



VOLUME 17, NUMBER 2, SPRING 2017

PAJARITO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER, LOS ALAMOS, NM

What Motivates Us?

By Katherine Bruell, Executive Director

Someone asked me the other day how we stay motivated at PEEC. There are no crises in the business of helping people get outside on the Pajarito Plateau (thankfully!) and everything is running smoothly. What keeps us excited at the nature center? I passed this question along to our staff and got these great answers:

“Whenever people ask me about working at the nature center, I say it’s a great place to come every day because people are happy to be here, it has a great view, and it’s a genuine asset to the community. Kids are excited to see the animals and play with the sensory stimulating toys. They use their imagination when visiting and on field trips. Even the smallest children have memorable experiences and make connections between what they know and things they’re learning (‘this snake feels like a basketball,’ ‘the beetle tickles,’ ‘worms are so cute,’ ‘chipmunks use their hands to eat, just like me’).

“I love trying to find new and exciting ways to connect people to our natural world. It sounds like a cliché, but I think giving people opportunities to get outside and explore is very important. I believe visitors come to the LANC and have the chance to learn something new to take with them while they explore our amazing home. We offer the chance for them to look more closely

at things they may have overlooked before. That is exciting to me.” – Beth, Nature Center Manager

“I first fell in love with PEEC when I brought my kiddos to the nature playtime program on Mondays. I know how important nature can be in bringing physical and mental peace to myself and also to my kiddos. I feel

(continued)

Do you love being outside?

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honored to work with an organization that connects people of all ages to nature. Working at PEEC allows me to contribute to something I believe in, something important. Plus, the staff and volunteers are amazing! And, because there is chocolate here.” – Christa, Volunteer Coordinator

“I’m excited about the Earth Day bottle project because I think it will make people stop and think, and it’s about an aspect of nature connection that I feel strongly about: stewardship. So anything I can do to promote recycling, up cycling, re-use, and non-use of plastics feels like I’m doing something worthwhile.” – Kate, Gift Shop Manager

“I come to work because I believe education is the only way to create the change I want to see in the world. My job allows me to provide experiences for people to connect with the natural world in a way that encourages big ideas and creative thinking. My hope is that people will take from their experiences a desire to conserve and protect the plants and animals that share our planet Earth...and all my coworkers are awesome!” – Denise, Educator

“I think the direction of creating service projects that are geared toward sustainability is exciting. I loved

organizing our clean-up day at Overlook Park because it was a project that had immediate and fantastic results. I would love to organize more programs like this.” – Jonathan, Director of Interpretation

“I am lucky to work with wonderful, like-minded people. At least once a day I learn of someone who is enjoying the benefits of nature thanks to the work we do. It brings a smile to my face and warms my heart.” – Sandra, Marketing Manager

“I recently heard that the best thing you can do for your employees is to allow them opportunities for continual growth, and PEEC allows us that latitude.” – Siobhan, Education Programs Director

As you can see, we all love being here. Why do I get excited to come to work every day? Of course I love the work we do and I know it makes people’s lives better. My biggest motivation day-to-day is the kind, intelligent, creative, and funny people I get to work with. Come and spend some time with us at the nature center and I think you’ll see what I’m talking about. 🐾



Orphaned bear cubs before they were released in 2016. Photo courtesy of Dr. Kathleen Ramsay.

Celebrate Earth Day with Us!

FREE Planetarium Shows
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Earth Day Festival
Saturday, April 22, 10 AM - 2 PM
At the Los Alamos Nature Center
peecnature.org/events

Living with Bears: PEEC’s Bear Festival

By Jonathan Creel

In the summer of 2016, black bears made headlines in Los Alamos. There was the bear attack that went viral and made national news, numerous in-town bear sightings, and even a bear that hitched a ride on top of a garbage truck. It felt like no bird feeder, trash can, or dumpster was safe. PEEC and others began discussing what residents should know about co-existing with these amazing creatures. Other communities around the country have worked to make themselves more bear-safe—what can we learn from them? There are some easy steps we can take: providing residents with bear-safe garbage cans, using



bear-resistant dumpsters, and not leaving pet food outside are just a few.

