



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

Contents

Family Friendly Bird Walks in the Canyon

Not Quite Identical Cousins - Pyrrhuloxias and Cardinals

Summertime Activities

Book Review: A Field Guide to Desert Holes

Another Fun School Year at the Canyon

Carpenter Ants Do What?

Family Fun Hikes

Public Interpretation Spotlight: Summer Lizard Walk



Family Friendly Bird Walks

Naturalist Jean

Summer is for the birds! Many birds visit Sabino Canyon just for the summer.



Photo of hooded oriole by Naturalist Marty Horowitz

Join Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists at 7:30 a.m. for an easy 2-hour walk on both dirt paths and asphalt roads. **Dates: May 18, May 25, June 8, June 15, and June 22.** Invite your family, friends, and neighbors, too.

You will learn the sights and sounds of the birds of the Canyon. This is a family friendly walk — kids are welcome!

We won't ignore the questions of experienced birders looking for something special. We have binoculars to borrow if you don't have any. What bird is making that sound? Which bird made that nest? Join us and find out!

Meet near the flagpole in front of the Visitor Center. Please bring plenty of water, and wear a hat and sun protection. Open-toed shoes or

sandals are not recommended. Children under the age of 18 must be accompanied by an adult.

Not Quite Identical Cousins



Photo of a pyrrhuloxia, taken earlier this spring by Naturalist Marty Horowitz.

According to Naturalist Marty Horowitz, pyrrhuloxias are close cousins to cardinals (they are in the same genus, *Cardinalis*, sharing a common ancestor) and sing the same songs. While cardinals are widespread, says Marty, the pyrrhuloxia's range is primarily in the desert southwest and northern Mexico. The male pyrrhuloxia and female cardinal are visually similar - the stocky yellow bill of the pyrrhuloxia separates it from the red, triangular bill of the cardinal.

[Click here](#) to see a photo of a pyrrhuloxia and a female cardinal side by side.

Summer Activities

Naturalist Cathy

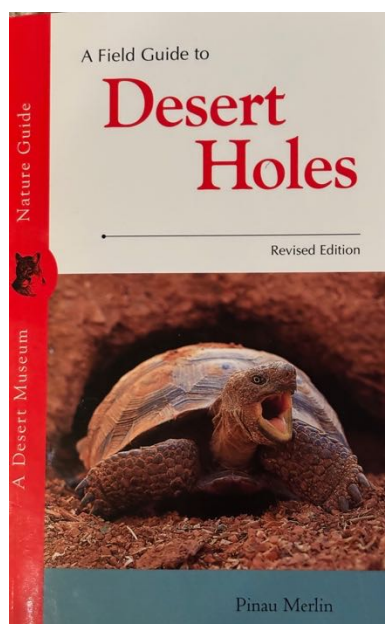
Summer events are starting soon!

- **Lizard Walks:** 8 a.m., first Saturday of each month, May through October
- **Summer Storytime:** 9 a.m., Wednesdays in June and July. Located in the Javelina Room in the Sabino Canyon Visitor Center
- **Mt. Lemmon Friday Hikes:** 9 a.m., Fridays in June, July, and August
- **Family Fun Hikes:** 10 a.m., fourth Saturday of each month
- **Ask a Mountain Naturalist:** 8 a.m. to noon, Fridays in June, July, and August
- **Family Friendly Bird Walks:** 7:30 a.m., May 18, and 25; June 8, 15, and 22

Check the calendar at sabinonaturalists.org for location and more information. Everyone is welcome!

A Field Guide to Desert Holes by Pinau Merlin

Book review by Naturalist Rebecca, SCVN Librarian



Walking around Sabino Canyon, you can't help but notice a variety of holes, divots, depressions, and shelters along paths, around rock crevices, and under trees, bushes, or sandy areas.

This book has over 50 full-color photographs and 60 drawings of desert animals, their holes and tracks. It tells you what animals live in various-sized ground holes, or in depressions, mounds, and elevated holes, plus what animals tend to borrow and modify shelters built by others. Reptiles, insects, and many other desert animals find safety and shelter in these holes.

Below are just a few of the most common holes you may have seen:

- Pocket mice make mounds of dirt which are pocked with many holes creating a Swiss cheese effect. Their holes range from one-half inch to one-and-one-half inches in diameter.
- Many one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half-inch holes (often found out in the open) are created by the social, round-tailed ground squirrel.

- The Harris' antelope squirrel digs two to two-and-a-half-inch holes, with no mound of dirt, and often burrows under cactus. Although many holes may appear to be inhabited, only one hole is used by this solitary squirrel; it often leaves tell-tale evidence of small bits of uneaten cactus near its entrance.
- The white-throated wood rat or packrat excavates multiple holes of three to five inches at the base of a prickly pear, mesquite tree, or cholla cactus. Tell-tale signs also include large mounds of sticks, cactus joints, and debris outside its hole.
- Grasshopper mice can build small one-and-one-half inch holes at the base of a plant or bush but are found more often in open areas with sparse grass. They are fierce predators of pinacate beetles, scorpions, and other mice!
- Kangaroo rats may build up to twelve large mounds where three-to six-inch tall oval holes are dug in sandy open desert scrub. They are found where grasses are dispersed among mesquite and creosote. Kangaroo rats are solitary and will fight if they encounter one another.
- The Botta gopher is found in riparian areas and washes, although there is little evidence of their entrance hole. They live mostly underground much of the year in extensive underground tunnels, and you may spy nearby vegetation disappearing as the gopher pulls it under. Count yourself lucky if you see one pop his head out to clear a lump of dirt from its tunnel.
- Abandoned holes can be occupied by borrowers such as bumblebees, spiders, lizards, scorpions, snakes, Gila monsters, crickets, centipedes, burrowing owls, and even desert tortoises.

