

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

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Winter Activities

For more information on any event or presentation check out our [Event Calendar](#).

- **Family Fun Hike:** Saturday December 27, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. All ages are welcome, from babies in strollers to grandparents. The theme will be longest nights of the year and who likes to sleep in winter. We'll walk about half a mile and look for hibernating and brumating animals. Any questions, contact familyfun@sabinonaturalists.org. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Sabino Canyon Bird and Nature Walk:** Saturday December 20 (day change) and then the 1st and 3rd Sundays starting in January; 8:00–10:30 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Saguaro - A Desert Giant Walk:** Sundays 10:00–11:00 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Plant and Bird Walk:** Tuesdays 8:30–11:00 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Intro to Sabino's Geology and Nature Walk:** Tuesdays 8:30–11:00 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Mt Lemmon Nature Hike:** 1st and 3rd Wednesdays 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. See calendar for meetup location.
- **Sabino Canyon Geologic Features:** Thursdays 8:30–11:00 a.m. (except December 25 and January 1). Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Panning for Garnets:** Thursdays 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. (except December 25 and January 1). Check website on Thursday morning to confirm both location and time.
- **Let's Explore Sabino Hike:** 2nd and 4th Fridays 8:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Friday Trail Hike:** 1st and 3rd Fridays 8:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. See calendar for meetup location and varying times depending on meetup location.
- **Hydrogeology Hike:** 1st and 3rd Saturdays 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.

Educational Presentations

All presentations are located at the Visitor Center.

- **Quail Corner for Kids:** 2nd and 4th Sundays 9:00–11:00 a.m.
 - **Skulls and Pelts, Wildlife of Sabino Table:** Tuesdays 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
 - **Ancient Cultures Table:** Fridays 9:00 a.m., December 26, January 9 and 16.
 - **Ask a Naturalist Table:** Saturdays 10:00–11:00 a.m. (except December 20)
 - **Mountain Lions: Apex Predators of the Santa Catalina Mountains:** Tuesday, January 20, 1:30 p.m. in the Javelina Room at the Sabino Canyon Visitor Center. Seating is limited so come early.
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Hibernation or Brumation?



Mornings are a bit chilly in the Canyon. The colder it is the faster we walk up the road and on the trails. Not so for the reptiles and amphibians that live in the Canyon; they slow way down. Unlike mammals that hibernate, spending the cold months sleeping in a nice cozy burrow, reptiles and amphibians go into brumation. They usually only sleep for a short period of time, because they need to drink water, sometimes eat, and warm up their bodies on a sunny

surface. Finding an animal in brumation can be tricky, because they rest in small burrows, crevices, and caves.

Join the Family Friendly Fun Hike on December 27, 10:00 a.m., led by an experienced naturalist, to learn about animals that hibernate and brumate. To add to the fun, animals (stuffed) will be hidden along the trail for children to find.

See [Event Calendar](#) for more information. Meet at the Visitor Center.

Mountain Lions: Apex Predators of the Santa Catalina Mountains Presented by David Dean Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalist



Saturday, January 20, 1:30 p.m., in the Javelina Room at the Sabino Canyon Visitor Center. Limited seating, so come early!

Mountain lions are found at all elevations in the Santa Catalina mountains and as apex predators (animals at the top of their food chain, having no natural predators of their own), they play a key role in maintaining the ecological health of the range. Come learn about how they play that role and other interesting aspects of their biology.

Quail Corner for Kids Goes on the Road Naturalist Cathy

The fun and interactive Quail Corner for Kids traveled to Senita Valley Elementary School for their STEM night on November 12. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Three naturalists joined a gym full of science-related tables to impress the students. Naturalist Carol challenged young ornithologists with her bird beak comparison table, Naturalist Cathy threw out fun facts as students matched bird names to photos, and Naturalist Mike impressed students and parents alike with his bird song matching game.

After stopping at each table, students would get a stamp on a bingo sheet. When they received enough stamps, they were entered into a drawing for free passes to the Flandreau Planetarium. All three naturalists felt this was a great way to connect with young kids, as well as get the name of Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists out into the community.



From left to right are Naturalists Carol, Mike, and Cathy. Naturalist Mike designed and built a creative bird song matching game that the kids enjoyed. You tap the "singing box"

with a card that pictures a bird. The box will let you know if you've chosen the bird that matches the song.

**From Tiny Seed to Desert Icon:
A Personal Saguaro Growing Adventure
Naturalist in training Brent**

I have collected various seeds to grow for as long as I can remember. But why grow saguaros? Saguaros are an icon of the southwestern USA, with their popularity undaunted by their narrow growth range. The saguaro's human-like appearance with open arms and great size cements their appeal. After seeing docents speak at the Desert Museum several times, I decided to grow saguaros myself in 2023.

I have saguaros in my backyard so acquiring seeds was simple, as long as I avoided rattlesnakes while collecting fruit. My unrelated backyard rattlesnake bite is a story for another time.

Each fruit contains more than 1,000 tiny seeds—potentially 2,000. The seeds have a very high germination rate, with almost all seeds producing plants if planted within a year and in the right conditions. Seeds are still very fertile at least two years later and counting. I have germinated seeds without soil in a zip-lock bag, in coco-coir (coconut fiber), planting soil, and cactus soil.

Young plants need a lot more water than adult plants and can be very sensitive to excess or under watering. Cactus soil can be a problem for young plants due to challenging water management. I recommend starting seeds in typical potting soil for easier water management. Seedlings will turn purple when either over or under watered, and the cultivator has to decide how much water to provide at critical times.

