

Echoes from the Canyon is a regular publication of the Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists (SCVN).

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About SCVN's New Newsletter *Echoes from the Canyon*!

Naturalist Jim

Echoes from the Canyon is an electronic newsletter for non-SCVN members. Published on the 15th of each month, it describes a variety of activities at Sabino Canyon and the Santa Catalina Ranger District. Included are detailed descriptions of our nature walks and hikes, educational programs, and suggestions for books to read. We also share pictures from our beautiful photo gallery that capture the wonders of our region's flora and fauna.

A New Program...

Naturalist Jan

The SCVN communications team is excited to announce a new program. Called the Ambassador Outreach, its purpose is to raise awareness of SCVN with the general public and to attract a more diverse volunteer base for the training program.

Many of the Public Interpretation (PI) events now have an accompanying Ambassador's table. This is a great way for visitors to sign up for our fantastic public newsletter, *Echoes From the Canyon*, and to learn more about SCVN and Sabino Canyon.

Our plan is that Ambassador Outreach will be ongoing, especially during the Canyon's busiest months. We also plan to do tabling at public events and various presentations at organizations.



Naturalists Cheryl and Cathy at Shuttle Stop 8 with a mountain lion display and the Ambassador table.

The SCVN Book Review: *Wild Foods* by Kevin Dahl

Book Review by Naturalist Rebecca

Our Sonoran Desert has an assortment of cacti and bushes that provide people as well as animals with nutritious fruits, berries, and spices. The plants that are successful in this hot, dry desert have adapted to these conditions and provide food not only for the rich wildlife that resides here, but for also current tribal communities.

Saguaro fruit, prickly pear fruits and stems, mesquite pods, wolfberry, mulberry, hackberry, wild grape, and chiltepins each offer its own nutrition in terms of fiber, carbohydrates, vitamins, and protein.

If you haven't eaten a ripened saguaro or prickly pear fruit, this book may give you pause to consider. Within the pages are procedures and methods to ensure a tasty delight.

Hackberry, wolfberry (also known as goji), mulberry, and graythorn bushes provide sweet ripe berries, each with a fruiting time of its own. Strange indeed is that wild grapes grow here as well.

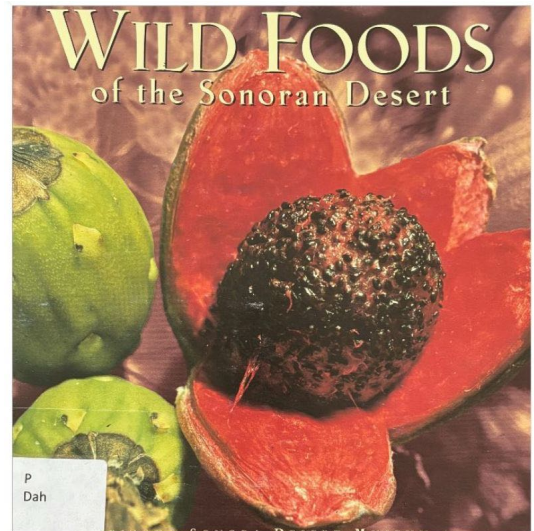
Then there is the wild chili, or its Mexican name, the chiltepin. Large populations are found and protected near the Tumacacori Mountains. Presenting red berries above their leaves, chiltepins provide our feathered friends (cardinals, mockingbirds, thrashers, pyrrhuloxia, and house finches) nutritious meals full of vitamins, fiber, and protein.

Cultivating native crops such as the tepary bean, corn, squash, sunflowers, and amaranth can be a wonderful addition to any vegetable garden. It is noted that these foods have provided the Tohono O'odham with 10 to 40 percent of their annual food needs, with the the rest from the wild foods listed above. Using traditional farming methods and planting seeds near the mouths of large washes, the Hohokam (meaning "those that are no longer with us" and the ancient culture prior to the Tohono O'odham) were known to cultivate corn, squash, beans, and agaves.

Don't miss the last page as you will find assorted uses of the plants, such as cradleboard frames and bows from hackberry, corn cobs for fuel, and husks for tamales.

