



Nature Notes



Campers from PEEC Pathfinders and Trailblazers traveled to the Jemez and explored Las Conchas!

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 4, FALL 2018

PAJARITO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER, LOS ALAMOS, NM

We Want to Celebrate You!

By Christa Tyson, Visitor Services Manager

To honor the special people that make all our programs, outings, classes, outreach, and important work possible, we invite you to join us as we celebrate PEEC Members. Come connect with others in our community who have shared values of respect and appreciation of the environment. Our annual member appreciation event, fondly known as PEEC-nic, will be held on Sunday, October 14, from 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. at the nature center.

PEEC will have activities planned for everyone, including hands-on games for kids and adults, a chance to meet PEEC's live animals, delicious desserts, and apple-cider making. We will also have a bird expert in the wildlife observation room and a guided hike into the canyon.

In addition to our festivities, our members can enjoy a special gift and free planetarium show. If you bring a friend who has never been to the nature center before, you and your friend will get a free planetarium voucher OR a 10% discount coupon for the gift shop.

In anticipation of the PEEC-nic, I asked our staff to share why they appreciate you, our members. Here are some of their answers:

"A favorite part of my job is talking with people who truly make coming to work so much fun. PEEC

members have fascinating stories. They're more than just people who walk through our doors and then leave. They inspire us. Hearing about their experiences in nature and seeing their smiles ... there's not a day that goes by where I don't feel fortunate to be surrounded by a wonderful community of like-minded individuals, passionate about our environment and ready to support our important work."

— **Christa Tyson**

Visitor Services Manager

"I love that members want to go a step further than just coming to the nature center or participating in programs. Members say, 'I stand with PEEC! I want to be a part of this organization!'" Members believe in our mission and are vital to getting kids up close with bugs, getting seniors out on the trails, getting teens exposed to the wonders of the night sky, and giving everyone tons of different ways to connect with and experience nature. Members are the backbone of PEEC. We couldn't do anything without them!"

— **Katie Bruell**

Executive Director

"It's a pleasure to see a group of diverse people united in their love of nature and animals. It's a beautiful thing to see and experience people coming together to support and enjoy each other."

— **Terry Hatch**

Gift Shop Manager

“As an educator, PEEC members make me feel that our mission is supported. I love talking with all of the families I work with and hearing how much they value their membership. I just had a Nature Playtime father tell me how excited he is to become a member and feel part of the PEEC community. It’s wonderful to see our memberships grow and know our education efforts are really making an impact!”

— **Denise Matthews**

Play-based Education Specialist

“When I started working at PEEC, I was surprised to see how many individuals give their support to make this organization run. I feel like I meet new people daily who are a part of the PEEC community — be that through their membership, attendance of our programs, or by volunteering for us. It is exciting to see that so many community members care about making PEEC the best organization it can be. Knowing that we have such a strong support system makes me feel encouraged that the work we are doing matters.”

— **Rachel Landman**

Marketing Manager

“I am so excited when I see PEEC members out in the community. I’ve had some of my favorite encounters out on the trails. It’s as simple as stopping to chat about the weather or how much we love that particular piece of Los Alamos outdoors. When I see our members out there enjoying the same outdoor spaces, I feel a sense of camaraderie, knowing that the ideals of the people we serve align with my own. That’s why I started working for PEEC in the first place — PEEC’s mission is one that truly mirrors my thoughts and beliefs. So, when a child in a store tugs on her dad’s shirt and says excitedly, “I know her! She’s from PEEC!”, I might be just as excited as the little kid! We work so hard to make every interaction with PEEC a positive one, and that moves to another level when we see members outside of the nature center and they smile, still associating us with positive memories.”

— **Beth Cortright**

Adventure Programs Manager

“Some of the most incredible people I’ve met have been because of PEEC. Our members come from around the world and have so many reasons why they connect to our organization. I feel honored to have people feel so passionately about what we do that they want to join. I hope they know that PEEC is only able to offer wonderful programs because they decided to become members!”

— **Jonathan Creel**

Director of Interpretation

We all hope to see you at the PEEC-nic to celebrate you and our organization! Mark your calendars and don’t forget to bring along a friend! 🌲



The view of the nature center and our mountains from the Rotary Treehouse is pretty spectacular!

How Does PEEC Enrich Your Life?

By Katherine Bruell, Executive Director

What do you think PEEC does that has the biggest impact in our community? People always say to me, “PEEC does so much!” I agree. On a typical week we have five to seven public programs, and even more school lessons, at least during the busy season.

People usually go on to tell me about an event they enjoyed recently, one they heard about but couldn’t get to, or something their children or grandchildren enjoyed. It’s great to have these kinds of conversations because they help me understand what of the “so much” we do has the most impact on people’s lives.

