



Nature Notes

Pajarito
Environmental
Education
Center

Your Nature Center in Los Alamos

Volume 6, Number 2

Summer 2007

PEEC, PO Box 547
Los Alamos, NM 87544
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PajaritoEEC.org

Location

3540 Orange St.
Open T-F, 12-4,
Saturday, 10-1

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President's Message

by Randy Ryti

volunteer niche.

July 2007 marks the start of the third year of PEEC operating Los Alamos' first Nature Center. The Nature Center, located on Orange Street near the Los Alamos High School, has been focal point of classes, meetings, and workshops offered by PEEC or other organizations. The Nature Center is open five days a week courtesy of our enthusiastic and generous group of volunteers.

It is no exaggeration that PEEC would not exist without its volunteers. There is not enough space in my column to properly recognize all of the volunteers and all of the important work they do for PEEC. But in brief, our volunteers help to organize and present many of our programs. They write articles for our newsletter and edit its content. Members of the advisory board provide guidance to our volunteer PEEC Board of Directors. So the next time you see one of our volunteers please offer your thanks for their contributions. You might also consider finding your own

Anniversaries are good times to reflect on both our accomplishments and our goals for the future. We recently succeeded in meeting one of our 2007 goals – we hired Branden Willman Kozimor as our part-time program coordinator. Attaining this goal sets us on a course from an all-volunteer organization to a professional organization with many strong roots of community support. Our taproot of support will be our volunteers with additional community roots provided by in-kind donations and cash support.

Some of our long-term goals are to increase our collaborations with public entities and diversify our funding sources. We would also like to partner with others in the community to build an interpretative nature trail that leads from the Center to a nature preserve in Pueblo Canyon. This is only a brief summary of our vision for the future; more information and progress reports are forthcoming. Please send me an email at rryti@mac.com if you have any questions or comments on my column.

Programs, Summer Into Fall

Cooking with Fresh Herbs

Martha Davis Tuesday, July 31 7-9 PM
\$8 members/\$10 nonmembers with further discounts for multiple family members. Min. 7 students must sign up for class to go, so please sign up early.
An introduction to a variety of fresh herbs you can grow at home and instruction on how to use them in the kitchen. Martha will introduce you to a variety of fresh herbs and how you can use them in the kitchen. She will include some specific recipes and you will have a chance to taste some samples.

Heirloom & Unusual Fruit of Los Alamos

County Martha Davis 11-Sep 7-9 PM \$8 members / \$10 nonmembers with further discounts for multiple family members. Min. 7 students must sign up for class to go, so please sign up early.
Learn about Heirloom and unusual fruit. Martha will introduce fruit trees and shrubs and one or two smaller plants that do well in Los Alamos. She will include mulberry, currant, gooseberry, Heirloom Apples as well as others. You will learn about better varieties, possible sources, and uses.

Geocaching for Beginners

Greg Kendall Saturday July 28 9AM-12PM
\$10 members/\$12 nonmembers with further discounts for multiple family members.
Geocaching is a new family friendly sport that involves finding hidden "caches" of miscellaneous items. A GPS device is used to locate the caches. The GPS is programmed with a series of numbers that defines a precise location. Participants follow a bearing given by the GPS device that leads them close to a hidden cache. Participants must then find the cache once the GPS has led them within rock throwing distance of the cache. Think of Geocaching as a high tech treasure hunt that families can have fun doing together in our local forests. Participants will learn how to find information about the many caches hidden in Los Alamos, how to program your GPS to find them and what to look for in the field on a real geocache hunt. Some familiarity with how to enter coordinates into your GPS is helpful. One GPS per family group is required.

Art & Nature for Beginners Series

Katie McClarren \$8/\$10 per Class. ages 13 and older .
*Minimum of 4 students must sign up for this class to be held. This summer, environmental educator Katie McClarren has been teaching a three part series on exploring how to tap into your creative side using nature as your muse. All classes are geared toward the beginner and are designed for ages 13 and older. Middle School and High School students are especially encouraged to sign up. All classes will involve discussion, practice, and peer critique. Classes in writing and drawing have begun/ended.
Photography: Thursday, August 2 and August 16
Please bring a camera that you know how to use.

Wildflower and Grass Identification Classes

This summer, PEEC sponsors a class offered by Terry Foxx and Dorothy Hoard, authors of *Flowering Plants of the Southwestern Woodlands*. Classes are open to anyone who is willing to observe; no experience is necessary. All sessions of the classes will be outdoor field trips except the first one, which will provide an introduction to the principles of plant identification. Field trips to various elevations and habitats will follow the flowering seasons of the various life zones of the Jemez region near Los Alamos. Emphasis is on teaching students to independently identify all types of plants, whether trees, shrubs, weeds, or pretty flowers. Students will visit some areas burned in the Cerro Grande Fire to investigate the role of plants in fire recovery.

