



VOLUME 30, NUMBER 3, SUMMER 2025

PAJARITO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER, LOS ALAMOS, NM

## Hummingbirds

By Bob Loy, PEEC Community Member

Ever wonder what made that trilling noise as it zipped over your head? While you suspected it was a hummingbird, you probably did not know that only the male Broad-tailed Hummingbird makes that unique sound while flying here in Los Alamos.

An often overlooked aspect of Hummingbirds is their role as pollinators. While bees get most of the pollinator glory, hummingbirds are also important pollinators. More than 160 native North American plants depend exclusively on hummingbirds for pollination, especially plants in the Fuchsia, Yucca, Currant, Sage and Aloe species. Hummingbirds are amazingly adapted pollinators. They have long, slender bills and tube-like tongues that they use to drink nectar from brightly-colored flowers; this gives them the energy they need to fuel their high metabolism. Hummingbirds drink up to two times their body weight per day. As they move from plant to plant, they carry pollen. As they pollinate the native wildflowers in parks, and the plants in your garden, hummingbirds add a splash of color to our landscapes.



Black-chinned Hummingbird  
Photo Credit: Bob Walker

Los Alamos County is the Spring breeding ground for both the Broad-tailed and Black-chinned Hummingbirds. In addition, Los Alamos hosts two other migrant

species—the Rufous and Calliope—as they venture North to their breeding grounds in the Spring, and in the Summer, as they re-fuel for their return south to Central America. Four species don't sound like a lot, but if you live east of the Mississippi, you only have one species, the Ruby-throated.

A few notes on each:

### **Broad-tailed Hummingbirds:**

- Males wings make distinct trilling sound when flying
- Highest altitude breeder in US
- Usually prefer red flowers

### **Black-chinned Hummingbirds:**

- Adaptable – broadest range of habitats
- Mating ritual – U shaped arc
- Unsocial – only come together for mating

### **Rufous Hummingbirds:**

- VERY, VERY territorial; always on patrol
- Most northern hummingbird breeder
- Females are slightly larger

### **Calliope Hummingbirds:**

- Smallest bird in continental North America
- VERY territorial; will chase hawks
- 2.5 grams = weight of a penny

Keep an eye and ear out for our Hummingbirds; many have already arrived and started to pollinate plants in your gardens without you knowing. If you decide to feed them, don't buy the fancy store nectar—make your own. A simple solution of one-part sugar to four-parts water is all it takes. No boiling or dyes required. ⚡

## A Pollinator Garden

By Terry Foxx, PEEC Co-Founder

They came again! No, not a bee or butterfly or hummingbird—my daughters. They came again this year to help me set up my pollinator garden, just like they did last year. What a beautiful Mother's Day gift, two years in a row! Couldn't be better. My youngest daughter, Kerri, admonished me for removing any plants or debris. "That's where the insects are," she said, so I left the garden as is. Every plant and every overgrown weed. I patiently waited as it became ugly, and now it's beautiful and full of life. Things are blooming and growing! My daughters are miracle workers, and you can be too!

You might be wondering, "What is a pollinator? Why are they so important? How much space do I need to help them?"

I'll answer your questions! Pollinators are insects (bees and butterflies), birds (hummingbirds and other birds), and sometimes mammals that visit various plants. Science determines which flowers are the most necessary for the ecosystem to thrive.

Why are pollinators important? 75% percent of fruits, vegetables, and nuts are pollinated. Nearly 80% of all flowering plants are pollinated. Do you like veggies? Without pollinators, they're doomed. Sadly, pollinating insects are disappearing from our planet. The population of insects has plummeted year after year. The human population has altered over 75% of the landmass. Habitat change is responsible for the loss of insects, such as bees and butterflies. Urban sprawl, the uncontrolled



Female Tarantula Hawk (NM State Insect) Nectaring on Horsetail Milkweed  
Photo Credit: Marc Bailey

expansion of urban areas, is also significant.

