



# Nature Notes

Pajarito  
Environmental  
Education  
Center

Your Nature Center in Los Alamos

Volume 6, Number 4

Fall 2007

PEEC, PO Box 547  
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505-662-0460

PajaritoEEC.org

#### *Location*

3540 Orange St.

Open Tue. -Fri., 12-4 pm,  
Saturday, 10-1

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## President's Message

by Randy Ryti

While the PEEC's President message does not usually involve what he did for his summer vacation, I'm going to use this space to explain a bit of my vacation as it relates to nature, New Mexico, and education.

Perhaps the thing that most embodies PEEC's programs is experiential education, which means getting out in nature and getting your boots dirty. My personal experience this past July was to climb Wheeler Peak, the tallest point in New Mexico, as part of my wedding anniversary celebration. Wendy and I completed the 8-mile trek as a day hike, as do many other New Mexicans and visitors.

Our excitement in successfully completing the hike was due to its many wonders. We were impressed by the alpine plants; some are miniature versions of plants growing in our garden. Wildlife was also of interest, from the chickadees and meadowlarks to the marmots and recently re-introduced big horn sheep. Of all the biota we noted on our hike, the big horn sheep are the easiest to anthropomorphize. The sheep seemed to be aware of the hikers and maintained a safe distance. Upon cresting one corner of the trail I startled a ewe and lamb no more than 20 meters away and felt some passing angst for making them expend energy in their rapid exit.

The scenery also was awe-inspiring and majestic and the weather generally cooperated to make for a wonderful day. When the storm clouds started to gather we made a quick pace down the mountain.

Mindful that alpine environments are both harsh and fragile; we were respectful to stay on the trail and observe only what we could from that vantage. However, I must wonder if all travelers into the alpine are both aware of the consequences of making their own trail and the need to provide wildlife their own space. A solitary sign near the trailhead provides much information on what hikers may encounter and what cautions are appropriate.

(Contd pg 2)



## Upcoming Events

### Programs for Kids

**Fall K-Club** resumes- 1st & 3rd Mondays, 4-5 PM: Michele Altherr

**Preschool Nature Series**- "Animal Tracking"- September 19, 1-3 PM: Susan Williams (\$8 members/\$10 non-members)

**Fall Hike for Elementary Aged Kids**- October 6, 10-12 PM: Bob Dryja

**Preschool Nature Series**- "Skeletons"- October 17, 1-3 PM: Susan Williams (\$8 members/\$10 non-members)

**Preschool Nature Series**- "Weather"- November 21, 1-3 PM: Susan Williams (\$8 members/\$10 non-members)

**Preschool Nature Series**- "Trees"- December 19, 1-3 PM: Susan Williams (\$8 members/\$10 non-members)

### Programs for Adults & Families

**Fall Migratory Bird Walk-Saturday**, October 6, 8 AM: Martin MacRoberts

**Pajarito Trail Fest**- October 13, 10 AM-2 PM: Timothy Lord leading trail related activity.

**Cougars of the West**, a presentation by 'Sinapu,' a non-profit Colorado based organization that is dedicated to the protection of native carnivores and their wild habitat in the Southern Rockies. Oct. 15, 7 p.m.

**Bioneers Meeting in Santa Fe**- October 19-21, Michele Altherr's Globe Project

**Introduction to Animal Tracking**- October 20, 1-3 PM: Timothy Lord (\$8 members/\$10 non-members)

**Historic Hike up Los Griegos Peak** Saturday, October 27, 10 AM-3 PM: Janie O'Rourke

**Dark Side of Plants Talk**- October 28, 7 PM: Tom Antonio & Carol Johnson FREE

**PEECnic**- November 3, 2-4 PM: Everyone! FREE PEEC's Annual Meeting. Open House in the Jemez Mts Herbarium, Santa Fe Raptor Center, our own exhibits, election of officers, special doings: see enclosed flyer.

### Nominations for PEEC Board of Directors

PEEC is seeking enthusiastic and energetic members of the Northern New Mexico community to join our Board of Directors and help connect people with the natural world at our back door. Persons interested in getting more information about the PEEC Board of Directors should contact Randy Ryti (PEEC President, rryti@mac.com)

**Advanced Animal Tracking**- December 8, 10 AM-12 PM: Timothy Lord (\$8 members/\$10 non)

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See PEEC This Week for updates.

