



## Nature Notes



PEEC hosted a beginner backpacking trip in early October with the Los Alamos Mountaineers. We hope to do more in 2019!

Photo by Jean Dewart

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PAJARITO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER, LOS ALAMOS, NM

### Get Ready for Passport III

By Beth Cortright, Adventure Programs Manager

You asked for it — and now, thanks to some generous donors, it's happening! The third Passport to the Pajarito Plateau will debut at PEEC's annual Earth Day Festival on Saturday, April 27, 2019. This next passport features sixteen new and exciting hiking adventures in a fun booklet.

A few changes are in store for this passport. The biggest change is with the prizes. This time, you'll need to complete more hikes before you can get your first prize. Passport III will also feature more moderate to difficult hikes than the last two editions. Passport finishers will still get a custom patch, specially designed to commemorate their significant accomplishment. Finishers will also receive a custom sticker.

Another change is that we're branching out to include more backcountry locations in Bandelier and a wonderful spot along the East Fork of the Jemez River. We can't wait to hear what new places you discover while hiking these trails. Who knows, you might just find some new favorite spots! From scenic overlooks to tight canyons to expansive meadows, the third Passport to the Pajarito Plateau is sure to bring you and your family another fantastic outdoor challenge.

If you haven't taken part in the passport program yet,



*We are thrilled to bring the community Passport III at our Earth Day Festival in 2019! Get ready to continue exploring the incredible outdoors of the Pajarito Plateau.*

here's how it works: pick up a passport and crayon at the nature center, then get out on the trails. You're looking for a small, square plaque (each trail has a different design) attached to a wooden post, bench, sign, or other feature along the trail. Use your crayon to make a rubbing of the image on that page to "stamp" your passport. Bring your stamped passport back to the nature center for prizes. It's that easy!

*(continued)*

If you're still working on the first two passports (the white and teal editions), don't worry, you can still hike those trails, make rubbings, and collect prizes. We'll keep those in stock. We are also planning to print the first two passports again as booklets.

The passport program wouldn't be possible without the help of our partners: Bandelier National Monument, Valles Caldera National Preserve, Santa Fe National Forest, and Los Alamos County. PEEC and these collaborators are very excited to bring you new ways to enjoy the outdoors. The Delle Foundation, the Clif Bar Family Foundation, and the Kate Svitek Memorial Foundation make funding for the passport program possible. We hope you enjoy hiking your old favorite trails as well as some trails you've never experienced before this spring! 🍄

## Raccoon Raid

By Marilyn Lisowski

Just when you thought it was safe to leave the bird suet feeders out all night ... the morning brings a scene of havoc, a night of rampage! Bears may be

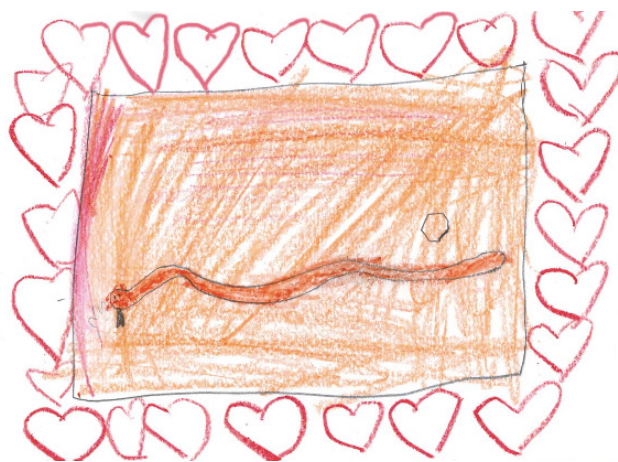
in hibernation but not raccoons, those cute, masked bandits of the dark that plunder anything edible around your home. Highly intelligent and nimble, raccoons can bound up high fences, chew wire, squeeze into tiny attic openings, pluck pet food through pet doors, and clamber down your chimney better than Santa Claus.

A cousin to the bear, these gray, furry creatures stand about twelve inches tall and three feet long, including their black-ringed bushy tail. A dark mask surrounds their eyes, above a black-nosed, pointed snout. Their hind feet rotate 180 degrees so they can plunge down trees headfirst. Their front paws, as dexterous as our hands and many times more sensitive, open doors, jars, latches, and bird feeders. Underwater, their paws are their eyes, identifying prey and vegetation.