The Land of Enchantment Wildlife Foundation (LEWF) and PEEC are partnering to help Los Alamos be more “bear aware!” Our main goal is to raise awareness of the simple steps residents can take to make their homes less attractive to bears. LEWF would also like to affect change at the county government level, ensuring that new residential and business trash cans and dumpsters have a bear-safe lock on them. To help forward these worthy goals, LEWF and PEEC are collaborating to make the month of May “Bear Month,” including “The Bear Buffet” dinner on May 12 and a fun-for-the-whole-family Bear Festival on May 13. Please join us to learn more about bear/human interactions and how you can help keep each species safe. 🦊



A curious gray fox. Photo by Hari Viswanathan.

Fox News Flash

By Marilyn Lisowski

A reddish-golden splash of fur darted behind a juniper bush under our birdseed feeders, not a small, escaped neighbor’s dog but a male gray fox, cunning and shy! He’s the first one to visit us this spring, hunting a fat, juicy mouse to feed his family. A female fox would never hunt before May. She is curled up in their burrow nursing her pups. This fox couple, like all foxes, is mated for life. They produce four to six tiny, fluffy foxes each spring. The babies remain snug and safe in the den for five weeks. They will stay with their family for another year before venturing off on their own.

Wily and seldom seen, the gray fox usually hunts in early evening and after dark, but now his female is hungry. These forest-dwelling foxes gorge on mice, rabbits, gophers, large insects, and even berries. They help keep the number of rodents from overtaking the airport, the schoolyard, and your backyard.

Foxes are not endangered even though they are hunted as ranch and farm pests and were killed in the past century for their thick fur. They must watch out at night for prowling cougars and swift coyote packs.

Our fox crouched on dark legs, black feet. The white tip of his bushy tail twitched slightly. Then he rose, golden and sleek, his narrow muzzle lifting, testing the wind, black-tipped ears cupped forward, as he slipped silently into the canyon in search of better hunting. 🦊

PEEC Birders Make the News

By Rebecca Shankland

Three remarkable bird sightings have made the news in the birding world recently.

Rozelle Wright had a juvenile male Broad-Tailed Hummingbird that hung around her feeder until January 3. We followed her photos and the saga of her feeding strategies to keep unfrozen sugar-water available when the temperature fell as low as 11 degrees at night.



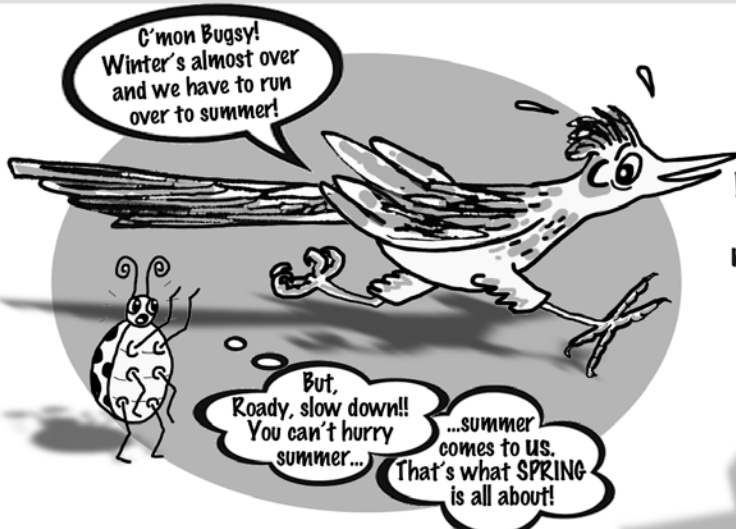
The resilient male Broad-Tailed Hummingbird. Photo by Rozelle Wright.

