



Nature Notes

Pajarito
Environmental
Education
Center
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Your Nature Center in Los Alamos

Fall 2008

PEEC, PO Box 547
Los Alamos, NM 87544
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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



This summer witnessed the return of migratory birds, as usual, but also the return of the Park Flight program. Park Flight had a one-year hiatus and returned to offer 6th grade students a true hands-on appreciation of migratory birds like Townsend's Warblers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers, and Wilson's Warblers. This program is a collaboration of PEEC and Bandelier with funding for the Central American interns from the National Park Foundation. Students learn about migratory birds in the classroom and then go on a field trip to participate in bird banding and data collection. The most amazing part of the experience is gently holding the bird when all the measurements are complete and letting it go back along its way.

Another hands-on program recently started at the Nature Center is Watt Swap. Through an energy conservation education contract with the Los Alamos County Utilities Department, residents can exchange incandescent light bulbs for compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs. CFLs use about one-quarter of the electricity as incandescent bulbs – so releasing your incandescent light bulbs at PEEC may also bring some satisfaction, if not the joy of releasing a small songbird. There are other aspects to the energy conservation education program – LA Green to support renewable energy development, developing brochures with suggestions to make vintage homes more energy efficient, and energy conservation education programs.

Having a Nature Center in Los Alamos is key to developing and presenting such worthwhile programs. PEEC will be requesting an extension to our lease from the Los Alamos Public Schools so that we can continue to serve our schools and community. Please send me an email at rryti@mac.com if you have any questions or comments on my column.



Volunteers Needed: Come and Get Acquainted

By Natali Steinberg

Like most other non-profits, PEEC could not operate without volunteers. We have two part-time paid staff - Diane, our Administrative Assistant, and Branden, our Program director. Also, we do pay some of our teachers. However, most of what happens at PEEC is done by volunteers. As PEEC expands, so does our need for volunteer help.

In order to give members and the community an idea of how they might help, PEEC is having a Volunteer Orientation party on Sunday, **Nov. 2nd from 2-4 PM.** We'll have ideas of how you can contribute to PEEC - from helping maintain our garden to computer help; from greeting visitors to creating interesting new displays.

Please join us on Nov. 2nd for refreshments and talking with other volunteers. It's not necessary to make any commitment - only to become acquainted with ways you, your family and friends might help PEEC further its mission of environmental education .

PEEC needs YOU !



PEEC truly is a creation by volunteers. Examples follow.

Number of volunteer hours logged at the Center in

June: 161, July: 227, August: 116.

Number of volunteer hours outside the Center:

108 hours for the Wildlife Habitat Yard Tour,
40 hours for Trail Building.

Total hours for May and June: **597.5.**



Memberships assure our programs. See details about our membership levels on the back of this newsletter. Join our 244 nature-supporting members by returning the form there, or go to the PEEC website at www.PajaritoEEC.org.

Remember to come into the Nature Center to learn what wild flowers are blooming now and which birds have been seen. As night temperatures get sharper, the wild flowers disappear but bird migration is in full swing. Local people have reported Ferruginous hawk and

Wilson's warbler. The white-crowned sparrows are back in White Rock.

Many thanks to Diane Noveroske, PEEC's administrative assistant, for statistics and bird lists.

20 More Wildlife Habitats

By Becky Shankland

PEEC's Backyard Wildlife Habitat Tour helped with the National Wildlife Federation goal. NWF wants to reach 150,000 certified yards this year.

In August, PEEC held a Backyard Wildlife Habitat Tour to showcase some earth- and wildlife-friendly yards in Los Alamos and White Rock.

Selvi Viswanathan, who organized the tour with a committee, reports that in 2008 Los Alamos added 20 certified yards, a giant leap forward. We hope that the tour inspired people to evaluate their gardens and register them with the NWF. Selvi comments that it's an easy process to accomplish on line. Just visit www.nwf.org, and at the bottom of the home page find the link to certify your backyard as wildlife-friendly.



Thank you, Los Alamos Chapter of Moms in Motion for choosing PEEC to receive proceeds from the 2008 Pajarito Trail Fest. We greatly appreciate your support!

What began in 1999 as a group of moms training together to complete a local triathlon, has transformed into a Global Network Connecting Moms through Fitness with members and teams throughout the world! Moms meet other moms with similar interests and fitness goals. They develop friendships and get the support and guidance they need to reach their goals.

See

www.momsinmotion.com



Annual PEECnic

October 26

- WHAT:** The PEECnic is our annual membership meeting.
- WHEN:** October 26th from 2p to 4p at the Nature Center.
- WHY:** A fun and informative afternoon is planned and we hope you will join us and enjoy free food and special demonstrations.

Here are some of the activities planned:

Who Eats Whom?

demonstration by Larry Bryant.

Santa Fe Raptor Center

live educational raptors.

Voting on new board slate and any other business items raised by the membership.

Honoring our teachers and volunteers

"Banding Rosy Finches on the Sandia Crest"
Raymond VanBuskirk began this project when he was a high-school student.

