



September 2025

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

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Welcome Back to the Canyon!

Despite Tucson's hot and dry summer, the Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists (SCVN) were busy providing educational and fun experiences for the brave souls who remained in Tucson for the "monsoon season." There were monthly *lizard walks* in the early morning, *Summer Storytime* for the kiddos in June and July, *Mt. Lemmon hikes*, and a new event, the *Sabino Canyon Bird Walk*, which was very popular despite the heat.

A couple of newer events at the Palisades Visitor Center on Mt. Lemmon, *Ask a Mountain Naturalist* and *Bird the Lemmon*, were a big hit.

Our members were out and about participating in special events like Summerhaven's Firewise Block Party, Summerhaven's 4th of July parade, and Buffalo Soldier Corp Kids Camp. Other naturalists shared their expertise with organizations, including a geology display for young runners at Run with the Roosters, a preschool presentation about mountain lions, and a talk about Candid Critters at the Mt. Lemmon Women's Club.

It was a busy summer and we thank everyone who came to our summer events. For info on what we have planned for the fall and winter, check out the [Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists calendar](#).



Naturalist Nancy and Naturalist Holli tell kids about javelinas at Summer Storytime. (Photo by Naturalist Ricki)

Fall Activities

- **Plant and Bird Walk:** Tuesdays 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. starting September 28. Meet at the visitor center.
- **Intro to Sabino's Geology and Nature Walk:** Tuesdays 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. starting November 4. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Panning for Garnets Walk:** Thursdays 10 a.m.- 12 a.m. starting October 23. Check website on Thursday morning to confirm both location and time.
- **Let's Explore Sabino Hike:** 2nd and 4th Fridays 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. starting November 14. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Friday Trail Hike:** 1st and 3rd Fridays 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. starting October 3. See calendar for meetup location.
- **Lizard Walk:** Saturday October 4 8:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. Last lizard walk of the season. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Sabino Canyon Bird and Nature Walk:** 1st and 3rd Sundays 8 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. starting October 5. Meet at the Visitor Center
- **Saguaro - A Desert Giant Walk.** 2nd and 4th Sundays 10 a.m. - 12 a.m. starting November 2. Meet at the Visitor Center

Educational Presentations

- **Skulls and Pelts, Wildlife of Sabino Table:** Tuesdays 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 a.m. starting October 7. Meet at the Visitor Center
- **Ancient Cultures Table:** Fridays 9 a.m. - 11 a.m., October 17 starting November 7. Meet at the Visitor Center
- **Ask a Naturalist Table:** Saturdays 10 a.m. - 12 a.m. starting November 1. Meet at the Visitor Center
- **Mountain Lion Table:** Saturday September 27 8 a.m. - 10 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center
- **FitKidz Classic:** Saturday September 27 6:45 a.m. - 9 a.m. at the Visitor Center. This event is for all ages and features information about wildlife in Sabino Canyon.
- **Quail Corner for Kids:** 2nd and 4th Sundays 9 a.m. - 11 a.m. starting October 12. Meet at the Visitor Center

What's Blooming Now?



One of the last cactus to bloom in the canyon is the fishhook barrel cactus, *Ferocactus wislizeni*, also called compass cactus because some of the larger plants lean toward the southwest. It usually grows two to three feet tall but can reach up to ten feet tall. The taller leaning fishhooks sometime become uprooted but have been known to survive six years without water. A hard frost is usually the killer of these magnificent cactus but don't despair; the dead flesh provides a home for 35 species of beetles.

They can live to be 100 years old and grow at elevations from 1,000 to 4,000 feet. Those intimidating spines actually serve a purpose other than protecting the plant from predators. They reflect UV radiation and protect the plant's fleshy parts. The deep side grooves allow the plant to swell and store water without tearing.

The flowers are orange, red, or yellow and attract pollinators like our native cactus bee, *Diadasia rinconis*. The fruit provides food for deer, javelina, and small mammals, and the seeds attract birds.

Fun Facts:

- The spines were used as fish hooks by indigenous peoples.
- Barrel cactus produce a sweet nectar that attracts ants, many of which are aggressive or stinging. The ants help protect the cactus from insect predators.
- You will rarely find it growing in a wash or dry creek bed because they like to grow in rocky ridges, bajadas, and other places that collect water.

Time to get up to the canyon to check out the blooming barrels!

What's in a name? Naturalist Cathy

Rivoli's Hummingbird:

- In 1829 this hummingbird was named in honor of the Duke of Rivoli (an area in Italy), who was an amateur ornithologist.
- In 1983 it was renamed to Magnificent hummingbird.
- In 2017 the Magnificent hummingbird was split into two different species; the one found in southeast Arizona is again called the Rivoli's hummingbird.