Joe and Sally Fitzgibbon (yes, the California Condor hosts in 2015) were inundated with Rosy Finches (three species), from January 20 to mid-March. Since these high-altitude winter visitors appear in flocks of up to 200, the Fitzgibbons’ seed bill has been astronomical, but they have graciously allowed visitors to enjoy the daily feeding frenzy. Usually, the only reliable NM place to see these birds in winter is the Sandia Crest.

Ashley Pond has attracted a few rarities, but a recent favorite was the male Cinnamon Teal that graced the pond, enjoying the company of the domestic ducks and geese. 🦊

Nature Notes Fun Page

Winter is ending and summer is on its way...Roady and Bugsy look at **SPRING!**



Can you feel it??

Yes, winter is starting to give way to summer, and that's what spring is: transition! Look around. To make the living things that slowed down or went away in winter gradually come back to life, nature follows **Spring's recipe: add heat & light!** This is exactly what happens as the earth moves closer to the sun in its yearly orbit. Plants and animals respond to the added warmth and longer daylight at different times throughout spring, making for an exciting parade of new appearances!

Look! It's **Sir Roadblock Holmes** and his faithful sidekick **Bugston...** the famous **Sleuths of Spring!**



They're searching for clues about spring. Is it really here?? Help them check off clues on their evidence checklist.

signs of spring:



Wake up sleepyheads or you'll miss all the fun!

Remember those Sandhill Cranes going south last November? Well guess who's going north again?

Insects are some of the first creatures to re-appear. Watch for ants, flies, and beetles.

Seems like it happens almost overnight!

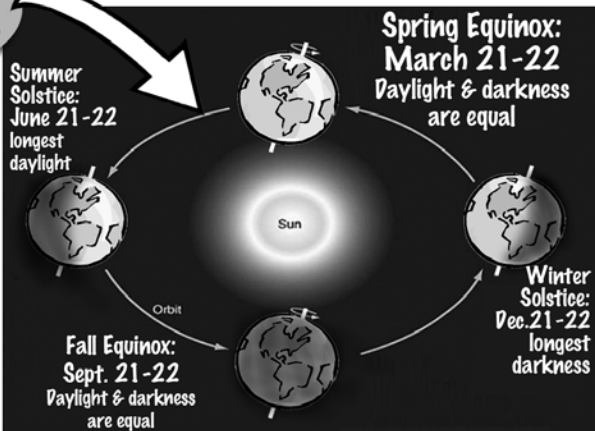


It's elementary!

- First bug. Date: _____ Type: _____
- First baby plants. Tree buds, Date: _____
- Grass shoots, Date: _____
- First springy bird song. Date: _____
- Last patch of snow in your yard. Date: _____
- First baby mammals. Date: _____
- Last snowfall. Date: _____
- First Hummingbird. Date: _____
- First Turkey Vulture. Date: _____
- First thunder. Date: _____
- First hailstorm. Date: _____
- Last snow on peaks. Date: _____
- First flower. Date: _____
- Type: _____

Spot the Spring!
There are 3 of them hidden on this page. Can you find them?

we are here!



Two things cause our seasons and the equinoxes and solstices:
1. the tilt of Earth's axis, and
2. the Earth's elliptical (oval) orbit



Meeting the millipedes sparks the curiosity of this young girl.
Photo by Beth Cortright.

PEEC Critters Adoption Program

By Sandra West

Though the nature center animals are now an integral aspect of the exhibits and PEEC, it wasn't always that way. When PEEC started in 2000, we didn't have live animals because we didn't have a building.

But in 2005 amphibians and reptiles crawled and slithered into our building on Orange Street, encouraged by Michele Altherr, who knew how animals connect people to nature. The goal was to enhance hands-on learning; as she said, "What better way than with live animals?" Thanks to Michele's insight, we now have an array of native animals at the nature center.

Our animals thrive with the knowledge and compassion of our wonderful critter caretakers. The first caretakers were Michele Altherr, Diane Noveroske, and Jennifer Macke. As Michele recalls, "Diane loved those critters and was famous for spoiling them." Jennifer still oversees the care of most of our animals, trains volunteers (including many youth), and shares her expertise by writing fact sheets and introducing visitors to the critters during our Nature Up Close program.