How much space is necessary for a pollinator garden? The fortunate answer is: not much. It can be your patio, balcony, or oodles of land. Bees, butterflies, and birds, as well as other pollinators, roam over a large area in search of food and water. One container with the right plant, or many acres of land, are both important to conservation of these essential organisms.

My husband and I sit out on our patio and enjoy our pollinator garden regularly. "There's a hummingbird, or a white-winged dove!" he'll exclaim. Even the scientist in him is learning from the effort my daughters gave to our pollinator garden. It is full of life, and I love sitting quietly on my patio!

*This story is dedicated to my wonderful daughters and the pollinator garden they knew I would enjoy! Thank you for my pollinator garden, Erin and Kerri. 🌱*



Are you looking for an opportunity to share your passion, knowledge, and expertise with your community?

We invite you to contribute your skills and enthusiasm by joining PEEC's Board of Directors! Participation in our board provides the opportunity to collaborate with dynamic people who love nature.

**The board has meetings approximately once a month on Mondays at 6 pm in person or via zoom.** Elections will be held **October 18th** during the PEECnic event.

**Learn more at [peecnature.org/board-application](https://peecnature.org/board-application).**



**PEEC**  
Pajarito Environmental  
Education Center  
Celebrating 25 Years

**LEARN MORE!**







Rho Ophiuchi  
Photo Credit: Ryan Rudolph

## Our Summer Skies

By Galen Gisler, PEEC Planetarium Volunteer & Board Member

Some things in life are eminently predictable. It will be hot in New Mexico in the summer, and we will likely have thunderstorms. The moon will go through all its phases every month—new, first quarter, full, last quarter, then new again. And when there's no moon in the evening sky (two weeks out of every lunar month), summer brings us the glorious Milky Way, stretching from Scorpius in the South all the way to Cassiopeia in the North, passing the Summer Triangle (Altair in Aquila, Vega in Lyra, and Deneb in Cygnus) along the way. Go to a nice spot far from lights to appreciate the view. Overlook Park in White Rock is a good choice, so is the Kwage Mesa trailhead area on North Mesa. Better yet, get out of town into the Jemez Mountains or north towards Abiquiu. If you have binoculars, aim them at the Milky Way starting at Scorpius and follow it, seeing how many more stars you can see than with your naked eyes. With even a small telescope you can also see the faint wispy nebulae (clouds of glowing gas) that adorn the plane of our galaxy. You might even see Rho Ophiuchi.

Also predictable, this summer we will see only two planets in the evening sky: Mars and (just barely) Mercury. Early risers may see Saturn and Venus in the morning sky, but Jupiter will be invisible, too close to the Sun. Venus has already passed its greatest morning brilliancy, but is still very bright. If you are intrepid enough to go after Saturn with a telescope in the early morning, know that its rings will be nearly edge on to us, and almost invisible. However, because of that alignment, we are now in the season of Titan shadow transits, which occur only every 15 years. There will be one every 16 days or so, from late May through September.

There will also be some meteor showers worth watching for: the Southern delta Aquarids and the alpha Capricornids, both peaking July 29-30 when the Moon is a waxing crescent, 26%

full and setting before midnight. Neither of these is as strong as the Perseid shower, which peaks August 12-13. On that night, the Moon will be a waning gibbous, 89% full and up all night, so the Perseids may disappoint.

We don't expect any bright comets this summer, but we could be surprised. Comet 24P/Schaumasse, an 8-year periodic comet, will make its closest approach in January 2026, and may be visible to binocular observers in the early morning sky this summer, setting before Venus in the West, in the constellation Taurus.

