

# Asombro Insights



A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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## Gateway to the Desert and Desert Discovery Day Preparations Underway

The Asombro team and vigorous volunteers are busy these days with two major projects underway at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. First up is the Gateway to the Desert project, which encompasses several park improvements, including a new trail, interpretive signs, and benches. Additionally, a welcome kiosk will greet park visitors with educational literature, trail maps, a list of upcoming events, and, of course, soothing shade! Asombro Science Education Program Leader, Ryan Pemberton, states, "These additions to the park have been dreamt about by Asombro staff for many years. It's a lot of hard work, and I'm so thankful for all the support from park volunteers to make it a reality." Gateway to the Desert is funded, in part, by a grant to Asombro from the NM Outdoor Recreation Division's Trails+ Program.

All of this hard work is in preparation for the park's second major project, the **Desert Discovery Day** event! This event will celebrate the grand opening of Gateway to the Desert and will include a ribbon-cutting ceremony, a welcome station with refreshments and a gift shop, a scavenger hunt with prizes, and four activity stations designed to allow people to actively learn about the Chihuahuan Desert environment and wildlife through hands-on participation. The event is free to the public, and will be held at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park on **Saturday, December 3, from 10 AM – 1 PM.**



*Board members, staff, and volunteers met with shovels in hand, ready to dig into the dirt outline destined to be the site of the park's new Welcome Kiosk!*

Asombro's Executive Director, Dr. Stephanie Bestelmeyer, said, "We hope everyone will join us for this celebration of our newest amenities at the Nature Park. Thanks to a grant from El Paso Electric and support from our generous Asombro donors, there will be free, hands-on activities about the desert for visitors of all ages."



*Boy Scout Troop 68 has become a regular sight at the park, contributing greatly with lining the new connector trail*

## "LUMINARIAS: LIGHT UP THE DESERT" IS BACK!!

After a two-year hiatus, the Asombro Institute for Science Education is glad to announce the return of its "Light Up the Desert" luminaria event! Join the Asombro team on **Friday, December 9, 2022, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.** at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Come stroll along a paved ADA-accessible trail lit with over 400 luminarias while enjoying a cup of hot chocolate and cookies.

## NAME THAT TRAIL CONTEST!

Thank you to everyone who submitted names for the park's new trail! Your entries were wonderful, thoughtful, delightful, and very creative, and we appreciate them all!

First Prize: Asombro T-Shirt goes to Jenny Mond for "Yucca Trail"

Runner up: Lavender Agate Crystal Slice goes to Isra Ort for "Whiptail Trail"



The Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park is located at  
56501 N. Jornada Rd. Las Cruces, NM.

Please visit [asombro.org/nature-park](https://asombro.org/nature-park) for more information.

## Second Graders Explore New Mexico Wildlife Wonders

What types of wildlife are important for humans to protect? When asked this question, many young students name animals like tigers or whales.

In a new Asombro lesson, second graders learn that New Mexico habitats are home to diverse animals like the black-tailed prairie dog, Sacramento Mountain salamander, and White Sands pupfish. Students use models of real wildlife sampling methods to collect data. They scoop plastic fish with a net to model seine netting, lift cardboard doors to "check for amphibians under cover boards," and look through toy binoculars for birds.

Students walk away with the message that conserving habitats for wildlife in New Mexico is important, and they can play an important role in these efforts. We are incredibly grateful to the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish for the Share the Wildlife grant to Asombro that funded this project. We are excited to bring these fun activities to more students this year.



*A student collects wildlife data by checking model camera traps.*



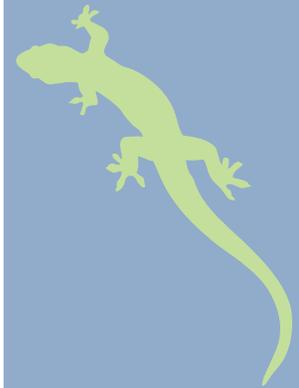
*Students pretend to sample and collect data on White Sands Pupfish, a threatened species found in the Chihuahuan Desert.*

Volunteering in classrooms with Asombro is fun! You can help us bring the joy of science to students just like these. Please contact [kelly@asombro.org](mailto:kelly@asombro.org) for more information.