The name "raccoon" (*Procyon lotor*) comes from the Algonquin people's word, "aroughcun." Still hunted for their fur, raccoons initially ranged from Northern Canada into South America but have expanded their territory. Introduced in Europe in the 1920s to stock fur farms, they now roam European forests. Japan imported thousands of baby raccoons as children's pets in the 1970s, inspired by the anime series "Rascal the Raccoon." When they grew large and unruly,

The January *Nature Notes* Director's note is always one of my favorites to write because it's all about you! Every year in November and December we start to worry—will you come through as you have in past years? Will your neighbors join you in supporting PEEC? Are we still having the impact you want us to have in the community? And, wonderfully, the answer again this year was yes!

Thank you for believing in PEEC, for valuing our mission, and for sharing nature with people of all ages from Los Alamos, Northern New Mexico, and around the world. Our annual fund drive was a success, thanks to you, and 2019 will be a great year for nature in Los Alamos.



— Katie Bruell, Executive Director





*Raccoons having a late night party at a backyard pond. Photo by Hari Viswanathan.*

Japanese families released many into the forests. Now the once beloved pet is an introduced pest, consuming native wildlife.

These furry omnivores eat almost anything. Powerful swimmers, they feast on frogs, fish, crayfish, and other water life. They will gobble up fruits and ravage your vegetable garden. Cats are prey, as are mice, gophers, squirrels, birds, and bird eggs. Is your garbage can tipped over, with orange rinds, Fruit Loops, and meat wrappers on display in your yard? Chances are, these outlaws have nailed a meal.

Raccoons prefer to dwell near water, but anywhere will do, away from high mountains and desert. They snuggle in hollow trees, rock crevices, spaces under woodpiles, under sheds, in abandoned cars, or in attics. The proliferation of humans offers more food choices and raccoons roam cities as well as the wild. You rarely see them, as they snooze all day and pop out at night for a meal. Do you sleep longer in winter? So do raccoons, but they do not hibernate.

Male raccoons prowl in search of a mate in late winter. The female bears two to six “kits” sixty-five days after mating. Kits remain with their mother until they are a year old. When the mother raccoon is ready to produce another litter, the kits are on their own. Are there noises in your chimney? Uh, oh. A mother and brood may have moved in on top of the firebox or the flue. Do not start a fire! Be patient. They’ll leave eventually.

Raccoons live only two to three years in the wild. They are killed by automobiles, hunting, trapping, starvation, and by becoming a meal for mountain lions, coyotes,

bobcats, or dogs. Eagles and owls prey on kits.

Raccoons also die from rabies. If you ever happen to be bitten, seek medical attention immediately. Other diseases raccoons can carry don’t necessarily kill them: round worm, salmonella, and — rarely — leptospirosis. These may be spread to pets and humans through feces. Wash your hands thoroughly or wear gloves when cleaning up a raccoon mess.

You might hear raccoons at night. They purr, chitter, growl, snort, and produce dozens of different calls. If one approaches you, shout and wave your arms. They are not as cuddly as they look — they will bite if cornered.

Considering a raccoon as a pet? President Calvin Coolidge pardoned a raccoon slated for his Thanksgiving dinner and kept it. He was often seen with “Rebecca” draped around his neck. The staff hated the animal, as it ripped up expensive furniture.

Raccoons are protected furbearers in New Mexico, although you may adopt one with state permission. But cuddly kits grow into mischievous vandals. Let’s leave these delightful, creatures in the wild, where no one cares except their prey! 🐾

## Reduce Your Waste-line

By Heather Ward

Every day, the average American throws away 4.4 pounds of trash. Over his or her lifetime, this amounts to 41.2 tons of garbage sent to landfills. Multiply that by our current population of 325 million, and it really adds up. The numbers are staggering: each one of us, on average, uses 5,300 pounds of clothing, 4,700 rolls of paper towels, 15 computers, 25,000 plastic bags, 200 bottles of shampoo, 12 cars, 350 disposable pens, 3,800 disposable diapers, and 43,000 cans of soda — and less than a third of eligible items are actually recycled. On top of that, the carbon footprint of creating and transporting those goods is astronomical. In this age of disposable culture, we have become accustomed to convenience while being separated from the processes and resources that create these items.