Will the American Ornithological Society, which is working to rename birds that are named after people, once again rename this hummingbird? Stay tuned.

This sassy fella is named for a duke but acts like he's King of the Nectar!

Fun Fact: The Rivoli's hummingbird is the second largest hummingbird north of Mexico.

Stop by the Palisades Visitor Center on Mt. Lemmon to see this beauty as well as other birds enjoying the many feeders.



Reds

Fun facts about javelinas: no, they're not pigs—they're peccaries, a different family of animals. The babies are called reds, and a group of javelinas is called a squadron.



(Photo by Naturalist Laurie)

Evening Raiders



Throughout southern Arizona, during late summer and early fall, people are waking up to find their hummingbird feeders completely drained. The culprits? Migrating Mexican long-tongued bats and lesser long-nosed bats. They're just two of the three nectar feeding bats that reside in the U.S. part of the year. The third species, the Mexican long-nosed bat, migrates just north of the Mexican border into Texas but due to a recent citizen science

project that uses DNA from swabbed feeders, scientists have found that the Mexican long-nosed bat is now coming into Arizona. To read more about this exciting news, see Bat Conservation International's [website](https://www.batcon.org/press/mexican-long-nosed-bats-discovered-in-arizona/)<https://www.batcon.org/press/mexican-long-nosed-bats-discovered-in-arizona/>.

In the spring, nectar feeding bats rely on nectar corridors, like Sabino Canyon, for sustenance on their long journey from central Mexico to their summer roosts in Arizona. Other species such as hummingbirds, moths, and butterflies rely on the nectar-providing saguaros and agaves in the spring as well. Nectar feeding bats also consume insects and fruit, which sustains them on their journey southward in the fall. According to the U.S. Forest Service website, about 20 years ago bats discovered hummingbird feeders. Check out the article [here](#). It seems they prefer the sweet nectar in the feeders over insect meat and natural sugar!

For bat enthusiasts, Bat Week is October 21 to October 31 2025.

Head up to Sabino Canyon around dusk next spring to see these bats enjoying Sabino Canyon's nectar corridor.

Heat Safety

Monsoon storms and flash flooding in the Sonoran Desert are no joke! [Tanque Verde Falls](#) in the Santa Catalina Ranger District morphed from a pleasant cascade to a torrent due to 1.4 inches of rain upstream of the falls in under two hours. This presents a serious safety risk to anyone in that canyon. At Tanque Verde Falls, consider using the new Rim Loop and Falls Overlook trails to get an impressive and safe view.

With the continued hot temperatures, a simple day hike can quickly turn dangerous with tragic consequences even for the most experienced and prepared hikers. Many hiking trails offer little to no shade, extreme elevation changes, and no cell service, which can quickly lead to disaster.

Before you head out, check the forecasts and hiking routes so you can be prepared.

HEAT SAFETY INFORMATION

HEAT CAN BE FATAL

Summertime desert hiking can be deadly! Early symptoms of heat-related illness may include muscle cramping, headaches, weakness and nausea. Take action immediately to cool and hydrate your body if you experience any of these symptoms. Seek medical attention if necessary.

Out-of-state and international visitors may be at higher risk and should take extra precautions as they may not be acclimated to the heat.

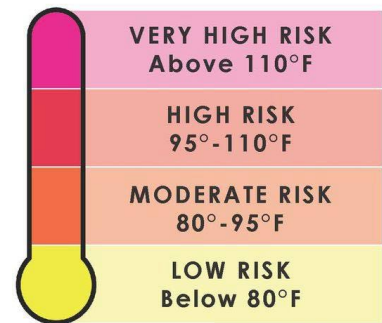


PLAN AHEAD

- Monitor weather and temperature forecasts prior to your outdoor experience.
- Hiking alone is not recommended. Always tell someone where you will be and when you plan to return.
- Wear sunscreen to protect yourself from the sun and reapply frequently.
- Long sleeves, pants, and a wide brimmed hat will further protect you from the sun and insects as well.
- Carry water or a sports drink with you. Drink 1 or 2 liters per hour.
- Hike during cooler times of the day.
- Return to the trailhead before 10 a.m. while it is cool and you have used only half of your water supply.
- Be sure your cell phone is fully charged before hiking.
- Cell phone reception is not always reliable. It is highly recommended to carry a SPOT, InReach, or other satellite SOS device with you.
- If possible, call 911 in an emergency.
- Always follow a physician's advice when participating in physical activity.



OUTDOOR ACTIVITY HEAT RISK



While it is important to avoid dehydration, too much water and sweating can impact your body's sodium levels; a condition called hyponatremia. For hikes lasting more than 1-2 hours, sodium containing sports drinks or eating a salty snack can help. As always, follow the advice of your physician.



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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/>.



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