Much more spectacular, if it happens at all this summer, is the expected recurrent nova outburst of the star T Coronae Borealis (T CrB). This star is normally too faint (10th magnitude) to see without strong binoculars, but has been observed to flare up several thousand-fold on two previous occasions, in 1866 and 1946, suggesting an 80-year flare-up periodicity. Accordingly, astronomers have been watching it carefully for the last couple years, expecting it to flare again. Corona Borealis (the northern crown) is an inconspicuous constellation in the form of a rough semicircle between the more prominent constellations of Bootes and Hercules. If T CrB flares this summer, it will be easily visible to the naked eye and worth watching for on our starry summer evenings.

The County-sponsored Dark Nights, hosted by the Pajarito Astronomers, will be held at Overlook Park in White Rock on **June 28th, July 26th, August 23rd, September 20th, October 11th, and November 15th**, weather permitting. These are usually held on the Saturday evenings closest to the new moon. There will be telescopes available for public viewing. And if you bring your own telescope, and need help with it, you'll meet some friendly experts! 📡

## Book Report: Soil

By Ed Santiago, PEEC Board Member

"Someone asked me yesterday what hope looks like," muses Camille Dungy partway through her breathtaking book, *Soil*. Reflecting on bulbs planted in the fall; on anticipation; on efforts that may take months or years to yield results—if they do at all—she responds: "My garden."

*Soil* is not a gardening book. You need not have a green thumb to enjoy it, although you may be inspired to try once you dive into it. You won't learn how best to plant irises, or where or when, but you may gain new perspectives on why to do so and



on how meaningful a garden can be. You may also pick up some valuable historical knowledge, or pause once or twice to admire a beautifully crafted sentence. Dungy identifies as a poet, and her prose shows evidence of it. Her paragraphs are deliberate, rich in imagery, meaning, and insight, rewarding the careful reader.

The narrative begins in 2013, with Dungy and her family moving from Oakland to Fort Collins. Her vision for their yard—pollinator-friendly, with a large variety of native flowers—is a far cry from the herbicidally sterile lawn the previous owners left them. It will take work and time for soil to heal, for columbine and blue flax to come in, and for insects and birds to start visiting. "Changing our environment from homogeneous to diverse is rewarding. But the process can be slow."

Woven all throughout are threads of memoir, history, art, literature, biography, language. The word dandelion being removed from a kids' dictionary, perhaps replaced by blog or chatroom. The etymology of the prefix "eco." Slivers from the lives of Mary Cassatt, Thomas Nuttall, John Muir, Anne Spencer. Tales of privilege and lack. The history and chemistry of neonicotinoids. And, significantly, Dungy herself and her family and their lives: their Covid experience; breathing smoke-saturated air while wildfires rage nearby (sound familiar?); moments of learning and imperfection and growth, in and around and away from the garden. "It is difficult to survive, much more difficult to thrive, without a community on which to depend."

Dungy's efforts—and hope—are rewarded. (This is not a spoiler: from the beginning she writes of the purples and golds and magentas, whites and browns that thrive in her garden and in her life. She has a finely tuned awareness of color). The book is about the journey, and it's a lovely one. ⚡

The One Los Alamos Book Club meets every other month at the nature center.  
<https://linktr.ee/OneLosAlamos>

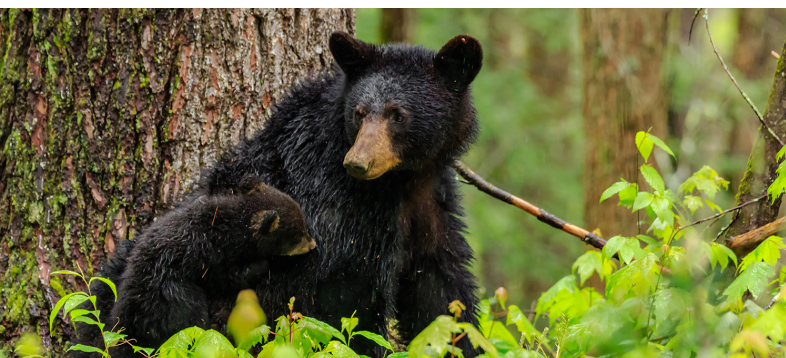


Photo Courtesy: Leslie Bucklin



Photo Courtesy: Leslie Bucklin

## What Should You Do if You See a Black Bear?

By Leslie Bucklin, Los Alamos County Communications

Seeing a black bear in the wild is an unforgettable experience. While bear attacks are very uncommon and black bears rarely become aggressive when encountered, knowing how to respond if you do see a bear will help you relax and appreciate these special moments.