*Instructions for subscribing are on page 8, this issue.*

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President's Message, Continued from page 1

It is neither feasible nor desirable to have monitors or naturalists situated throughout the wilderness so it is imperative to install knowledge and respect into visitors to this and other remarkable areas. This is done through our personal relationships, primarily with family and friends, but we also need to encourage stewardship through organizations like PEEC. So, as you please enjoy and respect nature, and when you return to your usual surroundings, please consider all of the ways to improve our collective understanding and respect for nature by supporting PEEC. I would appreciate your thoughts on this message, please send an email to [rryti@mac.com](mailto:rryti@mac.com) to share them.



# Native Plant News

by Chick Keller,

Jemez Mountains Herbarium at PEEC

At PEEC we have established a kind of library of actual specimens of our native plants. We're specializing in those from the Jemez Mountains and in particular from Los Alamos County. Plants are collected, pressed and dried, then mounted on archival stiff sheets and labeled from our data base entry. They are stored in our "plant library" (called a Herbarium) in alphabetical order. They can then be looked at to help identify other plants like them, to compare with other similar plants, as teaching tools (we use them in our changing display "What's Blooming Now", etc.

Currently we have over a thousand species from the Jemez Mountains and some 500 from Los Alamos Co. Add to that number the species we know we have but still haven't been collected and the number of species in our small county rises to some 730! We estimate that there are even more, and so we're out there looking and asking others to bring in plants that seem new and different to them.

Of special interest this summer is our discovery of two rather rare plants. The one is a lettuce that only grows in very special wet areas near perennial streams. It is amazingly strange, growing as it does unbranched to over 7 ft tall. The tallest we've found was 11 ft.! It grows in only three of our canyons, Frijoles, Los Alamos, and Guaje. This plant is new for our state having been found in only two other places recently.

The second plant isn't quite as rare but almost. As far as we know it grows in the Jemez Mountains only in middle Rendija Canyon. It is a dandelion-like composite but its flowers are purple and don't open much. In fact we've made up a common name for it--peeping dandelion. I had thought that it had died out during the fire, but this year I found two small colonies near each other.

The work we're doing at PEEC will continue all year, and no doubt next year will turn up some other such rarities. In addition we're here to help all of you to identify the plants you come across so that your lives will be enriched by seeing again and again familiar friends each year. Come see us, especially on Tuesdays and Fridays when we'll be working in the herbarium.

Also, visit the Herbarium during the PEECnic, Nov. 2d.



★

Thanksgiving Dinner and/or Weekend at the Bosque del Apache, November 22-24

A small group led by Steve Fettig issues an unusual Thanksgiving invitation: come eat turkey dinner with us as we watch the eagles try to catch their own dinners near a lake filled with ducks. Meet on the Scout Deck at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (south of Socorro) for Thanksgiving dinner at 2 p.m. Bring a side dish, salad, or dessert. Turkey, dressing, and drinks will be provided. We will have a three-burner stove for heating drinks, some dishes and sauces. Stay the weekend and camp with us under the stars and sounds of ducks, geese, and cranes. We will be camping on Bosque del Apache Nat. Wildlife Refuge. Bring your tent and camping gear (only tent camping is permitted; no pets). Arrive late on Thursday or early on Friday. Wood will be provided for a campfire each night. Friday we will spend bird watching around the refuge. Several spotting scopes will be provided for close-up viewing of ducks, geese and other birds. Coordinate with Steve Fettig re dinner, camping and directions: 662-6785

# The Wildlife That Comes

Local yards become certified by NWF

By Michele Altherr

The National Wildlife Federation recognizes that habitat loss is the biggest threat to America's wildlife. With the simple idea of establishing homeowner yards as habit resources, the NWF launched the national Backyard Wildlife Habitat certification program. In 2006, on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NWF, they surpassed their goal of 70,000 certified yards and now are aiming for 100,000 yards. I thought it was a worthwhile goal that would be easy to contribute toward. After all, numbers mean something in the political realm. Therefore, this past spring my yard became the 84,298<sup>th</sup> yard to certify as a wildlife habitat.