2008 PEEC Board of Directors Slate

President: Charles Keller (will be assuming second year of current term)
Vice-president: Rebecca Shankland
Director: Elaine Jacobs
Director: John Hogan
Director: Peter O'Rourke (previously elected 2006)
Director: Natali Steinberg (previously elected 2006)

Biographies for incoming board of director nominees are on the PEEC web site.
Diane Noveroske, nominations chair, will propose a slate of officers/directors for 2008-2010, to be voted on at the PEECnic. Randall Ryti is the Board of Directors liaison. Nominations from the floor are welcome.



The mystery nest with the entry hole clearly visible.

Science in the Field: The Mystery of the Wasp Nest

by Rebecca Shankland

The Park Flight bird-banding project focuses on birds, but this year both volunteers an bonus experience.

Steve Fettig and the other biologists discovered a strange paper-like nest 15 or so feet off the ground in a tree, with lots of insects buzzing in and out. Happily, we knew Zoe Duran, chief entomologist at the Valles Caldera, from the Nature Odyssey. She sprang into action and within 24 hours was up at our banding site with a complete educational package for visiting classes.

First, Zoe told the kids her problem--she's a "bug lady," not a "bee lady." That meant that she would need to do scientific research to identify the nest, of which she only had a description.

Second, she showed all the information she gleaned online, complete with photos. From the original 5,000 possibilities, she was able to narrow down the choices, explaining criteria like whether the creatures were social (yes), ground-dwelling (no).

Next she showed the kids the insect she had netted,

preserved in a small jar, and pinned to her insect display drawer. When they looked at the black-and-yellow stripes on the abdomen and compared it to the photos of the 9 species of aboveground nesting yellowjackets in the US, they could all pick out the correct species: *Dolichovespula arenaria*.

Zoe shared lots of interesting facts:

- *yellowjackets are a kind of wasp
- *they're very aggressive this time of year because they're feeding the queen so that she'll overwinter (they won't)
- *the "paper" nest is made by scraping pieces of plant and chewing them into pulp
- *the nest contains 1,500-15,000 yellowjackets

This discovery was a special treat for PEEC since we've had a nest like this one as a demonstration for several years, but we didn't really know who made it.

Thanks, Zoe, for the real-life (but NOT hands-on) science lesson.

And thanks to Stephanie Krantz of Aspen School for the photos. ✨

Living with Nature's Complications

by Rebecca Shankland

The bizarre metallic rattling noise was puzzling, and after a few minutes I peered out the dining room window of our White Rock home and found the source--not one, but two rattlesnakes coiling about each other just below our window and rattling vigorously.

On our rare encounters with rattlesnakes, Tom and I usually scoop them into a large garbage can and relocate them in remote DOE lands. But Tom was not yet home, so I phoned the snake expert Tom Wyant, who appeared promptly with his bucket and snake stick, just as Tom Shankland also got home.

By now the snakes had subsided into a peaceful coil

Migratory Birds in Park Flight

By Branden Willman-Kozimer

The Park Flight Migratory Bird Program was offered for the fourth year in Bandelier National Monument. PEEC coordinated the field trips and educational components of the program, inviting sixth graders from Los Alamos, northern New Mexico, and area Pueblos to learn about migratory birds.

Park Flight is a partnership between the National Park Service, National Park Foundation, and National Fish & Wildlife Foundation/USAID. The Park Flight Migratory Bird Program works to protect shared migratory bird species and their habitats in both U.S. and Latin American national parks. Park Flight has funded bird conservation and education projects in 14 U.S. national parks, including Bandelier National Monument.

Sixteen classes from Los Alamos, Tesuque, Jemez Pueblo, and San Ildefonso Pueblo attended this year's program. Students learned how biologists capture, band, and release birds in order to learn more about their migration patterns. Many thanks to visiting interns Daniel "Ruz" Rosado, from Mexico, and Eveling Tavera, from Peru, for teaching the students about their work and leading the bird banding field trips.

✧



Newly Banded Ruby-crowned Kinglet

and Tom Wyant confirmed what I'd suspected--mating. The evidence is their tails being latched together just at the base of the black-and-white bands that precede the rattles.

Tom said the larger one with 5 black bands was the male, though the female (4 black bands) is usually larger. The male had lost several rattles, but the female had the full complement.



Photo by Tom Shankland

We agreed to let them finish, not knowing that we'd wait for 1 1/2 hours before deciding to try to capture them as a pair--they were completely inseparable. Tom Wyant uses his invention--a metal stick with a hook that slides under the snake. He eventually coaxed and nudged them both into a white plastic bin. The next step was to drive them to his home for rest and relaxation before relocating them away from trails in White Rock Canyon. We worried about how heavy they would be, but learned the remarkable fact that they travel in a pillowcase.

While we were waiting, taking some hundred photos and movies of the event, Tom regaled us with fascinating stories about his adventures with snakes. And as we drank in his knowledge and watched his calm skill, our feelings of alarm gradually subsided into admiration for these elegant creatures.

