



Photo by Beth Cortright

This November, we hosted a fun three-day geology tour that brought together people from all over the state, including expert and novice geologists!

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 1, WINTER 2020

PAJARITO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER, LOS ALAMOS, NM

### You Helped Get More Kids Outside!

By Katherine Bruell, Executive Director

If you're reading this newsletter, you probably already know that PEEC offers lots for adults to do. But in talking with more and more of you, I've come to learn that most of you support PEEC because of what we do for the kids. Of course, you're happy to have a place to hear an interesting talk or a group to hike and learn with, but most of all, you're glad that kids are getting out in nature.

You know these kinds of experiences are so important for children, especially today. And kids love getting outside! Let them tell you about it:

"I like that the PEEK [sic] program shows and tells you a lot about cool different things about nature."

— **Jordan**

"I really liked learning how to be a good observer. It was really fun. I hope we do it again some time."

— **Alexis**

"Thank you for the field trip. I really enjoyed it. I know a lot more now about the environment we live in. My favorite thing we learned was about the plants and why they live where they do. I want to know about a forest ecosystem." — **Kylee**

"I felt what frog's eggs feel like." — **Keith**



*A first grader shows off a pine cone found during a scavenger hunt on a recent field trip to the Los Alamos Nature Center.*

(Photo by Rachel Landman)

"My favorite part of it was when we were learning the cfs of the creek. It was fun wearing the boots and walking in the middle of the flowing water."

— **Carter**

"I loved the hiking part. My legs really hurt, but in the end it was all worth it. Climbing up we had our ups and downs, but when we got to the top it was AMAZING." — **Kylee**

"When we went hiking it smelled so good to me it smelled like fresh air." — **Malaya**

So many of you gave generously in 2019 to make sure kids keep getting these nature experiences in 2020



and beyond. Thank you for all the ways you support PEEC — through volunteering your time and wisdom, an annual gift, a membership, a planned gift, an IRA distribution, or coming to visit the nature center and participating in our programs.

Whether you gave your first gift to PEEC this year or you have been supporting us since the start in 2000, you are critical to raising up the next generation of nature stewards. All of us — staff, board, and volunteers — are grateful for your partnership. Because of you, so many children's lives have been touched by PEEC and nature in the past 20 years. And, thanks to you, so many more will get those same opportunities in the 20 years to come. 🐾

## Bobcat at the Door

By Marilyn Lisowski

What should you do? Pick it up? Try to pet it? Offer it a bite of your tortilla chip? Notice the black ear tufts, the bobbed tail, the heavy size, the big legs and paws? The right answer is: Shut the door. Fast. That's not neighborly, but this is not your neighbor's cat.

The bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) is indeed a cat, a very large cat. It weighs about 30 pounds, averaging 33 inches long without its stubby tail, and is 18 inches high. Our bobcat has dark spots on its grayish brown coat to camouflage it against rocky ledges so the bobcat can ambush its favorite meal: rabbits. Its hind legs are longer than the front ones for leaping and racing to grab its prey. Bobcats also snack on rodents, geese, pet cats, small dogs, and even small deer. They climb trees to raid a nest, swim for fish, and launch into the air to catch small birds. However, controlling the rabbit population is its primary duty in our canyons and gardens.

The bobcat descends from the Eurasian lynx. This hardy, early cat trotted across the Bering Land Bridge about two million years ago. The lynx ventured south where it was warmer and evolved into the modern bobcat as recently as 20,000 years ago. Later migrations remained separate in the north and became today's Canadian lynx.

Bobcats range over the entire United States, southern Canada, and northern Mexico. They love rocky



*This bobcat showed up at the author's back door this fall and stuck around for a photograph. These beautiful creatures are not your neighbor's cat, however, and should remain on the outside and in the wild! (Photo by Paul Lisowski)*

canyons and woodlands like ours, although they pop up near swamps in Florida and deserts in Texas. If you are very lucky, you might catch a glimpse of a bobcat in the early evening or just after dawn. In winter, prey is more active during the day. The hungry cat surreptitiously roams along with them, keeping watch for a chance to spring onto a meal.