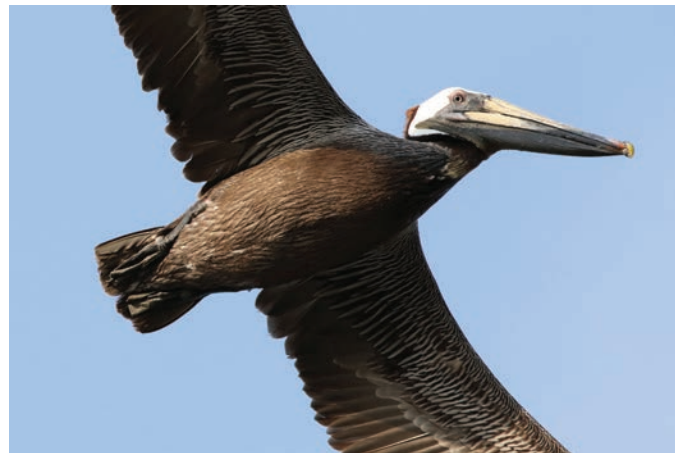
Now we’re trying to do more of this learning and on a larger scale. We’d like to be strategic with our efforts, and direct ourselves toward the work that has the most impact on people’s lives. Included in this issue of *Nature Notes* is a postcard with one question on it.

PEEC’s mission is enriching people’s lives by strengthening their connections with our canyons, mesas, mountains, and skies. In your opinion, what PEEC activities most enrich people’s lives? Please fill out the postcard and bring it to the nature center or mail it back to us.

I’ll compile the results, and we will use them to guide our planning and focus our work, so that the “so much” we do has the strongest impact it can. I appreciate your input. Thank you! 🌲



Ring-Necked Pheasants in South Dakota. Two are females and one is male. Dave drove 800 miles out of the way on a trip to Canada to get photos of the state birds in South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana. Photo by Dave Yeamans



The Brown Pelican in Louisiana, This bird was the twenty-ninth photo taken for this project and took two trips to the state to photograph. Photo by Dave Yeamans

Fifty State Birds, Fifty Photographs

By Dave Yeamans

I'm photographing every state bird in its own state. Forty-three down and seven to go. It takes a lot of driving, flying, and birding. Staying in sleazy hotels, camping, and chiggers are all part of the deal. I've been at it since 2013 when I took a "now or never" shot of the nene in Kauai, thinking it would be extinct by the next time I got to the island.

I snapped the shutter and then thought, "Wow, that's the state bird and here I am in the state. Why not all 50?"

It became a light-hearted challenge I could probably achieve, but it didn't matter when. On the journey I've met people who have seen 100 bird species in every state and another who has seen 200 in all 17 counties along the Minnesota River. There's no fame or fortune, but it keeps us going.

Alabama's northern flicker, the "yellowhammer," took me eight days in four trips. It is easy to hear and see at a distance, but getting close enough to take a photograph was hard to do. And, while South Dakota's ring-necked pheasant often runs across the road, it doesn't pose for a guy racing from state to state on a schedule. I got some serious questioning looks from local hunters who thought I might be shooting pheasants in "their" field a day before hunting season.

I learned to hunt the birds near state borders if the habitat were suitable. That way I could get one state in the morning and drive to the next before birdie nap

time. I used that trick in Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska, for example.

My next challenge is to capture a couple of chickens. That will take more phone calls than I like, but how else to find the Rhode Island Red and Delaware's Blue Hen Chicken? Pennsylvania's ruffed grouse may be the last and hardest of all, but perhaps I'll get lucky.

I have a few good photos, but some are ordinary or worse. My standard is: recognizable by an expert if they know the location and time of year. I look forward to upgrading Massachusetts and New Jersey on future visits, and by now I have better photos of the California quail, but I still publish the originals. I don't mind publishing Oregon and North Carolina as is because they show the bird as we usually see it, far away in bad light. Besides, I'm a picture taker, not a photographer.

Thank you to my friends at PEEC for your enthusiasm. Invite yourselves along and let's go birding together. New England in June, anybody?

Check out the project and my progress so far at:
<https://ravenson.smugmug.com/BirdsofKauai/50-State-Birds/> 📷

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF NATURE NOTES?

Do you have a story that you would like to share in the next edition of *Nature Notes*? Is there something you would like to learn more about?

We would love to hear your ideas for stories or general feedback about *Nature Notes*. Email publicity@peecnature.org to share your thoughts.

WHAT DID YOU ACCOMPLISH WITH PEEC THIS SUMMER?