This is just excitement, excitement, excitement!

-2nd Grade Teacher



## Wonder Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service: Jeanette King

Jeanette was new to Las Cruces when we met her three years ago. Since then, she has been an enthusiastic volunteer in almost every capacity. Jeanette has been in the classroom with us and at monthly volunteer gatherings.

During the pandemic, she was always willing to pick up materials and put together science kits at home. This year she's been helping as a trail keeper at the Nature Park to construct our new Gateway Loop Trail. Plus she's been great about bringing friends to volunteer with her!

Thanks Jeanette! We think you're WONDER-ful!



*Wonder Award recipient  
Jeanette King*

## Meet Amy - Asombro's New Operations and Communication Coordinator

Amy is an east coast native, spending most of her time in the Washington D.C. area. While serving in the U.S. Air Force, she earned a Master's degree in Business Administration from Saint Leo University and traveled extensively to the middle east, which launched a love of the desert and prompted a permanent move to the southwest, finally settling in the Land of Enchantment in 2014. When not at work, you can find Amy volunteering at various local community events, tossing horseshoes, and swimming. She also installed a home camera system just to "catch stills of my hummingbird feeders!"

**What led you to your new position?**

The opportunity to work for a wonderful non-profit organization.

**What is your favorite thing about your job so far?**

Working at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

**New Mexico is the Land of Enchantment. What do you find most enchanting about our state?**

The Organ Mountains at dusk

**Red or Green?**

Both!



*Amy Tront,  
Operations and  
Communication  
Coordinator*

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## Meet Natalie - Asombro's New Science Educator

Natalie grew up in Las Cruces, and experienced Asombro field trips first-hand as a local middle school student. She went on to earn Bachelor's degrees in Geography and Spanish from NMSU, and after volunteering for 2 years at the Las Cruces Museum of Nature & Science, returned to NMSU part-time to take courses in math, physics, biology, and astronomy. During this time, she also worked as a research assistant in the Astronomy Department, spending five years studying interacting binary stars and galaxy evolution. Natalie joined the Asombro team in 2022 and is excited to be able to continue to share her love of science with her community. When not in the classroom, Natalie enjoys filming and photographing the bugs in her backyard with her pet lizard on her shoulder.

**What is your favorite thing about your job so far?**

For me, teaching has always been the best way to learn. Teaching math as a tutor was what got me past my lifelong fear of the subject and enabled me to return to college and level-up my science education. I feel very fortunate that at Asombro, I not only get to continue doing one of my favorite pastimes - learning about science - but I also get to do it in one of the most effective and gratifying ways possible, i.e., teaching it to others! I know from my own experience how much a quality science education can enrich one's life, and I am thankful for the opportunity to help young students along in that journey.

**Red or Green?**

In my opinion it's harder to find a good red than a good green, so unless I'm at a favorite restaurant, I go with green!



*Natalie Wells,  
Science Educator*

## Meet Amanda - Asombro's Fall Semester Undergraduate Intern



Amanda Mock,  
Undergraduate Intern

Living in New Mexico has given Amanda many opportunities to explore and grow. She is attending New Mexico State University to study Biology and Biochemistry to get her Bachelor's Degree. Amanda has loved science for as long as she can remember: starting with her interest in Astronomy and Ecology! Along with these interests is Amanda's fondness for helping children learn. She coached volleyball to young athletes throughout high school and spent summer as a camp counselor. Amanda enjoyed it so much as she watched the kids she helped grow. That led her to Asombro Institute for Science Education where she can give back to the community she loves. Amanda enjoys drawing to pass the time, especially on rainy days. She also plays volleyball on occasion; her favorite position to play is libero/defensive specialist.