What I learned in the PEEC Kids Garden Club this Summer

By Ryan VanCleave (6th grade)

As a person in K-Club, I think it's a nice thing to be able to go outdoors, get in touch with your eco-friendly self and your gardener side so you won't need help when you grow up. The garden plot is right next to PEEC. When we gardened we learned about native weeds and how to remove them, how to feed the soil with blood and bone meal and to mulch the soil so it can hold more water. You may not like all the work when you garden at first, but when it comes to the harvest time, you get to enjoy your treasure. That's what I really enjoyed about K-Club.



One time K-Club when down to the Seeds of Change seed farm and we got to see all these lots of organically grown plants. They don't use pesticides and try to have the plants be able to coexist on what was already there; not like a regular farm that takes out all the plants

and turns it into a patch of something. At Seeds of Change the areas that don't need to be touched, remain untouched. They had chickens to keep the populations of harmful insects in check, which I think is neat because I think chickens are awesome.

In K-Club I learned about many things that can harm plants and also things that are helpful for the environment. The harmful things are about certain types



K-Club Garden Map By Ciara Carter (5th grade)

of pesticides and water contaminants. There are too many things we learned to help the environment to even write it on five pages, but here are a few ideas. Please don't wash your car with soap because it would pollute the river when the water eventually goes there. Also, don't place pesticides on your lawns because it would be harmful to the insects and the animals that would be on the lawn and the bees that are very important for pollinating plants. One of the helpful things is to try to turn your lawn into a registered wildlife sanctuary or habitat. It doesn't mean you have to have a large plot of land that you turn into one big giant forest or meadow. You can still keep your creature comforts without having to turn it into some sort of jungle behind your house. All you need is water, a safe place to raise young, places of cover and a food source. That way the animals and insects can be able to exist peacefully and reproduce. So you can enjoy watching the animals and the animals can do jobs for us that we don't want to do on our own, like pollinating plants, and a bat house can decrease your mosquito population drastically.

K-Club was worth my time and I'd recommend it. ✨

A Garden Poem

By Olivia Snyder (6th grade)

Grow, grow, garden make a show.
Let's eat, eat, eat until our bellies cover our feet.

A sprout, a sprout. I'm so happy I could
SHOUT!

A bud, a bud it's as fun as mud.

It's growing, it's finally
growing and now it's
showing!



National Wildlife Federation tells us why, and many ways to do it, on a special web site, GREENHOUR.ORG, which is excerpted below.

As a society, we are raising the first generation of Americans to grow up disconnected from nature.

Today's overscheduled kids are increasingly "plugged in" to electronic devices and media and unplugged from the fundamental and formative experience of nature in their own neighborhood. Their senses -- including, most sadly, their sense of wonder -- are bombarded, overwhelmed, and ultimately diminished.

Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, refers to this nature-child disconnect as "**nature deficit disorder**." One of the primary symptoms is the replacement of the green space by the screen space as the occupier of children's free time. Indeed, a Kaiser Family Foundation study found that the average American child spends **44 hours per week** (more than 6 hours a day!) staring at some kind of electronic screen. Studies have linked excessive television viewing to obesity, violence, and even lower intelligence in kids. Now, a growing wave of research indicates that **children who spend time outdoors are healthier**, overall, than their indoor counterparts .

Children who regularly spend unstructured time outside:

Play more creatively. Have lower stress levels.
Have more active imaginations. Become fitter and leaner. Develop stronger immune systems.
Experience fewer symptoms of ADD and ADHD.
Have greater respect for themselves, for others, and for the environment. ⚙

By Michele Altherr

Columbus Day weekend, October 11th -13th, is usually a time when we enjoy the shimmering golden leaves of aspen on the mountain slopes and cottonwoods along the rivers.

In addition, this Columbus Day weekend is the first annual "Make Tracks! Family Trail Weekend." This is a National Wildlife Federation initiative with the aim of getting thousands of families from across America out and enjoying nature over the Columbus Day weekend.

Fortunately our community offers its residents a plethora of beautiful parks, trails and picnic spots to choose from. Your outing might be as simple as grabbing the stroller and taking your baby out to the local park or as adventurous as taking the whole family for a hike in the canyons. If you need help finding a trail, PEEC has maps at the center, as well as, a trail guide at

PajaritoEEC.org/guides/trails.php

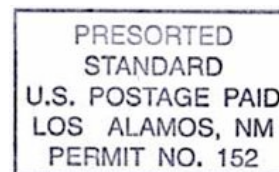
PEEC's web listing includes the easy two mile Pueblo Bridges Loop Trail starting at and returning to PEEC, as well as, the **East Fork Walnut Canyon to Kinnikinnick Natural Park**, a 3.5 miles hike one-way starting on San Ildefonso and ending at the aquatic center.

If you or someone you know is inexperienced in taking their family outdoors, go to www.maketracks.org for tips to make the outing safe and fun for everyone. If you do decide to participate in the Make Tracks weekend, consider registering your family at maketracks.org. You'll join thousands of others in support of the "Green Hour" movement, an effort to promote a daily dose of unstructured time outdoors for all kids. (Greenhour.org for more information and a weekly guide to fun outdoor activities)

Remember "Make Tracks" this Columbus Day weekend and "trade some screen time for green time." ⚙



PEEC
 Pajarito Environmental Education Center
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Nature Notes - Fall

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