We have all heard the phrase “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle,” but we tend to put the emphasis on recycling



*At the Bear Buffet in August, PEEC partnered with Zero Waste Los Alamos to make waste stations, where guests sorted their waste. Food scraps went to chickens and compost piles, liquids were used to water plants, and utensils were washed and are being used again at other PEEC events!*

and tell ourselves that it's okay if we buy something as long as we recycle it when we're done. However, the words are in that order for a reason. Reduce our consumption first. Reuse things whenever possible (and avoid single-use items). And finally, recycle what we can.

The Zero Waste movement is a state of conscious consumerism. It is not about deprivation, but rather recognizing what effects our purchases have on the environment and seeking out responsible alternatives. It's about realizing that, yes, one single plastic straw does have an impact. Plastic shopping bags are completely unnecessary. Most produce can be purchased without a bag at all. Shampoo is available in solid bar form, usually wrapped in paper. Some dental floss is made with compostable silk or bamboo fiber.

Meal planning cuts down on food waste. Restaurants will gladly put leftovers in your own reusable container. Bulk bins are great for cutting down on packaging, especially when you bring your own container.

On August 24, 2018, Los Alamos had its first official Zero Waste event: the Bear Buffet at the PEEC Nature Center, as part of Bear Week. Food was served on non-disposable plates, with metal utensils. All food waste was either composted or saved for chicken feed.

Going Zero Waste doesn't have to happen all at once. Pick something you use frequently, such as plastic produce bags or paper napkins, and replace it with a sustainable alternative. After you build the habit of using that replacement, pick something else to switch out. Make it a goal to cut both your trash and your recycling waste. With a little forethought, we all can drastically cut our waste.

To learn more about Zero Waste Los Alamos and reducing your waste, visit [goo.gl/fKBWUh](https://goo.gl/fKBWUh)

## The PEEC "Sisters"

By Rachel Landman, Marketing Manager

When Terry Beery moved to Los Alamos two years ago, she knew she wanted to volunteer at PEEC. She had explored the nature center with her grandchildren while staying with family in town. After she signed up as a new volunteer, she wanted to work with a variety of different people so she could learn about docenting and meet more people.

"One day I worked with Christine Cloyd," Terry said. "I just really liked her a whole lot and I said, 'Would you mind having a second person working your shift with you?'"

Now, Terry and Christine work together as volunteer docents on Monday afternoons, a shift that Christine used to staff on her own.

"I have to say, I think it was friendship at first sight," Christine said.

Christine then introduced Terry to the Gentle Walks group and other friends in Los Alamos. The two spend time together regularly outside of PEEC, going to movies, hiking, attending book club, going out to eat,





*Terry Beery and Christine Cloyd met through volunteering together at PEEC. Now, they are close friends. If you visit the nature center on a Monday afternoon, you will likely be greeted by the two of them.*

and going to the opera with their group of friends.

“She’s an amazing person,” Terry said. “She cares about the same things I do and enjoys a lot of the same activities. She got me into the Gentle Walkers, so I’ve met a whole bunch of people there and she introduced me to her other friends. I have this wonderful social circle here in Los Alamos and it’s all because of Christine.”

When they work as docents together at the nature center, they discuss everything from current events to their third grade boyfriends. Terry has conquered her “snake-phobia” while docenting at PEEC by getting to know the snakes at the nature center, and Christine was right there to take a photo of Terry the first time she held one herself.

PEEC’s Visitor Services Manager Christa Tyson loves listening to Christine and Terry’s conversations through the office door. “One of my favorite things is when they’re together and I’m in the office and I hear them giggling together. It totally makes me smile,” Christa said.

Often when Christine and Terry are together, strangers will ask them if they are sisters. They aren’t — but Christine says she does look more like Terry than like her own sister.

“I call Christine my PEEC sister,” Terry said.

Both Christine and Terry are thankful for the time they’ve spent volunteering at PEEC and for making close friends through the process.

“We encourage everybody to become PEEC volunteers so they can make good friends like we did,” Christine said. 🐌

## Thanks for Your Feedback: From Dirt Lovers, Groupies, and Proud Members

By Katie Bruell, Executive Director

In the last issue of *Nature Notes* I asked for your help in determining what PEEC’s areas of greatest impact are. We are still collecting survey responses, both at the nature center and online at [www.pecnature.org/survey](http://www.pecnature.org/survey), but the first 150 responses are in and I thought you might like to know what they said. You should feel gratified that you are doing good work when you support PEEC — the results show so much appreciation for what you provide to children, adults, and our community.

