

Asombro Insights

Science education for eager minds

A Quarterly Newsletter

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Making Science Fun for 7th Graders

If you are like most adults, you have NO desire to go back to middle school. Yet Asombro staff are doing just that, and doing it with a smile! Thanks to a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Environmental Education Program and a contract from Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS), Asombro will be leading 400 hands-on schoolyard and classroom science programs with 7th graders this year.

Why 7th grade? This is the age when students' inherent interest in science starts to decline. We know that hands-on science (an Asombro specialty) rekindles that enthusiasm. In addition, New Mexico science education standards for 7th grade focus on ecosystems, so Asombro programs are a great fit.

The EPA-funded program allows us to work monthly with 7th graders at J. Paul Taylor Academy, Las Cruces Catholic School, Lynn Middle School, Mesa Middle School, Sierra Middle School, and Vista Middle School. Each month's lesson focuses on a different component of the ecosystem (e.g., the

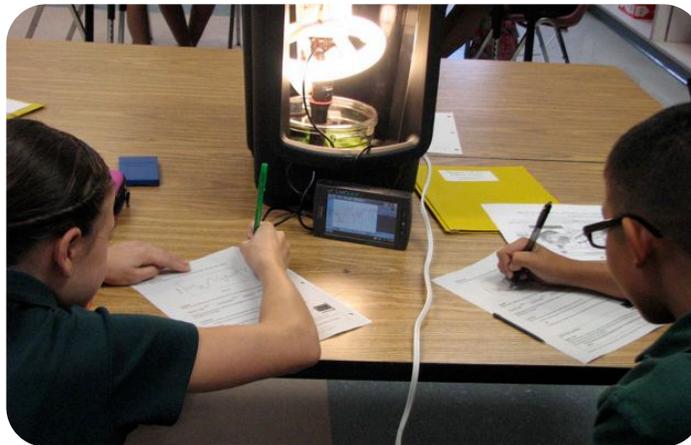
carbon cycle, soil, vertebrates). Students conduct science experiments and learn how each component relates to other parts of the system. In April, students will also compare data between the schools, becoming a true community of student scientists.

In addition, the contract from LCPS will allow every 7th grader to get one of

Asombro's three new class and schoolyard programs. Teachers choose the program that fits best with their plans: (1) exploring the carbon cycle with data loggers and CO₂ sensors and then playing our

"sink the carbon" game, (2) using gel electrophoresis to explore DNA fingerprinting in a wildlife CSI scenario that also informs students about Mexican gray wolves, or (3) using the schoolyard to investigate ecosystem components and thermohygroimeters to reveal suitable lizard microhabitats. In addition, LCPS 7th grade teachers can apply for field trips to the Nature Park.

So the next time you pass by a local middle school, keep your eye out for young desert scientists learning and having fun in their own schoolyard.



Las Cruces Catholic School students Bailee Minnick and Lawrence Hernandez record carbon dioxide levels in a chamber with a photosynthesizing plant as part of Asombro's hands-on carbon cycle lesson.

Ending 2012 with New Programs at the Nature Park

2012 may be winding up, but the Asombro staff is celebrating with new programs at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

"Wild Rumpus" at the Nature Park

"And now," cried Max, "let the wild rumpus start!"

It is the perfect time to get out to the Nature Park, where wild things are. We began celebrating the season with *The Wild Rumpus: Story, Craft, and Costume Party*. Asombro partnered with the Storytellers of Las Cruces to bring delightful children's tales perfect for fall. Expert story-tellers weaved tales that were fun and educational. The first story was the late Maurice Sendack's classic Where the Wild Things Are, a tribute to children's imagination and wild spaces. Our story tellers also prepared original stories.

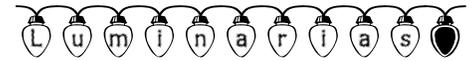
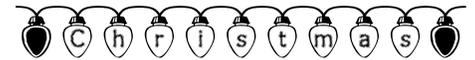


Left: Visitors made Halloween-themed crafts.

Crafts included a trick-or-treat pouch and arthropod art. Visitors played plant identification bingo, created fall poems, and enjoyed having their faces painted. Special appearances by a Harris Hawk and many costumed children capped off a wonderful celebration of wild things!