Note: Native Seeds/SEARCH, a non-profit committed to preserving rare crop varieties, will have many of the above-mentioned native seeds for your garden. If you plant the corn seeds and find a strange fungus growing on some ears, take heart; it is considered a relished treat!

You can find this book at the Pima County Library.



It's Family Fun Time

Naturalist Adora-Marie



Family Fun Hikes are new events held at the Canyon the last Saturday of the month at 10 a.m.

All hikes are family friendly and nature themed. The first hike, held February 22, was titled “Hearts and Horses.” Twenty-two kids and their grown ups were divided into two groups, depending on the children's ages and walking ability. Everyone hiked part or all of three short trails starting at the Visitor Center.

The hikes included a scavenger hunt and a meet up with naturalist Jean and friends, who brought three horses: Joxer, Monster, and Mateo. The children and families were entranced by stories about the history of horses in Sabino Canyon and enjoyed looking at the horses' hooves and trappings used to ride, such as horse shoes. Several brave children patted the noses of the friendly horses. The big group of horses/kids/adults attracted many curious hikers on this busy day in the Canyon.

Along with Jean and her friends, a shout out is due to naturalists Nancy, Dan, Paula, and Jody. The next hike — “Spring has Sprung” — will be March 29, and we’ll talk about seasonal changes in Sonoran Desert animals and plants as spring approaches.

What's Blooming Now

Naturalist Trainee Kathy

There's a shrub flowering in Sabino Canyon that's paid no attention to the lack of rain this season. It seems the coursetia (*Coursetia glanulosa*), also known as baby bonnets, is determined to bloom despite drought conditions.

Coursetia is in the legume family and has pea-shaped flowers that are a beautiful two-toned white and yellow with a pink accent. They get their common name because some people think the flowers look like little baby bonnets. Take a walk up the main paved road in the canyon and you'll see groups of blooming coursetias that also look a lot like spring-blossoming apple trees. How beautiful is that?

Just as Arizona gets many rare bird species found nowhere else in the U.S, the same goes for some plants, including coursetia. It's only found in southeast Arizona between 2,000 and 4,000 feet elevation, mostly in washes and dry rocky slopes.

Once established, coursetias are heat and drought tolerant and hardy to about 20 degrees Fahrenheit. They have been underused in landscaping but would make a great accent or background shrub. Its ability to fix nitrogen would eliminate the need to fertilize.



While taking photos, I noticed that a couple of coursetias had verdins (tiny birds with a yellowish-green head) pecking away at the flowers. The verdin must have been thankful for the blossom nectar when nothing else is blooming. Native bees, hummingbirds, and small mammals also make use of the plant's nectar and seeds. Funereal duskywing butterflies use coursetia as a larvae host plant.

As far as coursetia's ethnobotany goes, a gum-like substance obtained from the plant was used to mix with adobe blocks and also to make jars of syrup air tight. I couldn't find any medicinal uses for the plants.

So glad to see this shrub in Sabino Canyon. It truly is a desert survivor!

Critter Corner - Greater Roadrunner

Naturalist Trainee Kathy



The Greater Roadrunner (*Geococcyx californianus*) is one of the most iconic symbols of the desert but also thrives in other habitats, such as juniper-oak woodlands, grasslands, and even densely populated areas. It can adapt to many habitats because it will eat just about anything, especially critters people (except naturalists, of course!) love to hate, like spiders, mice, scorpions, and snakes.

Apparently, *The Road Runner Show* (1949-1973), starring Wile E. Coyote and The Road Runner, was dropped by ABC because of its excessively aggressive scenes. Those scenes are mild compared to a real roadrunner catching and killing its prey. It's not pretty. They will do anything they can to break an animal's body before swallowing it whole. Roadrunners are toothless, so it's not uncommon to see a lizard tail hanging from a roadrunner's mouth while the rest of the lizard is being digested.