A bobcat marks its territory — typically about five square miles — by scratching trees, urinating and defecating, or scraping with hind paws near perceived boundary lines. Reclusive and never known for social graces, a male might attack any of its species that wanders through, unless it's a receptive female during mating season. They avoid humans and will not attack them unless cornered.

The winter months of February and March are prime mating season. A pregnant female gives birth after two months. Two to four thickly furred, spotted

kittens are born in a den tucked into a canyon enclave. She raises her young without any help from the responsible male. He may hang around, but she shoos him away. She weans the kittens at two months old and by four months old takes them hunting with her. White patches located under her stubby tail and on the back of her ears reflect dim light and show the kittens where she is. She mews softly for them to follow. Before winter comes, they are hunting by themselves, happily independent but in grave danger.

Few bobcat kittens reach adulthood. Once they leave the protection of the den, they are hunted as food for great horned owls, coyotes, and cougars. An adult bobcat lives about ten years unless run over, trapped, or hunted and shot by its main enemy: humans. Disease from parasites and starvation also take a toll.

Heavy hunting in the early 1900s reduced the bobcat population. In the 1970s and 1980s, soaring prices for pelts caused increased trapping and hunting. Bobcats are now listed as “endangered” in some states and hunting them there is banned. However, in other states the population is relatively stable, and hunting and trapping are still allowed. By some measures, the population is not threatened and still classified “least concern.” New Mexico state law protects bobcats, but they may be hunted with a license and bobcat tag in winter months.

A bobcat at your door is probably not good news. At best, it’s curious about you. At worst, it’s hungry. If you leave food outside, it will likely come back for more and could be dangerous to your family and your pets. However, a bobcat is a beautiful sight. Enjoy the view through glass or screen and speak softly to it. You never know when you might need a friend, even a wild one. 🐾



# CRITTER CORNER

By Esta Lee Albright

## HOW DO SNAKES CLIMB?



How does **Foxy the Hognose Snake** climb up to lie on a high shelf on the back wall of his exhibit? Snakes climb using muscles all along their bodies. Part of the body grips the wall, using grooves in their scales for more holding power, while other parts of the body pull and push the snake along. This is called concertina movement!

## WHY DO BLACK WIDOW SPIDERS HAVE A RED MARKING?

**Natasha the Black Widow Spider** often hangs upside down in her exhibit showing off the red, hourglass shaped marking on her belly. Black widows have this bright marking as a warning to potential predators that they are toxic!



## HOW DO RED CROSSBILLS EAT?



**Red Crossbills** were a familiar site in the **Wildlife Observation Area** this year. You might have thought that these birds had damaged beaks. The long tips of the upper and lower bill don’t meet, but instead cross over each other. The Red

Crossbill bites between the scales of a pine cone and pries them apart by opening its bill and then dislodges the seed with its tongue.





*Winter could become your kids' favorite season with the right gear and some fun adventures and activities! (Photo provided by Karen Holmes)*

## How to Get Your Kids to Love Winter

By Karen Holmes

[southwestfamilyadventures.com](http://southwestfamilyadventures.com)

Winter means cold and, hopefully, snow! But with the change in seasons comes the challenge of getting your kids to want to be outside. With the right clothing, activities, and creativity, winter becomes a wonderful season for the whole family to enjoy!

### Getting the Right Gear

The number one key to enjoying winter is having the right clothing. The trick with kids is to find the right balance between warmth and comfort — Little Mikey may not be able to move ... but he's warm! Or he has all his dexterity but is back inside in two minutes because he's freezing. The biggest issue for little kids is keeping their hands and fingers cozy. Waterproof mittens are your best bet. The mittens keep hands toasty and you can sneak a hand warmer in there if needed. Even older kids and adults will fare best with fingered gloves inside warm, down mittens.

When you're adventuring out into really cold temperatures, down jackets are ideal. Although thin "fashion puffies" are popular these days, you really want the puffiest jacket you can afford for your kids. The great thing about down jackets is that they are light despite the bulk. Your kid will be warm and comfortable but not feel weighed down or have to wear a ton of layers underneath. AND down jackets are easy to cram into a backpack when not in use! For kids 10 and under, our family has discovered

some great puffies and buntings at [molehillmtn.com](http://molehillmtn.com) for a reasonable price. They have lasted our boys several years. LL Bean and Eddie Bauer also have some great options for kids. Pair a down puffy with long underwear, a fleece pullover and waterproof pants, and your kids will be set.