Our Animal Adoption program was also established when we were on Orange Street. The founders of the program, Michele Altherr and Esta Lee Albright, started it to provide opportunities for people to build a unique connection with the critters and help fund their care. Michele remembers, "It was a way for PEEC to build connections with the community, especially children." As Esta Lee says, "They touch our hearts when they gaze back at us. It moves us and connects us to

"They touch our hearts when they gaze back at us."

nature in a way only they can."

From the beginning, the program was volunteer-run, with Esta Lee giving her time to prepare the data sheets and photos for adoptive parents. Now she has support from the staff, but she still writes each adoption letter and update.

At the new nature center, we care for animals and plants inside and outside of the center. We expanded the program to include our outdoor bird feeders, nature play area, raised bed gardens, and the wonderful penstemon landscape.

Our adoption program raises funds to support the native plants and animals that help us teach visitors and our community about the Pajarito Plateau. Adoptive parents can learn more about their animal or outdoor area, and they receive updates during the year. Best of all, we provide behind-the-scenes tours, the highlight of the program for both our expert volunteers and the participants.

What we love most about our programs is how they improve the lives of the participants. Here's one story:

"Some years ago, my sister and I agreed that we didn't
(continued)



need to exchange objects for the holidays, and that instead, each would donate to a nature cause in our own area (she lives in Oregon). As time went along, her three children each got married and had children of their own. So now I donate to PEEC in the name of my sister and also each of her children's families. They get the information about 'their' animals, which helps the kids build a personal connection to wildlife. ... Along the way, I decided to donate to the fish in the name of a friend who is a well-known author of books on fly fishing, and make other sponsorships for friends who would rather provide food for educational animals than have one more gee-gaw sitting around the house. I really appreciate all the good work that the nature center does to keep members of the community, especially children, connected with the wild world, and how hard all these volunteers work to make it possible." –Anonymous Adoptive Parent

"Today, the live animals make the center a vibrant and exciting place to visit," says Michele Altherr. We thank the volunteers, visitors, and staff who support our critters and outdoor areas. To learn more about adopting an animal or outdoor space, please visit <http://peecnature.org/support/adopt-an-animal/>. 🌱



Fraser Goff samples the volcanic fumaroles at Galeras Volcano, Colombia.

Volcano Adventures...

By Fraser Goff

Geologists Fraser and Cathy Goff (formerly Janik) were fortunate enough to work on active volcanoes and high-temperature geothermal systems during their respective careers with Los Alamos National Laboratory and the US Geological Survey. They first met in 1982 at the Cerro Prieto geothermal field, Mexico. There Cathy taught Fraser how to sample fluids from enormous, scary geothermal production wells for his upcoming drilling projects in Valles Caldera. Then they collaborated on a series of adventurous projects in Honduras, Guatemala, Italy, Mexico, Japan, and several USA sites (Valles Caldera,



Cathy Goff swings a big wrench on production well at Cerro Prieto geothermal field, Mexico.

NM; Dixie Valley, NV; Salton Sea and The Geysers, CA). They specialized in getting difficult samples of volcanic gases ($T \leq 835^\circ \text{C}$) and geothermal fluids ($T \leq 350^\circ \text{C}$), often from remote sites requiring arduous hiking and four-wheeling. Their motto: "If you can't feel the heat, you're too far away."

When they retired they joined forces and became geothermal consultants in Los Alamos. After working in the Peruvian Andes and lecturing in Italy, they became involved in three major geologic mapping projects: Valles Caldera, Sierra Blanca (near Ruidoso), and Mount Taylor. They have led numerous field trips for non-geologists through the Valles Caldera and for geology students and researchers from national and international universities and colleges.