Wildflowers of the Late Summer and Fall:

Tuesdays, 8/7-28 4 classes

Identification of Grasses of the Pajarito Plateau:

Thursdays, 8/9-30 4 classes

\$40 PEEC members, \$45 non-members., Classes have a minimum of 7 students and a maximum of 20. Tuition will be refunded in case not enough students register. Further information call Terry Foxx (672-9056), storyteler@comcast.net or Dorothy Hoard (662-2662) dorothyh@swcp.com

PEEC Book Club

The club meets monthly. Free. The July meeting will be Tuesday, July 31st at 5:30pm. Contact the center (see cover) for location and join the discussion. We will be sharing ideas about the book: **Last Child in the woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-deficit Disorder**, By Richard Louv.

PEEC'S New Program Coordinator
Contributed during a talk with Branden.

An Amazing Garden
by Emma Lathrop



PEEC's new programs coordinator, Branden Willmer-Kozimor, is pictured above with soil samples and Kinnikinnick Club gardeners Maggie Andreiczuk, Melanie Boncella, and Mirri Naud.

Branden is relatively new to this area, coming to us from Berkeley, CA, and Florida before that. But, she is not new to environmental work. From San Francisco State Univ. she has one degree in environmental education and a masters in non-profits management. She delights in using gardening as a teaching tool for environmental sciences. Interested in small farm and community issues, she started a farmers' market in Santa Ana, CA, that is still going.

Branden would like to emphasize PEEC's need for teachers. Tell Branden your special interest and she will help you share it with others.

Also, everyone is urged to suggest programs and classes for PEEC. You can reach Branden at her email address: programs@PajaritoEEC.org

Natalie Steinberg, who schedules and directs the PEEC volunteers, would like to second Branden's words. For example, if we had more volunteers to greet visitors at the Nature Center, it would be open more hours. It's a great place to spend time. Contact Natalie at: natwoman@cybermesa.net

There is more than just kids growing in Kinnikinnick Club! "PEEC" around the corner of our building and see what's happening!

Before the planting even began, we decorated and painted a simple piece of plywood. That creamy yellow piece of wood was turned into a colorful garden sign in only 45 minutes! After making a sign, members made a plan for what the garden was going to look like, what we would grow, where to put the plants, and what materials we were going to need. Next, we found an area to plant and tilled and cleaned out trash from the soil. In our next meeting we started seeds in recycled containers like milk cartons and yogurt containers. We took a few of these home to watch them grow. Finally, we transplanted our seedlings in our amazing garden.

Stop by and look at the garden, maybe even try your own! ❖

Emma Lathrop, a sixth grader, is getting her message across in the photo below with a mouthful of sprouts. She is a member of the PEEC Kinnikinnick Club. That's a nature club for kids 6-12 years old. You ask what is Kinnikinnick? It is an evergreen ground cover also called Bearberry found all over the Pajarito Plateau. For more information see our web site: www.PajaritoEEC.org



Saving Wild Tigers at Earth Day

by Gowri Viswanathan

Three of the eight tiger subspecies that roamed Asia as recently as 50 years ago are gone and the remaining wild tiger population is under severe threats from habitat loss, poaching and other forms of human pressure. Tiger's future is uncertain at best. (savingwildtigers.org)

The Saving Wild Tigers booth at the Earth Day 2007 festival featured games and contests for children of all ages. DVDs and photographs of Bengal tigers from our recent trip to India were on display. The biggest attraction was, however, a board game called Race for the Tiger, designed and made by our 10 year old volunteer Melanie Boncella. By including trivia questions for landing on marked spaces, the board game was a fun way to educate children about tigers and the importance of conservation. The coloring contest winners were Brooke Weatherbie, Giovanni Echave, Jenna Wetherbie, Carina Echave and Maggie Andrejczuk. Melanie Boncella and Aubrie Powell won prizes in the essay writing competition. ❖

Backyard Wildlife Habitat

by Selvi Viswanathan

It is Easy to certify your yard as Backyard Wildlife Habitat with National Wildlife Federation(NWF) . Our center PEEC and I have necessary applications, forms and flyers with tips on how to do it. Luisa Grant of NWF is very kind and provides these materials for us. I hear from her that there are now 83,1000 certified habitats, and by end of this year they have a goal of 100, 000. I have seen that, in Los Alamos, many love wildlife, feed the birds and attract butterflies . So I think it would not be very hard for them to certify. The Application Form is self explanatory. There is a non refundable fee of \$15. If you have questions you can call me at 661 2618.

The five things necessary for certifying are:

1. Food. Planting shrubs with berries, having wild flowers whose seeds many birds love and providing nectar for humming birds and butterflies.