My front yard could have been certified without a pond, but I had always thought that a modest one would be an interesting feature. So this past Mother's Day I asked for a pond hole as my gift. Early in the morning, my husband and son set about digging the hole, which didn't seem as modest of an effort as the size. The pond was to sit at the bottom of a slope. Therefore, I chose a rigid kidney-shaped pond form over a pond liner because I thought erosion might become an issue. Next, I decided to install a solar pump to create a sound attraction for birds, improve water circulation and discourage mosquito breeding. I knew that it would only work in sunshine but felt it would be fine. However, after going through two solar pump models, I have given up on the idea. For whatever reason, they did not last. Currently, I'm relying on my thriving community of gambusia (Mosquito Fish), water hyacinth, cattails and umbrella plants to keep the pond healthy. In particular, the gambusia are contentedly eating larvae and multiplying so that now I have dozens of different size fish in the pool. There has been one unfortunate event. One morning I arose to find a dead chipmunk in the pool. Now, since the walls of the liner don't provide any purchase for climbing out, I lay a branch across the surface so there is a "pond escape". I have found having a pond fascinating because of how wildlife interacts with it. However, if this all seems too much, remember all you really need is a birdbath to certify your backyard. As a community, we can contribute toward the NWF certification goal.

By Diane and Evan Noveroske

I recently had my backyard certified by the National Wildlife Federation. For years I have been providing food, water, cover, and places to raise young, to wildlife. I live in White Rock so providing water is essential. I have a fountain birdbath and a bird pond with a fountain. The sound of running water is attractive to birds. My yard is mainly designed to attract birds but mammals also benefit: (of course ) mice, (but I have lot of snakes also!) skunks, raccoons, rock squirrels, ground squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits and even coyotes. I provide white millet, black oil sunflower seed, hummingbird water, and suet to attract the largest number of birds. We have planted many shrubs, bushes and trees to house and feed wildlife. We have installed flicker boxes, bluebird boxes, wren houses and robin nesting platforms. I have fenced off my bird feeding area to help protect from cat predation and netted all my windows to help prevent window kills. Much of our large backyard is in its natural state with native plants. We try to never use chemical pesticides. There are ample areas of dense shrubs and thickets for cover and a large wood pile (well away from the house) that attracts a lot of wildlife, whether we want to or not!

By Randy Ryti

On August 1st our yard was certified as wildlife habitat. We have enjoyed working to make our yard habitat for all creatures and we have enjoyed seeing all varieties of animals including native bees, butterflies, lizards, garter snakes, and many species of birds.

Ed. Note: We have frequent, delightful updates about her certified yard from Selvi Viswanathan. We've used some of them in our list of birds for September. See page 7. It also is good to note the mammals she has seen, which include the following: coyote, chipmunks, Abert's squirrel, ground squirrel, black bear !

PEEC wants to hear from you!

We have put together a survey to find out how we are doing. Please take a moment to fill out the survey posted on the home page of our website [www.PajaritoEEC.org](http://www.PajaritoEEC.org). The survey will be open until October 5<sup>th</sup>.



## What To Do When a Bird Strikes a Window

Birds are sometimes found alive, but stunned, beneath a window. Such birds are at risk of predation or death from exposure. They are usually suffering from a concussion, which means that the brain is swollen.

Because of their vulnerability, it is a good idea to pick such birds up (if they are stunned enough to allow you to do so) and bring them inside. They should be placed in a box or unwaxed paper bag, with paper towel or a finely woven cloth on the bottom, and placed in warmth and total darkness (a closet often works well). Keep the bird in this fashion for at least an hour, to allow the swelling to go down and to prevent the bird from being active. If the bird has not recovered after a few hours, the help of a veterinarian experienced in caring for birds will be required and, even then, it may not be possible to save the bird.

If the bird shows obvious signs of injury, blood, open wounds or a fracture, please seek help immediately.

Avoid excessive handling or stress. Do not give the bird food or water, and never try to give the bird alcohol of any kind, not matter how diluted. Alcohol will not help the bird, and could prove very harmful.

### Assessing Recovery

Leave the bird undisturbed for an hour or two. If after this time the bird appears alert and unharmed, try to release it --away from windows.

You should stand a few feet away from shrubs or trees when opening the bag or box. If the bird is able to fly into the vegetation, it should be fine. If, however, it has difficulty reaching the bushes, please gently catch it and take it to a rehabilitaiton centre immediately.

Remember, not every bird that hits a window can be saved. You can take steps to minimize the probability of birds hitting the glass and can try to help those birds that are only stunned.

