs at the Nature Park last year made it clear that we needed more parking for visitors.

After carefully removing many cacti from the area (and transplanting them to the Xeriscape Memorial Garden), the site was ready. Many thanks to Dave Thatcher from the Jornada Experimental Range for expanding our parking by more than 50 spots in April!

Visitors to the Butterfly Flutterby on May 17 and to future public programs can now park with ease and enjoy their visit to the Nature Park.

**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**