Since kids grow so quickly it can be expensive and tricky to buy them gear every winter. Look at thrift stores, ask friends with older kids, or use online resources like Freecycle and the Buy Nothing Facebook group to look for clothes and then pass them along. Brands like REI, Patagonia, The North Face, and more also have used gear selections.



*The author and son enjoying a family trip to a yurt. (Photo provided by Karen Holmes)*

### Our Favorite Winter Adventures

If you're confident heading out into the snow and have kids six years and older, consider booking a yurt trip for a highlight of the season. A yurt is a canvas hut equipped with a wood stove, small kitchen area, and beds. Outhouses are closeby. Guests bring their own food, sometimes bedding, and must melt snow for water. Owners often provide basic kitchen supplies, firewood, and indoor comforts. Here in Northern New Mexico, we have several options for yurts that are accessible via skis or snowshoes. Both the Little John and Long John yurts at Enchanted Forest Cross-Country Ski Area in Red River, NM are great for families. And — for a small fee, the managers will take all your gear via snowmobile! With less than 2.5 miles of travel required to each yurt, Red River offers a low-commitment opportunity if you just want to try it out (small kids can be pulled on sleds or pulks). The ski area will also rent skis and snowshoes.



*The author's family built an igloo in their backyard last winter with all the snow we had. With cookies and warm drinks for fuel, her boys enjoyed playing in it throughout the season. (Photo provided by Karen Holmes)*

If you're more experienced with backcountry and/or GPS navigation, you might check out the yurts through the Southwest Nordic Center or Spruce Hole Yurt ([yurtsogood.com](http://yurtsogood.com)) near the New Mexico-Colorado border. The treks in are not as easy as Red River, but the spectacular, remote locations of the yurts make it all worth it! Our boys are still talking about the trip we took last March. For the older teen or adult crowd, a ski adventure to one of Colorado's 10th Mountain Division huts would be intense and amazing. Advanced backcountry skills are required but the trips will make for a true mountain-high experience.

Most yurts will have sleds, a few games, and a deck of cards. Bring coloring and drawing materials, books, and your own favorite games to pass the time. Your family will love sledding, identifying animal prints, and building snowmen right outside the yurt's front door. Make sure to bring your coziest slippers and pajamas, too.

For those looking for something different yet a little closer to home, invest in an IceBox igloo maker! Our family got ours from [www.grandshelters.com](http://www.grandshelters.com). These crazy contraptions take a minute to figure out but you

can build your own backyard (or backcountry) igloo in just a couple of hours. Throw down a tarp inside and load the kids up with cookies and warm drinks. They'll hang out all day. It takes "winter camping" to another level and the neighborhood kids and parents will love you. As the igloo melts, it makes a perfect short and steep ski or sled run.

### Offering Treats and Reassurance

The most important thing is to help kids — of any age — associate snow and cold weather with FUN and PLEASURE. Hot chocolate and special treats on the trail aren't just to warm them up: they also serve as a tangible reminder for all of us that we are okay, we can get warm, we won't starve, and life is good! When you hand your kiddos their favorite candy bar or heat up a mug of yummy soup, you are reassuring them that being cold does not always have to mean being miserable. In fact, with the right gear and some fun activities, winter may become your child's favorite time of the year! 🧀

**THURSDAY, JAN 23 | 7 PM**  
**REEL DEAL THEATER | LOS ALAMOS, NM**  
 SPONSORED BY **CENTURY BANK**  
 We Bring Local to Life.  
 LEARN MORE AT [PEECNATURE.ORG/BCFF](http://PEECNATURE.ORG/BCFF)  
 BROUGHT TO YOU BY PEEC & THE REEL DEAL  
 BEER FROM PAJARITO BREWPUB & GRILL





## Looking Back on 20 Years, and Toward 20 More!

By Rachel Landman, Marketing Manager

In the fall of 1999, about a dozen community members gathered together to dream up ways to celebrate nature in Los Alamos and educate the public about the wildlife of the Pajarito Plateau.