Not surprisingly, fostering a love of and appreciation for nature, along with educational programming for children, were at the top of the list. We were happy to see that lots of people also mentioned PEEC’s talks and educational programs for adults, since sometimes the perception is that PEEC is “only for kids.” People also seem to appreciate our focus on local nature and the way we strive to build community around nature. Multiple people mentioned the passport program, the Rotary Tree House, and our summer camps as standout offerings.

Did anything surprising or unusual (or fun) come out of the survey? We had one respondent who wished we did more to prevent cats from killing songbirds. One self-identified nature center docent commented that, “The docents are great!” (We agree). One survey was signed, “A Groupie.” Another was signed “A proud member” (we hope you feel the same way). Someone commented that it’s nice to see children who are playing (without screens), interacting, and making new friends in the Children’s Discovery Area. This respondent was happy that many kids don’t want to leave the nature center when their parents say it’s time

For a summary of everything we heard, you can look at the word cloud below, which captures how people feel about PEEC and your nature center. I hope looking at the cloud makes you feel proud of what you accomplish when you support PEEC. We're so glad to have you as partners in this endeavor! 🍷



Since the new nature center opened, I've had the privilege to develop and present planetarium shows with other local astronomers. I've been having a

I believe the Board of Directors, dedicated staff, and outstanding Executive Director Katie Bruell form a vibrant team that will lead PEEC into the future. In the coming months, the Board will be





*Rick Wallace became the President of the PEEC Board of Directors in November 2018. Rick dedicates much of his spare time to working in our planetarium. He also enjoys wildlife photography and ballroom dancing!*

focusing on new ways to raise money for PEEC programs, evolving the ways we conduct programs, and exploring new ways that we can fulfill our mission of enriching people's lives by strengthening their connections to our canyons, mesas, mountains, and skies. Find out more about PEEC's staff and Board at [peecnature.org/about/staff-board/](http://peecnature.org/about/staff-board/)

Thank you for ideas and dedication to PEEC's work. ⚡



**Thursday, January 24 at 7 PM  
at the Reel Deal Theater**

**Beer and wine from Pajarito Brewpub  
Get your tickets at the Reel Deal!**

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

## PEEC Board of Directors

Rick Wallace, President  
Elizabeth Allen, Vice President  
Mouser Williams, Secretary  
Jeremy Campbell, Treasurer  
Directors: Angela Lopez, Jennifer Macke, Hari Viswanathan, Bob Walker, and Linda Zwick

## PEEC Staff

Katherine Bruell, Executive Director  
Jonathan Creel, Director of Interpretation  
Elizabeth Watts, Education Programs Director  
Beth Cortright, Adventure Programs Manager  
Rachel Landman, Marketing Manager  
Christa Tyson, Visitor Services Manager  
Terry Hatch, Gift Shop Manager  
Denise Matthews, Play-Based Education Specialist

## Inspiring New Connections

*"I've never been so close to a  
TREE before!"*

*— Aspen Elementary Kindergartener*

## Nature Center Hours:

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

## Visit us Online, too!

[www.peecnature.org](http://www.peecnature.org)  
[facebook.com/peecnature](https://facebook.com/peecnature)  
[instagram.com/peecnature](https://instagram.com/peecnature)  
[flickr.com/photos/peec\\_nature](https://flickr.com/photos/peec_nature)  
Download the free Los Alamos Trails App from the iTunes store or Google Play  
Leave us a review on Trip Advisor, Google, or Yelp



**PEEC**  
Pajarito Environmental  
Education Center

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PEEC at the Los Alamos Nature Center  
2600 Canyon Road  
Los Alamos, New Mexico 87544  
505.662.0460  
[www.pecnature.org](http://www.pecnature.org)

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*Our Nature Playtime families explored the world of bats the week of Halloween. The group gathered in a bat cave, played an echo-location game, and more.*

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## FEATURED EVENTS

Los Luceros Bird Walk **JAN. 5**  
Astronomy Potluck and Night Hike **JAN. 15**  
Backcountry Film Festival **JAN. 24**  
Video Game Night with BBBS **FEB. 19**  
Mapping New Mexico's Wetlands **MARCH 5**  
County Takeover: Putt-Putt & Games **MARCH 19**

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