THE LOS ALAMOS NATURE CENTER has been buzzing with the excitement of summer for the last few months. There has been a steady flow of visitors coming through our doors enjoying the exhibits, observation room, and nature play area. Our staff had a very busy season that allowed us to form new partnerships, explore new ideas, and connect more people with nature on the Pajarito Plateau.

Here are seven highlights from our busy summer:



1) A Bear-y Good Time

We hosted the second annual Bear Festival alongside the Land of Enchantment Wildlife Foundation on August 25. The festival helped hundreds of community members learn about safely co-existing with our black bear neighbors and gave them a sense of how amazing these animals are!



2) More Kids Outdoors

Two brand new camps started this August! PEEC Pathfinders and Trailblazers allowed kids to get out in nature before going back to school. Parents were happy to get some wild time for their children and to have childcare during two weeks that are usually difficult to find coverage for.



3) New Faces at the Nature Center

Elizabeth Watts and Terry Hatch joined the PEEC staff this August! Elizabeth will be working as our Education Programs Director for the next year and Terry is our new Gift Shop Manager. They're excited to keep growing the PEEC programs and services you love.



4) Partnering with Our Neighbors

PEEC worked with NM Historic Sites and Amigos de Los Luceros to host a monthly event at Los Luceros Historic Site. Families enjoyed picnics at the beautiful property and a variety of activities like fishing, a bilingual puppet show, sheep shearing, harvesting apples, and more to connect them with nature and cultural traditions.

5) It's Electric!

Many people are curious about going electric, and with your help and the Department of Public Utilities we put on our first Electric Vehicle Show. People got to test drive and learn about a wide variety of vehicles — bringing them one step closer to reducing their dependence on fossil fuels.



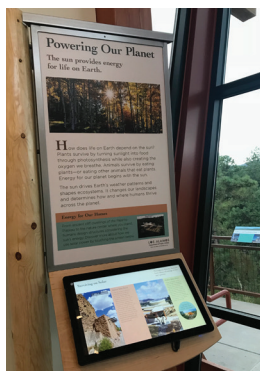
Thomas Graves



Bob Walker

6) Rotary Sparks Fun!

The Rotary Treehouse has got kids' imaginations buzzing! We've seen packs of children forming new friendships there, negotiating fair rules, and immersing themselves in some serious imaginary play — growing their minds and bodies in the process. If you haven't already, be sure to check out this amazing addition to the nature center. Thank you, Rotary Club of Los Alamos!



7) Saluting Our Sun

The donors who made our solar panels possible along with the Department of Public Utilities were the inspiration behind our newest exhibit. "Powering Our Planet" helps visitors learn how living things rely on the sun and how humans can use the sun for power — from ancestral Puebloans to the nature center today! Our amazing volunteers Jennifer Macke and Akkana Peck are programming the touchscreen display to include interactive elements that will help our guests learn how to live more sustainably. Come check it out by the big windows next time you are at the nature center.



Ezra (8) and Atticus (6) Kozimor pose in their backyard, which is now a Certified Wildlife Habitat! They are holding their certificate and pointing at the bat box they built with their grandfather. Photo by Branden Willman-Kozimor

Our Yard Is Now a Wildlife Habitat!

By Ezra Kozimor and Branden Willman-Kozimor

You and your family can have fun outside by certifying your yard as a Wildlife Habitat. Our family did it this summer! The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) has all of the information you need on their website, which makes certification fun and easy. We learned from the NWF that there are over 221,618 Certified Wildlife Habitat gardens all over the United States, and 170 of them are right here in Los Alamos!

To create a Certified Wildlife Habitat you need to make sure your yard has natural sources of food, water, cover, and places for animals to raise young. You also need to be sure you take care of your yard in a sustainable way that incorporates native plants, conserves water, and doesn't rely on pesticides.

To certify our yard we walked around and noted ways we already provide animals with food, water, and shelter. For food, our yard has long grass, native plants like yarrow, penstemon, netleaf hackberry bushes, fruit trees, and ponderosa pines. We also fill our bird feeders with seed and hummingbird nectar. For water we keep a small bird bath filled, and for shelter we have several trees for squirrels and birds to nest and

lots of rocks for insects to find cover. We decided our yard could use more places for animals to raise their young, so we built a bat house and hung it on a big elm tree.

Some things we would still like to do to make our yard an even better wildlife habitat include building a pond, making a butterfly feeder, and planting more fruit trees and native plants.

Certifying your yard also helps Los Alamos County continue to maintain its status as a Community Wildlife Habitat! Los Alamos County earned this title in 2016 and must renew it every year. Getting your own backyard certified helps with the renewal process!