If you see a bear before it notices you, stand still, observe, and enjoy, then quietly move away. Never approach bears or try to creep in closer for a close-up photo or a better look.

If a bear sees you, stay calm, stay with your group, and back away slowly. Never run; running can trigger a chase response, and you can't outrun a bear.

If a bear approaches, stand still, hold your ground, wave your arms, and yell until it leaves. "Hey Bear" is a popular choice. If a bear continues to approach, use your bear spray.

In the unlikely event a black bear makes physical contact with you, fight back aggressively with anything at hand. Never play dead. People have successfully deterred bears with hiking poles, rocks, water bottles, binoculars, and even their bare hands. ⚡

**Learn more here:**

**Bears and Trash Management**



**Bear Proofing Your Property**





# Keeping Bears Wild: Composting

By Nirankar Horak, Land of Enchantment Wildlife Foundation (LEWF) Executive Director

For years, there have been many conversations about bears and other wildlife in Los Alamos. One of the many questions that continues to be discussed is how can we reduce interactions and keep wildlife wild? We have seen great progress with bear resistant roll carts and reducing wildlife feeding. While this has helped tremendously, we still have issues with bears coming into town due to attractive smells. Bears spend all their time after hibernation getting ready to hibernate. They must eat significant quantities of food to ensure they can survive hibernation and don't need to come out early in search of food. Due to their high food drive, they search high and low for reliable food sources to help them reach their food goals.

Although Los Alamos has reduced some of the easy access to food, there are still other places that smell incredible to a bear-like compost. We may think of it as just our scraps, but bears see the opportunity for easy access to food. They can smell compost bins for many miles and thus come into town looking for the great smelling food. Because many compost bins contain food scraps, yard waste, and other organic matter, there are a lot of great smells to attract bears. The bins become even more enticing when there are worms in them!

With all that said, do we need to get rid of our bins? The simple answer is NO. How do we deter the bears? Add a hot wire fence around compost areas. We have seen enormous success in beekeepers protecting their beehives with a hot wire and we encourage homeowners to add it to their compost areas, chicken coops, and any other areas we would like to deter bears. There are a lot of systems that can be purchased to fit the needs of the homeowners. 🐻

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## BEAR DINNER

FRI, AUG 22 | 5 to 7 PM  
REGISTRATION REQUIRED!



## BEAR FEST

SAT, AUG 23 | 10 AM to 2 PM  
FREE!



## LOS ALAMOS NATURE CENTER

2600 CANYON RD, LOS ALAMOS, NM 87544



[PEECNATURE.ORG/EVENTS](http://PEECNATURE.ORG/EVENTS)



Jenna Stanek Volunteering at PEEC's 25th Anniversary Earth Day Festival with Bee City Los Alamos  
Photo Credit: Casey Lundberg

## Excerpt: Jenna Stanek Selected By Friends Of Bandelier As Recipient Of 11th Annual Dorothy Hoard Stewardship Award

By Friends of Bandelier

"When [Jenna Stanek] moved to Los Alamos in 2018 to work at Los Alamos National Laboratory as a biologist, Jenna soon noted that egg-laden milkweeds would be affected by mowing operations. She took immediate action, collecting and saving the eggs, taking them to the Pajarito Environmental Education Center (PEEC) where she initially fostered them in a cage. She then transferred the eggs into an outdoor enclosure hatching the butterflies and releasing them. Since then, she has been involved at PEEC on a continuing basis, engaging the community in Monarch recovery efforts. The Monarch is being considered for Federal Protection under the Endangered Species Act. A ruling is expected in December of 2025.