Source: Toronto Humane Society

### Local bird rescue phone numbers:

The Wildlife Center outside Espanola	505 753-9505
Santa Fe Raptor Center	505 699-0455

Ed. note: Come to the PEECnic Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup> and see birds from SF Raptor Center that have become "educational birds" after being treated for injuries. Talk with their handlers about safety and conservation.

## Window Episode Has Happy Ending

Barbara Clef of Western Area, Los Alamos, wrote the following about her experience in April, 2007:

"Yesterday I heard a big thump and ran into the living room. On the front porch I could see a hawk with its wings spread. Its head was up but it was obviously stunned. I grabbed the camera and sat with him to make sure no dog or cat grabbed him. After a few minutes the bird stood up and about five minutes later he flew away."

She sent three photos to Becky Shankland of PEEC, who forwarded them to Steve Fetting, a Bandelier ranger. Steve answered:

It is indeed a Sharp-shinned Hawk. The squared over tail is one clue. Other clues are the smooth nape; Cooper's Hawks often show raised hackles that give a rough-nape look. Also, the lack of any strong contrast in the color of the crown vs the nape or back of the head points to Sharp-shinned Hawk. Cooper's Hawks often show a strong contrast between a dark cap or crown and a pale nape. Lastly, look at the toes and legs on this bird. The leg looks like the bone inside may be the diameter of a toothpick -- very thin. That points to Sharp-shinned Hawk. Also the middle toe does not look very strong. If this bird grabbed one of us, it could draw blood, but it couldn't do much damage. Cooper's Hawks have much stronger and more dangerous feet. Also the barring on the breast tells us it's an adult. The photo of the bird on the deck is great because it gives us a good view of the back. All the feathers look like they are adult features, so this is probably an after-second-year (ASY) bird.



Photo by Barbara Clef

## Fungi, Tipping the Scale in Nature's Favor

By Michele Altherr

When storms, floods, volcanoes and other natural disasters wreak havoc on the environment, fungi come to the rescue. They recycle, back into the soil, animal and plant debris, as well as essential elements such as carbon, nitrogen, sulfur and iron. Actually, fungi are the soil builders of Nature. Nearly all plants have joined with fungi in symbiotic, or mutually beneficial, partnerships. The fungi attach to the roots of plants and help them to absorb water and nutrients. In return, the fungi receive food and nutrients from the plant.

Fungi are very ancient and do not have chlorophyll, the pigment that we see as the green color of a plant. Since fungi do not obtain energy and food from the sun, they need another source. Generally, this other source of nourishment is dead plants and animals. In order to digest all matter of things found in the soil, fungi send out a network of threadlike strands called mycelia. More than a mile of mycelia threads can be found in a cubic inch of healthy soil! At times, the mycelia swell and fill with millions of spores. The swellings push up through the soil and appear as what we recognize as mushrooms, the fruiting body of a fungus much like an apple is to a tree. From the mushroom, spores spread on the wind to start new fungi elsewhere.

Fungi are also man's ally. Some produce chemicals that become important medicines. Others you see in the grocery store and add to your favorite recipes. Also mushrooms produce enzymes that clean up toxins that people put into the environment. Some even breakdown hydrocarbons, which are common to oils, petroleum products, pesticides and other pollutants. Sometimes *E. coli*, bacteria found in sewage, invades an ecosystem and causes problems. One kind of fungus produces a chemical that attracts the *E. coli* and kills them. These are just a few exciting discoveries. Imagine what remains to be learned about fungi and their role in healing the planet.

### Family Nature Connection: Mushroom

#### Spore Prints

By Michele Altherr

Discover at home a little bit about the estimated 150,000 species of mushrooms by doing this activity. Find a mushroom with gills or buy one at the grocery store. Pull out its stem. Then place the cap right side up on a piece of paper. Cover it with a bowl so the spores will drop directly onto the paper undisturbed by drafts. In a few

hours lift off the bowl and pick up the cap. You should see a lovely pattern of spores on the paper. If not, try a different color paper and a fresh mushroom. Remember some mushrooms in the wild are poisonous to eat. So, always wash your hands after handling wild mushrooms.

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### Kinnikinnick Club Garden Grows Strong

#### Roots this Summer

by Branden Willmer-Kozimor

On a midsummer Tuesday morning it happened. Looking under the umbrella leaves in the squash zone, we found our first zucchini of the summer. A large green club fit to be shared between two families. Then, another, and another. There would be enough squash found that morning for each of the children to take home for dinner.