Right: Ecologist John Coffman teaches guests about a Harris Hawk, one of the amazing "wild things" that live in and around the Nature Park. Photos by Will Keener.



The Desert Discovery Trail will shine bright in the heart of the Nature Park with hundreds of luminarias to ring in the holiday season. Break out in holiday cheer as you stroll along the path with a hearty carol or decorate a luminaria with your personal holiday wishes while catching up with friends. Free!

When: Saturday, December 15th,

5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Where: Chihuahuan

Desert Nature
Park, 56501 N.
Jornada Rd.,
Las Cruces, NM



We are grateful to the generous people who donated between July and September 2012.

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Moonlight Taste of the Desert

As the full moon rose above Mesilla, more than 100 friends gathered and sampled local New Mexico fare, all in the name of science education. The Asombro Institute's Moonlight Taste of the Desert fundraising dinner on September 29 brought awareness to our mission of increasing scientific literacy and renewed our commitment to teaching both students and adults about our unique ecosystem.



Asombro supporters Kathy Groves, Pam Egan, and Bob Egan enjoy a good laugh.



Guests enjoyed local fare such as oryx stuffed mushrooms and New Mexico wine.



The 7-foot praying mantis created by students in the Gen M Science & Art Institute greeted guests as they arrived.



Board member and Moonlight Taste of the Desert host Gil Tellez made sure everything was in order before the first guests arrived.

We Could Not Have Done it Without You! Thank You!

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AUTUMN VISITS THE NATURE PARK

Paul Harper, Site Coordinator



It is fall, and if you need an excuse to get out of the house, this season certainly provides it. The nights are getting cool, which means the mornings are ideal for relishing in the most pleasant time of the year at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Our bright blue skies contrast with creosote and golden grasses. Sotol and yucca stalks stand poised against the distant mountains. Walk along the Desert Discovery Trail to spy harvester ants working on the fluff grass and check out the pineapple-looking fruits of the barrel cactus. The Arroyo Trail is also teeming with life, and wolfberries are full of red fruits. Our winter bird residents will soon be here, so keep an eye out for northern harriers, red tail hawks, and my personal favorite, mountain bluebirds. Who does not enjoy the warmth of the sun on a cool brisk morning?

Remember that the Nature Park is open from 7 - 5, Tuesday through Saturday!



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FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION

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Education Programs

Thanks to generous support from grants and Asombro members, 11,652 students and 1,465 adults have experienced the excitement of science with the Asombro Institute in 2012. Here are the programs that took place from July to September.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 21-Jul Desert Nightlife | 5-Sep LC Catholic - biomes |
| 31-Jul LC Water Utilities - Project WET Teacher Workshop | 6-Sep J Paul Taylor Academy - plant phenology |
| 3-Aug J Paul Taylor Academy - advanced animal classification | 7-Sep J Paul Taylor Academy - Class Amphibia |
| 4-Aug Jose Cisneros Cielo Vista Library - animal adaptations | 10-Sep Doña Ana Elem. - I'm a Scientist |
| 10-Aug J Paul Taylor Academy - Phylum Mollusca | 11-Sep Vista MS - phenology |
| 10-Aug J Paul Taylor Academy - desert safety | 11-Sep Central Elem. - I'm a Scientist |
| 18-Aug Butterfly Flutterby | 12-Sep Sierra MS - phenology |
| 25-Aug Las Cruces Visitors Bureau media tour of park | 12-Sep Booker T Washington Elem. - I'm a Scientist |
| 28-Aug J Paul Taylor Academy - carbon cycle | 13-Sep Lynn MS - phenology |
| 31-Aug J Paul Taylor Academy - career day | 14-Sep Mesa MS - phenology |
| 31-Aug J Paul Taylor Academy - Phylum Chordata | 18-Sep Vista MS - phenology |
| 4-Sep Tombaugh Elem. - I'm a Scientist | 19-Sep Sierra MS - phenology |
| 5-Sep LC Catholic - I'm a Scientist | 20-Sep Lynn MS - phenology |
| | 21-Sep J Paul Taylor Academy - Class Reptilia |
| | 25-Sep Sierra MS - Wildlife CSI |
| | 25-Sep Monte Vista - field trip |
| | 26-Sep Sierra MS - phenology |
| | 27-Sep LC Catholic - phenology |

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