Jenna has been active in efforts to save butterfly eggs and habitat, establishing a permanent outdoor butterfly cage and then a pollinator garden at the Los Alamos Nature Center for PEEC. She has conducted research on and monitored Monarch migration. In Los Alamos, Jenna documented Monarch and milkweed locations in relation to areas of local mowing to protect them and helped to establish Best Management Practices for mowing. She has provided significant educational outreach at PEEC, elementary schools, and at events such as the National Pollinator Week at Bandelier, where she will demonstrate Monarch recovery techniques this June.

Jenna is a founding member of the Bee City Los Alamos and continues to serve on its committee. Through Bee City, she has worked with the county to derive a species list and seed mix of appropriate native pollinator plants. She is a part of Bee City's

iNaturalist project to document native local pollinators and encourages others to participate. Jenna's efforts have shown positive results in our community and beyond, both long term and sometimes within the same season.

During peak butterfly season in summer, Jenna will often be at PEEC either tending the milkweed gardens or providing community outreach. During the late summer and early fall, she volunteers at elementary schools. Not only does she care for the gardens, fostering the success of the milkweed, she cares for the children of the community teaching them in an impactful way. Jenna makes learning fun and lasting. The kids are excited! Imagine their joy and fulfillment in caring for eggs, fostering their growth into caterpillars and chrysalides, then eventually being part of their release as butterflies. Jenna is equipping and motivating young people to go forth as enthusiastic stewards of conservation and the environment and teaching them that each of us can have an impact.

Jenna is passionate about protecting Monarchs and all wildlife. Her outreach and ongoing education in their regard and her mentoring of future stewards, have been heartfelt and thorough. She asks that we share that she is hopeful about the ultimate success of Monarch butterfly conservation if we all work together; Monarch butterflies are one of those species where even a small local planting of native plants including milkweed can have a big impact.

*The Friends of Bandelier, founded in 1988 by local naturalist Dorothy Hoard, provides funding for stewardship, education, and conservation projects at Bandelier National Monument. The Dorothy Hoard Stewardship Award was established after her passing to honor individuals who demonstrate effective stewardship of the natural or cultural resource of Bandelier and the Pajarito Plateau. For stories of previous award recipients, and for information on the Friends of Bandelier, visit their website at [www.bandelierfriends.org](http://www.bandelierfriends.org).*



Plaque Honoring Dorothy Hoard Added to Monarch Exhibit at Los Alamos Nature Center  
Photo Credit: Casey Lundberg



**Grow Native Plants ~ Support Local Pollinators**

**BEECITYLOSALAMOS.ORG**



# Love Nature and Community? Join our Volunteer Team!

**Opportunities:** Docents, Bird Feeders, Animal Caretakers, Gardeners & More.

**Make a Difference!** Gain experience while connecting with nature and your community.



## Questions?

Email our Visitor Services Manager Nic at [nicole@peechnature.org](mailto:nicole@peechnature.org) or scan the QR code.



Volunteers chatting with Visitors at PEEC's 25th Anniversary Earth Day Festival  
Photo Credit: Casey Lundberg

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

## PEEC Board of Directors

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"We enjoyed the [Planetarium! It's] an excellent source to learn more about the stars and galaxies."

— Los Alamos Nature Center Visitor

## Nature Center hours:

Monday: 10 – 4  
Tuesday: Closed  
Wednesday: 10 – 4  
Thursday: 10 – 4  
Friday: 10 – 4  
Saturday: 10 – 4  
Sunday: Closed

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Pups Posing at Bear Fest in 2024  
Photo Credit: Casey Lundberg


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## UPCOMING EVENTS

-  Butterfly Walk **JULY 26**
-  Bear Dinner **AUG 22**
-  Bear Fest **AUG 23**
-  Geologic Tour to St. Peter's Dome **SEPT 9**

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