2. Water. A simple bird bath will do. It is not necessary to have a pond or water fall. All wild life need water and it is a big attraction.

3. Cover. Trees provide this and birds use them as shelter.

4. Bird Houses. Houses, such as for Blue Birds, will be helpful for birds to raise their young.

5. Sustainable gardening practices. Eliminate chemical pesticides, and add composting.

I think many are practicing these things already, so I do encourage all to try to certify your yards and give back something to the wild life. At the same time it helps our whole planet. Here is a first-hand report on the fascination a backyard wildlife habitat can bring:

Hi Selvi - . The yard does look great! It is fine if the Backyard Habitat Certification for our yard is announced. It came in late summer, 2006. We attract many kinds of birds, Abert squirrels, rock squirrels, chipmunks, another common gray squirrel whose official name I do not know, deer, an occasional bear (which is why we do not feed the birds during summer months), garter snakes, an occasional raccoon, and no skunks since the fire of 2000. The birds nesting in our back and front garden include broad-tailed hummingbirds, canyon towhees, spotted towhees, house finches, English sparrows (regrettably!), nuthatches, and in recent years but not this year, Says phoebe and house wrens. (The last two species moved over to our neighbor's yard!)

Ronnie Moss, 3533 Arizona Ave., Los Alamos ❖

Turn your Next Event
into an Educational Experience
Announced by Randy Ryti

Reserve PEEC for your next family or business event. PEEC is available to members for educational uses -- events could include birthday parties or business meetings or workshops. A reservation is required a minimum of two weeks in advance. You will need to fill out an application for use and a liability waiver. Your application must be approved by the PEEC Board of Directors or its designee. Times available are: Tuesday through Friday, 12 to 4 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. PEEC has specific requirements for certain kinds of events, please contact the Nature Center for more information.

PEEC provides a welcoming and interesting place



Melanie Boncella, 10 year old volunteer for saving tigers (see pg 4)

to interact and discover our exhibits. If you would like one of our staff to talk about any of the exhibits or a nature subject, we will need more advance notice and there will be an additional charge.

Call 662-0460 or stop in Tuesdays through Fridays, 12-4 p.m. or Saturdays, 10 a.m. -1 p.m., to get more information or to make a reservation.

Bioneers Conference Organizers
Want Your Input

The 3rd Annual NM Bioneers Satellite Conference takes place this year October 19-21 at the College of Santa Fe. More than 30 local workshops are planned during the conference. This local programming is generated through a series of community outreach meetings held throughout the state. Please come to the Los Alamos community outreach meeting to share your ideas with the NM Bioneers on Thursday July 26, 5-7 pm at PEEC. Please visit www.nmconference.org/bioneers for details about the October conference.

Our Plateau Whiptail Lizard Has a Name.

The name-the-lizard contest has come to conclusion and our whiptail is named Zoe. Haylee Richardson suggested that name. She and five other children who suggested names were sent lizardy prizes donated by an anonymous lizard admirer.

Our Wish List

(help make PEEC a better nature place)

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| A roll of 41 cent stamps | Digital Projector |
| Digital Camera | Display Cases |
| Picnic table | Bike Rack |

- Replica animal skulls and skeletons for educational use.
- Green friendly paper products (from recycled)
- Green friendly soaps, cleaners
- Nature books for the library
- Garden hose

Gift certificates to the following:

- www.museumproducts.net
- www.acornnaturalist.com

- Office Depot for office supplies
- Hobby Lobby for arts and crafts supplies



Nature Odyssey 2007 student & friend at Valle Grande

Earth Day 2007 All festivities, hikes, demonstrations and the benefit dinner were successes.

Many environmental experiences and messages were enjoyed. Thank you, Everyone!

Photo below: PEEC thanks our sponsors at the 2007 Earth Day Benefit Dinner.
Left to Right: Randy Ryti (Neptune and Co.), Mark Katko (LANB), Keith Tucker (Portage Environmental), Suzie Haveman (RE/MAX Los Alamos), and Felicia Orth. Pete Maggiore (North Wind) and Ken Kisiel (Apogen) also were sponsors.



Vernal Pools, Ephemeral Oasis by Michele Altherr

Early American explorers, Zebulon Pike and Randolph Marcy, characterized the southwest as the "The Great American Desert," akin to the Sahara. Yet the Spanish who had settled the area prior to the Americans knew otherwise. Over the course of 150 years, the Spanish had explored and carefully documented the significant water sources of the southwest. Their settlements grew up around these and, to this day, place names reflect the importance of water: "rio" for river, "cienega" for marshy places, "laguna" for permanent lakes, and "bosque" for woods near water. Not only were these water sources important to the Spanish, but also to wildlife. For example, New Mexico is along the Central Flyway, a route used by millions of waterfowl on their annual migrations. In a fine orchestration of nature, our seasonal water sources peak with their migration times.