Hundreds of people, including you, have made these dreams a reality. On Earth Day 2020, the Pajarito Environmental Education Center will officially celebrate its twentieth birthday. We've been a part of the education of thousands of school children; provided a space for hikers, birders, astronomers, and those just curious about nature to gather and share ideas; and have been recognized as a resource for environmental education across the state.

This year, our team wants to dive a little deeper into issues that matter to the Pajarito Plateau. We're planning to tell more stories through blog posts, videos, and more to entertain and educate our community about our local wildlife. We'll be offering special 2020 lectures, hikes, and other programs along with this.

We want to hear what you think, though! I'd love to hear your family's fond memories or see your favorite photographs of PEEC as we celebrate this milestone all year long. Are there mediums you'd like to see PEEC explore or topics you'd like to learn about? What do you hope to see from us in the next few years — let alone the next 20? Get in touch with me at [publicity@peecnature.org](mailto:publicity@peecnature.org), share your story, and help us plan for the future! 🌱

*Photos of PEEC's last 20 years by Michelle Altherr, Minesh Bacrania, Leslie Bucklin, Bob Walker, Rachel Landman, Thomas Graves, and Denise Matthews.*



Our volunteer Larry Deaven, a.k.a. “The Penstemon Whisperer,” with PEEC staff Rachel Landman, Katie Bruell, Jonathan Creel, and Beth Cortright. (Photo by Liz Martineau)

## Larry Deaven Recognized as New Mexico Association of Museums Volunteer of the Year

This September, Larry Deaven won the New Mexico Association of Museums Volunteer of the Year award. Larry is the mastermind behind the beautiful penstemon gardens at the nature center. He averages 120 to 150 volunteer hours per month for PEEC. We are so happy to have him on our team and that he was recognized for his dedication to our organization. 🌱

SAVE THE DATE

# 05.03.2020

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY GALA

**LOS ALAMOS NATURE CENTER**  
5 PM

FOOD FROM PIG + FIG CAFÉ

DRINKS FROM BATHTUB ROW  
BREWING CO-OP INCLUDING  
A SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY BREW

**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  
 Linda Zwick, Treasurer  
 Directors: Jeremy Campbell, Galen Gisler, Angela Lopez, Jennifer Macke, and Hari Viswanathan

## PEEC Staff

Katherine Bruell, Executive Director  
 Jonathan Creel, Director of Interpretation  
 Siobhan Niklasson, Education Programs Director  
 Beth Cortright, Adventure Programs Manager  
 Rachel Landman, Marketing Manager  
 Christa Tyson, Visitor Services Manager  
 Ashleigh Lusher, Gift Shop & Programs Coordinator  
 Denise Matthews, Play-Based Education Specialist  
 Elizabeth Watts, Educator  
 Maegan Carter, Live Animal Curator

## Learning Through Nature

*“Today's trip was a wonderful learning opportunity for our class. Students had the opportunity to make observations, notice patterns, ask questions, and make inferences about the landscape.”*  
 — 6th Grade Teacher, Kha’p’o Community School

## 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.pecnature.org](http://www.pecnature.org)  
[facebook.com/pecnature](https://facebook.com/pecnature)  
[instagram.com/pecnature](https://instagram.com/pecnature)  
[flickr.com/photos/pec\\_nature](https://flickr.com/photos/pec_nature)  
 Leave us a review on Trip Advisor, Google, or Yelp





**PEEC**  
Pajarito Environmental  
Education Center

---

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)

---

PRESORTED  
STANDARD  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
LOS ALAMOS, NM  
PERMIT NO. 152



*First graders learned about stars and constellations in the planetarium on a recent field trip to the nature center. After the lesson, they created their very own constellations! (Photo by Rachel Landman)*

---

## INSIDE

- 1 You Helped Get More Kids Outside!
- 2 Bobcat at the Door
- 3 Critter Corner
- 4 How to Get Your Kids to Love Winter
- 6 Looking Back on 20 Years, and to 20 More!
- 7 Larry Deaven Recognized for Volunteer Work

---

## FEATURED EVENTS

Fantastic Fractals **JAN. 11**

Intermediate Snowshoe Outing **JAN. 11**

Backcountry Film Festival **JAN. 23**

Family Snowshoe Outing **FEB. 8**

Wild Love: A Valentine's Celebration **FEB. 14**

The Universe in Six Strings **MARCH 13**

---