Some Greater Roadrunner fun facts:

- They are fast! Roadrunners can run up to 21 miles per hour. They have to run fast because they can't fly very well. They aren't as fast as a coyote, which can run up to 45 miles per hour in short bursts, so Wile E. could have caught the Road Runner if he had run and not relied on ACME products. The main predator of roadrunners seem to be raptors, not coyotes.

- They have zygodactyl feet — two toes pointing forward and two back, making their footprint look like an X. You wouldn't be able to tell if the roadrunner was coming or going, so don't try to follow one.
- Roadrunners have heat-absorbent skin and can often be seen sitting with their backs facing the sun, feathers raised, to warm up after a cold night.
- Unless it's mating season, you won't see roadrunners hanging out together. They just aren't that social. They are monogamous, though, and both parents will incubate the eggs; females incubate during the day and males during the night. Mating begins in February-early March and nest building soon after. Nests are made of large sticks and are 3 to 10 feet off the ground in bushes or cholla cactus.
- Mating season is also the time you may actually hear a roadrunner. They make a cooing sound, thought to be a signal to a mate or an attractant call. They also bark, whine, and rattle but don't beep-beep. I have recently heard cooing down by the dam, and I know a roadrunner hangs out there.

And lastly, as a kindness to Greater Roadrunners, do not feed them. They are often seen panhandling, which means they are used to being fed by visitors. Feeding a roadrunner could make it sick or habituate it to begging, which can lead to aggressive behavior.

Ten Years Ago at Sabino Canyon

Naturalist Marty



Anyone remember what a flowing stream looks like? This photo was taken by SCVN nature photographer, Marty Horowitz, at the Sabino Canyon Dam in early February 2015.

Wildlife of the Canyon Skulls, Pelts, and Skeletons

Naturalist Amy



“What animal has this huge skull with the enormous canine teeth?” was one of my questions for Naturalist Mark, regular staffer at the Skulls, Pelts, Wildlife of Sabino table in front of the Visitor Center. Volunteer naturalists in the Canyon's kindergarten and elementary school programs frequently show students bobcat, rabbit, deer, coyote, javelina, and owl skulls as part of the weekly field trip experiences. None of the other skulls was as big and intimidating as this one.

“I’ll ask you the same thing I ask all the visitors who want to know that answer. What do you think it is?” said Mark.

"Hmmm....good question." Mark was challenging me to think for myself. By the size of the skull and teeth, I made a guess. “It must be a bear,” I replied.

“It’s a grizzly bear,” said Mark. “The last Arizona grizzly bear was shot and killed in 1936 in eastern Arizona.” Noted writer and environmentalist, Aldo Leopold, describes the killing of this grizzly, nicknamed “Old Bigfoot,” in his classic collection of conservation essays *A Sand County Almanac*. Less than 100 years ago, grizzlies roamed freely from the Chiricahua Mountains near the Mexican border to the White Mountains of eastern Arizona.

You can visit with Naturalist Mark and test your knowledge of the animal artifacts at the table on Tuesdays. You can view the grizzly bear skull plus plenty of other skulls, skeletons, pelts, bats, snakes, and spiders to challenge your curiosity.

Upcoming Continuing Education Topics for Naturalists

If you become a volunteer naturalist, you will be able to attend fascinating presentations taught by experts in their fields. Here are examples scheduled for this spring:

- Geologist Bob Scarborough will talk about the interior of the earth and how Sabino Canyon was formed.
- **Rock Art in the American Southwest**, by Steven J. Phillips
- **Saguaros**, by Bill Peachey
- **Sabino Canyon Archaeology Survey Results**, by Sara Anderson and Allen Dennoyer

To see upcoming events open to the public like nature walks, hikes, and public interpretation events, visit the link below to go to Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists' events calendar.

<https://sabinonaturalists.org/calendar/>

Echoes from the Canyon is published monthly except July and August by members of the Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists. If you are interested in learning about the Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalist program or about educating the public and/or children in learning about the flora and fauna of this unique riparian environment of the Sonoran Desert, please visit <https://sabinonaturalists.org/join-us/>



[Sabino Canyon](#) Naturalists



Sabino Naturalists Website