Many of New Mexico's water resources are ephemeral; it rains or the snow melts; the water collects for a time and then disappears. During a springtime hike in Los Alamos, you might notice the most humble of aquatic resources, vernal pools. Vernal is Latin for spring, the typical time of year when heavy rains pool in terrestrial depressions underlain by clay or rock hardpan, which keeps the water from draining out. The pools last only a few weeks or months. As the rains taper off, the pools dry out and flowers move in until the next period of rain starts the cycle again.

Vernal pools are fascinating miniature wetlands with a nearly closed ecosystem and huge food web. Importantly, and due to their seasonal nature, they lack fish which allows for the safe development of amphibians and insects. Things happen very quickly once heavy rains begin. The buried cyst-like eggs of the Daphne, or water flea, begin to hatch. They become food for many species including the dragonflies living out their larval phase in the pool. With the advent of rain, aquatic beetles

deposit their silk-encased eggs on plants. Spadefoot toads emerge from underground to breed in the pool where their tadpoles hatch and develop. Garter snakes are good swimmers who lie in wait on the banks for a meal of frogs and salamanders. Red-tail hawks swoop down upon unsuspecting lizards and insects. Despite their importance, vernal pools are easy to ignore; some people see them as glorified puddles. Due to their seasonal nature, they are easily destroyed before they are even discovered. Next time you see one of those funny looking puddles, pause for a moment to look for the life that abounds within them.

Family Nature Connection: Collecting Raindrops by Michele Altherr

The raindrops that splash down on dry ground and eventually form a vernal pool are interesting in themselves. A naturalist named Wilson Bentley wanted to know what raindrops looked like and devised a method to collect them that you can try at home. Beware, you will get wet!

You will need: 1) a metal pie plate and piece of cardboard to cover it, 2) flour, 3) zip-lock baggies, 4) ruler, 5) dark construction paper and 6) a fine mesh strainer. First, sift the flour into the pie dish so that it is 1 to 1.5 cm deep. Second, cover your pie pan with the cardboard and go outside in the rain. Go where there are no trees or buildings, just you and the sky. Third, briefly remove the cardboard cover from the pan for 8-10 seconds, then cover it back up. Fourth, take your pan inside. The raindrops will have formed little dough balls. Carefully separate these floured raindrops using the sieve. Fifth, dump the raindrops on the construction paper to dry for two minutes. You can sketch, measure and sort your raindrops by size. If you like, you can date a zip lock bag and store your raindrops in the freezer.

Did you know that the size of the raindrop indicates how far it fell? While all the drops are generally the same shape, the ones to have fallen the farthest are the largest. Try doing this experiment during different types of rain showers, but definitely do not try it while there is lightning nearby. Be safe and have fun discovering the wonders of nature. ❖

PEEC
 Pajarito Environmental Education Center
 3540 Orange St.
 P.O. Box 547
 Los Alamos, NM 87544

Connect with PEEC

Visit the Center.
 Become a member.
 Check the website often:
www.PajaritoEEC.org

Read PEEC This Week:

If you have an e-mail account and when you are a member in good standing, you can receive "PEEC This Week." Send a message to Randy Ryti: rryti@mac.com . Weekly e-mail alerts about classes, events, science and the environment will reach you. You can contribute appropriate notices by sending them to Randy. 'PEEC This Week' always includes PEEC activities !

Membership in PEEC
Members receive Nature Notes, electronic updates (PEEC This Week), library check-out privileges, discounts on classes and gift shop.

General Membership	\$35
Living Lightly	\$20
Non-Profit Sponsor	\$75
<i>1 Newsletter and PEEC This Week for up to 3 organizational members.</i>	
Penstemon	\$60
<i>Benefits of membership plus t-shirt or canvas shopping bag.</i>	
Sunflower	\$100
<i>Benefits above plus additional t-shirt or canvas shopping bag.</i>	
Wild Iris Donor	\$250
<i>Benefits above plus Muench coffee table book.</i>	
Skyrocket Gilia Donor	\$500
<i>We will contact you to determine how to recognize this generous level of donation.</i>	
Wood Lily Donor	\$1000
<i>We will contact you to determine how to recognize this generous level of donation.</i>	

Joining Is Easy!

Tear off this form, fill it out, and mail it in with your check.
Do it today! Thank you.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Number in Household: _____

E-mail: _____

_____ **Please contact me about volunteering.**

PEEC is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization.
Donations are tax-deductible.

 Mail checks to:
 PEEC
 PO Box 547
 Los Alamos, NM 87544
 Att: Membership