**New Mexico is the Land of Enchantment. What do you find most enchanting about our state?**  
A very valuable thing my state has that captures my heart is food! New Mexico has some of the best meals ever. When I traveled around with my family, it was always hard to find a scrumptious place to eat. There were a lot of great options but they didn't have the taste of home. In the Land of Enchantment, there's always a trip to flavor town when eating at many of the restaurants found here.

### Red or Green?

The age-old question of red or green is one yet to have a clear winner. I like to say it depends on what I'm having it with and who made it haha! But I like to think red goes great with everything.

## Adventures in Outdoor Learning in the Schoolyard

As the 3rd graders came outside, they gasped with delight when they saw the model yucca Asombro staff had set up in the schoolyard. After learning in their classroom about yuccas, students were eager to work in groups to collect data on the "root" length of the yucca before it was time to go back inside. Even though the class had been in the same schoolyard where they go for recess every day, one student told her teacher on the way in, "That was such a fun adventure!"

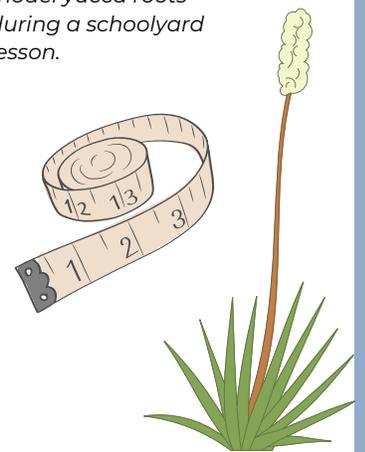
Considerable research supports what everyone could see while watching these students: outdoor learning benefits students' academic skills and physical and emotional health. In addition to offering field trips to our Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, Asombro has been promoting the use of schoolyards for outdoor learning for more than 20 years. Schoolyards are accessible, require no buses or parent permission forms, and allow for long-term data collection.

Asombro is expanding our partnership with Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS) this school year to promote schoolyard learning. We trained all 7th and 8th grade science teachers in July, previewing some of our schoolyard lessons. More recently, LCPS received an outdoor learning grant from the NM Public Education Department to collaborate with Asombro. Together, we will develop a "schoolyard field trip" that equips elementary teachers with the training, tools, and lessons they need to use the schoolyard all year.

We are delighted to partner with LCPS to ensure thousands of LCPS students experience the "fun adventure" of a schoolyard lesson and its many benefits.



Third graders measure model yucca roots during a schoolyard lesson.





At the New Mexico Science Teachers Association conference in Socorro, NM, Education Director Kelly Sayanagi shares curriculum resources with teachers interested in teaching climate change in creative new ways.

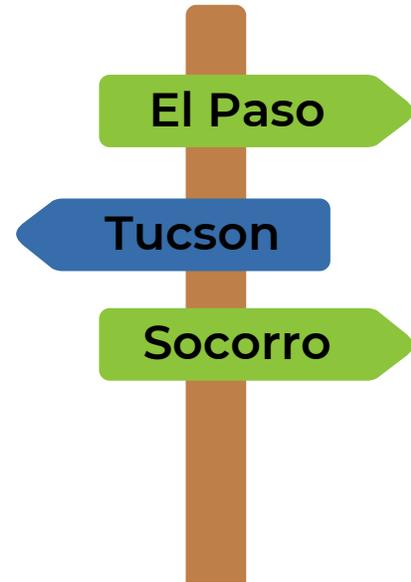


Asombro education staff visited Tucson, AZ for the 51st annual North American Association for Environmental Education Conference.



The Chihuahuan Desert Fiesta held at the El Paso Zoo was an exciting opportunity for Program Leader Ryan Pemberton to share the wonders of the desert with local visitors.

## Team Asombro's Recent Travels



## THANK YOU!

We are grateful to our generous donors from the third quarter of 2022.

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New Asombro Science Educator, Natalie Wells, guides Hermosa Heights 4th graders in examining the importance of keystone species in the desert.



Asombro volunteer, Anthony Schaefer, explains bacterial biocrust to Hermosa Heights Elementary students during the Sept. 9, 2022, field trip to the park.

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