Desert holes are everywhere. This guide will help you determine who is behind all that digging. Find it at your local book store, online or as an in-library use only book at Pima County Public Libraries.

Another Fun School Year at the Canyon

Naturalist Kathy

It's hard to believe that the Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists are already saying goodbye to another school year. Time to pause and reflect on all we've accomplished. Was the children's interest peaked during the field trip? Did they leave the canyon knowing more than when they arrived? Did they have fun?

It being my first year as a SCVN trainee, I saw the positive impact the naturalists have on the children. Yes, the children were engaged and interested and yes, I'm sure they left feeling a little more connected to the natural environment around them — all while having a great time!

What keeps the children engaged are the hands-on activities like *Strike it Rich*, *Critter Scene Investigation*, and *Predator/Prey*. There's also a puppet show and nature walk that the children love. And guess what? Even though the naturalists take teaching seriously, they're having a good time too!

The school field trip program serves kindergarten through elementary-aged children, and each class is about two hours long. The program runs from October through April.

If you would like to be a part of helping shape a child's future, check out SCVN's school programs at <https://sabinonaturalists.org/what-we-do/school-programs/>.



Kindergarten kids listening to every word from a bobcat.

Carpenter Ants Do What?

Naturalist Cathy

Carpenter ants are not something you want around the house, but they are very helpful with forest decomposition. Hooray for that. But did you know that some carpenter ant species are farmers?

According to entomologist.net, “Ants may not seem like traditional farmers, but several species, particularly carpenter ants, have a true agricultural practice: farming aphids. These ants cultivate aphids primarily to harvest a sugary secretion known as honeydew, which is produced when aphids feed on plant sap. The relationship between ants and aphids is mutually beneficial: ants protect aphids from predators, while the aphids reward them with honeydew.

“In this farming process, ants stimulate aphids to release honeydew by stroking them with their antennae. Interestingly, some aphid species have become so reliant on their ant caretakers that they have lost the ability to excrete waste on their own, relying entirely on ants for milking. Carpenter ants, while also predatory, prefer farming aphids, treating them similarly to dairy cows. They safeguard their 'herd,' and even remove sick aphids from their ranks to ensure a healthy supply of honeydew.”

[Click here](#) to watch a short truth-is-stranger-than-fiction video about carpenter ants.



Naturalist Cathy photographed this lone carpenter ant (*Camponotus vicinus*) on the Sunset Trail on Mt. Lemmon in April.

Family Fun Hikes

Naturalist Adora-Marie

We've had three Family Fun Hikes in this inaugural year. A total of 63 adults and 36 children attended and admired the beauty of Sabino Canyon. Most recently, hikers enjoyed panning for garnets, playing with magnetite, grinding mesquite beans, and playing ancient games. The next hike will be May 31, and we'll move to Bear Wallow to listen for birds, do forest animal-inspired yoga, and enjoy the shade of cool pine and maple trees.



Naturalists help family fun hiking kids grind mesquite beans like the Hohokam did and find garnets and magnetite. (Photos by Naturalist Bev and Naturalist Holli)

Public Interpretation Spotlight: Summer Lizard Walk

By Naturalist Bill

When: The first Saturday of each month, May through October, at 8 a.m.

How long have you been doing this PI event? Since 2009. That summer, Larry Jones (AKA Larry the Lizard Guy), a zoologist by education and an employee of the Forest Service, made interested SCVN members an offer we could not turn down. He took us into Sabino Canyon to learn about reptiles. He received a grant to purchase binoculars SCVN could loan to members of the public for use in education programs. Not only did we do lizard walks for the general public, but for several summers we ran a program for children attending summer day camp for Tucson Parks and Recreation.

Why is this subject matter of interest to you? Even my Golden Retriever "loves" lizards. Who hasn't been captivated watching these small critters running around our yards? If we are lucky we might even see a beautiful venomous Gila Monster to safely photograph if we do not get too close. As an amateur photographer, I have been fortunate to photograph thousands of lizards, often beautifully colored during mating season. You can never get too many photos.

What is your favorite part of providing this event? As with any nature walk that I lead, I am always interested in meeting people from all over the world. On one walk, I met a former neighbor of mine from when I lived in Winnipeg many years ago. I had no idea that he was visiting Tucson until he showed up on my walk. On some walks, we have been fortunate to have an eleven-year-old who knows more about reptiles than I ever will. Seeing a rattlesnake is always stimulating.

What is the most interesting/odd/funny/unusual question you've ever been asked? People always seem to be interested in how long lizards live. They are also interested in safety issues concerning venomous critters (e.g., what to do if you get bitten—don't try to catch the snake and bring it with you to the ER).

Pro Tip: Make sure to drink plenty of water. It does not do any good to leave it in the bottle. Don't be afraid to turn around if you are feeling the heat.



Gravid (pregnant) Elegant Earless Lizard (*Holbrookia elegans*)
(photo by Naturalist Kathy)



Echoes from the Canyon is published monthly except June, 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