If you and your family want to certify your yard, visit the National Wildlife Federation website at www.NWF.org/garden or call 1-800-822-9919. The animals will thank you for it! 🦉

Acorn Woodpecker Antics

By Marilyn Lisowski

Have you spotted a red-topped black and white bird zipping through the oak and pine forests of the Pajarito Plateau? You might think you saw an airborne clown. Chances are, though, you saw an acorn woodpecker. At seven inches long, the dashing black and white male sports a bright red cap. The female's red head patch is smaller. Both sexes stare with disarming white eyes. With a piercing "wicka wicka," they call others. A sudden ear-splitting screech means, "Danger, flee!"

These clown-colored woodpeckers eat primarily acorns. Gambel oaks on the Pajarito Plateau produce acres of juicy acorns for summer and fall feasting. And, instead of clowning around, the industrious birds excavate hundreds of acorn-sized holes in a standing dead ponderosa pine for a winter and spring granary. A loosely related woodpecker "coalition" fiercely guards the granary against rival acorn woodpecker gangs or bold solitary raiders. Generations of acorn woodpeckers utilize the same granary but the dead pine eventually rots and falls, burns, or is cut to deter wildfires. All is not lost, though, as the busy woodpeckers have pecked smaller annex granaries nearby in pines, in wooden soffits under roof eaves, even in fence posts.

When not gobbling acorns, these birds are devoted to ants. They slurp the tiny creatures from the bark of trees, but never peck holes to catch tunneling insects, as do other species of woodpecker. They also devour nuts, seeds, fruits, tree sap and other birds' eggs. They love to sip from hummingbird feeders.

Most fascinating, acorn woodpeckers are communal. When feeding, one bird takes a turn on watch while the

others eat. In a coalition of up to seventeen birds — breeding parents and non-breeding helpers — they nest together in a dead pine cavity. Nesting holes might exist already or be hollowed out by their powerful beaks.

Acorn woodpeckers breed primarily in April among adults at least two years old. If acorns are plentiful, they breed again in late August. Inside the nest, two to three females lay eggs fathered by up to seven males. A nesting female will destroy a few eggs laid by another female to make room for her own. The last to lay her eggs benefits by destroying some of the eggs of other females, making room for all of hers.

Helper woodpeckers viciously defend the nest. Parents and perhaps a dozen helpers take turns incubating all the eggs and bringing food to the nestlings after hatching. Nestlings fledge at about one month of age and parents continue to feed them for several days.

In spite of the devoted care acorn woodpeckers give to other coalition members, they can be brutal to outsiders. Another species feasting on their favorite suet is an invitation to be dive-bombed and strafed. Solitary birds attempting to join a group might be allowed or violently rejected. Challenges from another acorn woodpecker group can result in savage warfare.

Acorn woodpeckers, like all smaller avian species, face cruel perils. Danger lurks behind foliage, in the air, and on the ground. Snakes and birds of prey may gobble



An Acorn Woodpecker. Photo by Bob Walker.

the eggs and the young. Adult woodpeckers are tasty prey for bobcats, foxes, hawks, and coyotes. They are at risk from falling dead trees they need for nesting and granaries and from habitat encroachment. Survival averages 62% from year to year in this area, higher for adults than for first-year youngsters.

As yet not endangered, our acorn woodpecker population remains stable. The woodpeckers flourish in our Gambel oak and ponderosa pine mix, collect and store acorns, and nestle in a harmonious communal colony. They raise new generations from year to year. They snack on insects, and devour suet in wild bird feeders. They grace us in Los Alamos year round, flitting like tiny red, black and white clowns through our forests and scrub oaks, entertaining and delighting us endlessly. 🐦

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

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Rachel Landman, Marketing Manager
Christa Tyson, Visitor Services Manager
Terry Hatch, Gift Shop Manager
Denise Matthews, Play-Based Education Specialist

Leave Us a Google Review!

"My children love going to the nature center to play and learn."

"Really cool spot to learn about the area."

"Bear Fest rocks!"

Nature Center Hours:

Monday 10-4
Tuesday 10-8
Wednesday 10-4
Closed Thursday
Friday 10-4
Saturday 10-4
Sunday 1-4

Visit us online, too!

www.peecnature.org
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Pajarito Environmental
Education Center

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Kids met goats from Second Bloom Farm and Gypsy Mountain Ranch at a Summer Family Evening in July. This event was sponsored by Del Norte Credit Union!

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FEATURED EVENTS

History of Fiber in New Mexico **OCT. 2**

PEEC-nic **OCT. 14**

Black Bears and Forest Restoration **OCT. 19**

Geology Tour of Shiprock **OCT. 27 - 28**

Wilderness First Aid Class **NOV. 3 - 4**

Bird Populations on the Pajarito Plateau **NOV. 6**