After the zucchini it was Crook Neck squash, golden yellow and bumpy. Then green beans, and the first hint of ripening tomatoes before the summer garden program slowly wined down for the year. The kids are back at school, but the garden still grows. Some kids stop by to pick the vegetables they grew, what is left is donated to local food banks and soup kitchens.

Beyond the satisfaction of growing our own food, we learned a lot this summer. We built a compost bin, learned to identify local weeds and other garden pests, and learned to test soil fertility. When we found the soil was lacking in important nutrients, we enhanced it with bone meal, blood meal and worm castings. We talked about why it is best to use organic growing methods rather than pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. On the last day of class, we had a potluck lunch with each child bringing something to share with the group. Many of the dishes were made from ingredients from the k-club garden or a garden the child had grown at home.

Thanks to Metzgers Hardware for donating a gift certificate for supplies, to Lowe's for a grant that will support this year's expenses and more to come, to the PEEC board of directors for help with the initial digging of the garden, Selvi Viswanathan and Michele Altherr for volunteering your time, parents for your support, and the K-club kids for your enthusiasm, eagerness to learn, and those bright green thumbs!

How does your garden grow? Membership in the Kinnikinnick Club is a great gift to give to kids ages 6 - 12, for interesting nature experiences all year and for more garden-growing projects.

## Birds of PEEC and Surrounding Spots

By Diane Noveroske, who maintains the list of birds for all to see at PEEC, and Selvi Viswanathan from her certified wildlife habitat yards at 690 Pueblos

### July:

Red Crossbill- Nail Trail  
Rufous Hummingbird-PEEC, White Rock  
Pine Grosbeak-PEEC  
Pinyon Jays- White Rock  
Scrub Jay-White Rock

### August:

Western Tanager-White Rock  
Lesser Goldfinch-White Rock  
Lazuli Bunting-690 Los Pueblos  
Greater Roadrunner-White Rock  
Clark's Nutcracker-White Rock and 690 Los Pueblos  
Williamson's Sapsucker-White Rock and 690 Los Pueblos  
Red-Naped Sapsucker-690 Los Pueblos  
Black Phoebe-690 Los Pueblos  
Band tailed Pigeons-690 Los Pueblos  
LASE will be using PEEC facilities on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month from 6:30-8 pm

Drawings are from  
[http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/gallery/es/Animals/birds\\_a-f.htm](http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/gallery/es/Animals/birds_a-f.htm)



Pine Siskins- 690 Los Pueblos  
Mountain Chickadee- 690 Los Pueblos  
Hairy Woodpecker-690 Los Pueblos  
Downy Woodpecker-690 Los Pueblos  
Green-tailed Towhee-690 Los Pueblos  
Cassin's Finches-690 Los Pueblos  
Bushtit-White Rock and 690 Los Pueblos  
Stellar's Jay-690 Los Pueblos  
Sharp-shinned Hawk-690 Los Pueblos  
Canyon Wren--690 Los Pueblos  
Red-tailed Hawk-690 Los Pueblos  
Chipping Sparrows-690 Los Pueblos, PEEC

### September at 690 Los Pueblos:

Three juvenile( as big as their parents) Turkey Vultures hovering and soaring in our back canyon.  
Sharp shinned hawk on our deck trying to catch the chipmunks and small birds at the sunflower seed feeder.

A pair of stunning Red tailed hawks soaring and trying to catch prey in the canyon.  
Rednaped sapsucker male is a regular visitor now, drilling holes on the cherry tree trunk.

Green tailed Towhee

A few warblers

Juncos are coming back

Beautiful Canyon Wren

A flock of 20 Pinion jays are invading all the feeders and it is nice to see their blue color, especially in a flock taking off and landing together

When I see these birds. I noticed now the female finches are feeding their offspring. I think in the summer the mothers are trying to raise the second brood.

Humming birds are almost gone --- seeing only female and juvenile black headed grosbeaks and western tanagers now.

Wilson's and Townsend's Warblers

Townsend's Solitaire

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Visit the Center.  
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 Check the website often:  
[www.PajaritoEEC.org](http://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 !

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

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<i>We will contact you to determine how to recognize this generous level of donation.</i>	
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<i>We will contact you to determine how to recognize this generous level of donation.</i>	

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**Do it today! Thank you.**

**Name(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number in Household:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Please contact me about volunteering.**

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