...and a Trip with the Goffs

On the weekend of June 17-18, 2017, the Goffs will lead a PEEC field trip to Mount Taylor volcano, northeast of Grants. This trip is for those interested in geology and natural science, and non-geologists are particularly welcome. Mount Taylor is an extinct composite volcano that formed roughly 3.7 to 1.3 Ma (million years ago) and is New Mexico's second largest volcano after the Valles Caldera (about 1.25 Ma). Mount Taylor forms a broad conical highland cresting at an elevation of 11,301 ft and is surrounded by several lava-capped mesas at elevations of roughly 8,000 ft. Most volcanic rocks form lava domes and lava flows and range in composition from rhyolite to basalt. Our two-day field trip will examine the geology and volcanology of Mount Taylor and surrounding areas.

Although this is primarily a geology tour, some of the stops will highlight rocks with interesting mineralogy and textures for collectors. Visit peecnature.org to register for this trip. 🌱

PEEC's Outdoor Summer Camps

Let your kids enjoy a fun and unique nature-based camp.

Grades 4-6

Nature Odyssey: Rocking and Flowing, June 12-16

Nature Odyssey: Moving and Growing, June 19-23

Grades 7-8

Living Earth Adventure Program, June 12-16

Grades 9-12

Backpacking Adventure for Teens, June 6-9



peecnature.org/events/summer-camps/

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Our Mission: Enriching people's lives by strengthening their connections to our canyons, mesas, mountains, and skies.

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The word is out on TripAdvisor:

"Great introduction to the area."

"PEEC: Well worth a visit."

"Great place!"

"Wow!"

Nature Center Hours:

Monday 10-4

Tuesday 10-8

Wednesday 10-4

Closed Thursday

Friday 10-4

Saturday 10-4

Sunday 1-4

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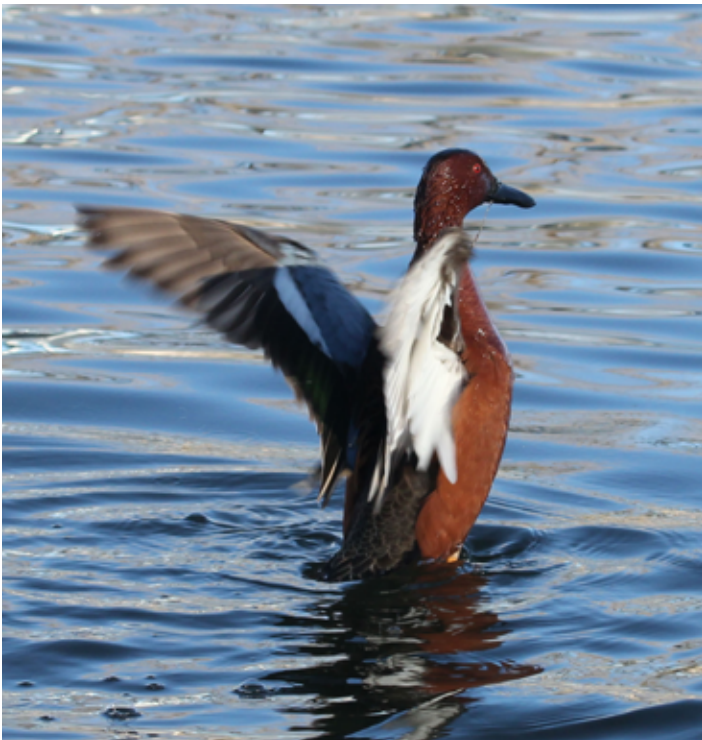
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This Cinnamon Teal, a rare bird in this area, arrived in March and rested at Ashley Pond for over a week before continuing its journey. Photo by Rozelle Wright.

INSIDE

- 1 What Motivates Us?
- 2 Living with Bears: PEEC's Bear Festival
- 3 Fox News Flash
- 3 PEEC Birders Make the News
- 4 Nature Notes Fun Page
- 5 PEEC Critters Adoption Program
- 6 Volcano Adventures

FEATURED EVENTS

Water is Life Discussion and Film **APRIL 4**

Earth Day Festival **APRIL 22**

Bear Festival **MAY 12-13**

Mount Taylor Tour **JUNE 17-18**