Seedlings do best indoors for a couple of years to control water needs and should be placed on a south-facing window sill for best growth. A year after germinating, they are not larger than a kidney bean but grow quickly soon after as they develop root systems.

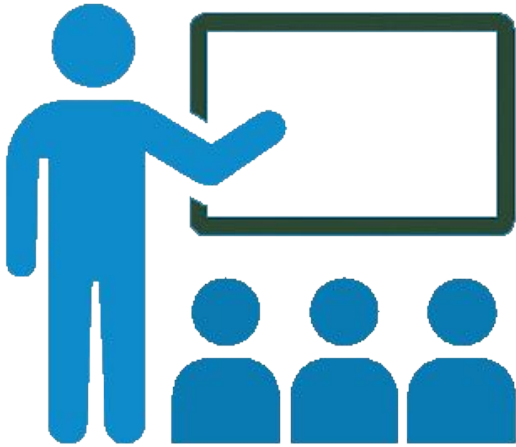
Today I have about half a dozen small plants on my east-facing patio, where they are sheltered from full sun. I will likely plant most of them in a permanent spot around my home in the spring of 2026 when about three years old, but I may keep a few in pots for special care and later planting.

I enjoy propagating a majestic icon that will add beauty to my surroundings for decades beyond my time here. If I had to say why... sort of like the people who climb Everest, I have no good reason other than because this is something that is exciting to me.



Top row, left to right: tiny saguaro seeds about the same size as poppy seeds and then at one week old. These are shown next to a walnut for size comparison. Second row: Larger seedlings are two months old, while the smaller one is three weeks old; second photo shows four-month-old saguaros. Third row: two-year-old saguaros in a window sill and a single two-and-one-half-year-old saguaro. (Photos by Naturalist Brent)

In-person Presentations



The SCVN Communications Team is now offering short, in-person presentations to local organizations such as the Sierra Club, hiking clubs, nature clubs, and other community or special-interest groups that share an appreciation for nature and service. These can be at the organizations' regularly scheduled meetings or another time.

If your group might be interested in learning about SCVN, please contact Jan at ambassador@sabinonaturalists.org

PI Events Thrive

All high-season Public Interpretation events are now in full swing. We have interesting topics for everyone: plants, ancient cultures, geology, mammals, Sabino Canyon history, heart-pumping destination hikes, and slow-paced nature walks. If you have an interest, then you can bet we have the hike, walk, or interpretive table.

We also have no lack of geology presentations. The Geology of Sabino Canyon table, Panning for Garnets, a hydrogeologic hike, and two other geology walks are all led by true “rock stars.” Naturalist Chuck leads Tuesday’s Intro to Sabino’s Geology and Nature and Naturalist Pete leads Thursday’s Sabino Canyon Geologic Features.

Per Naturalist Pete: “As a kid, I collected rocks. When I was a teenager I started rock climbing. In my career as a pilot, I loved looking out the window and seeing how light enhanced all the ground features, which made me wonder how those features formed. The American Southwest is full of beautiful and fascinating landscapes. Just looking out my window and seeing the mountains with their rock formations, steep valleys, and canyons gets me excited.”

Naturalist Pete appreciates when people ask questions because he knows that he’s prompted them to think about their own backyard. The questions also motivate him to further his research on a topic and continue to expand his knowledge. Everyone who attends his walk agrees that he is a super gneiss guy!

Be sure to check out one of these fantastic geology presentations, or any of the other Public Interpretation events SCVN has to offer. They are all listed on the SCVN calendar, as well as on

the kiosk in the Sabino Canyon plaza.



(Photo by Naturalist Jim)

Mysteries & Miracles of Arizona:
Guide Book to the Genuinely Bizarre
in the Grand Canyon State

By Jack Kutz

Review by Naturalist Rebecca, SCVN Librarian

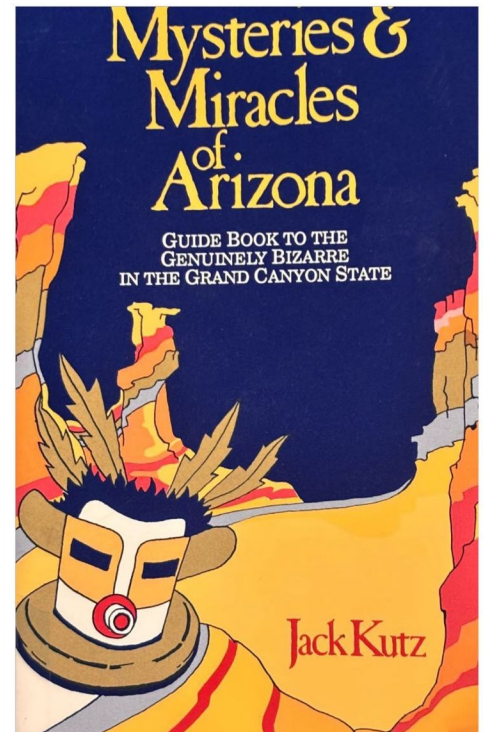
Mysteries and Miracles of Arizona is a collection of unusual, legendary, and mysterious stories from across Arizona, blending folklore, oral history, and strange true-life accounts. Author Jack Kutz curates tales ranging from Native American traditions to modern paranormal events, presenting each as a mix of cultural heritage and intriguing oddity.

The book includes stories such as:

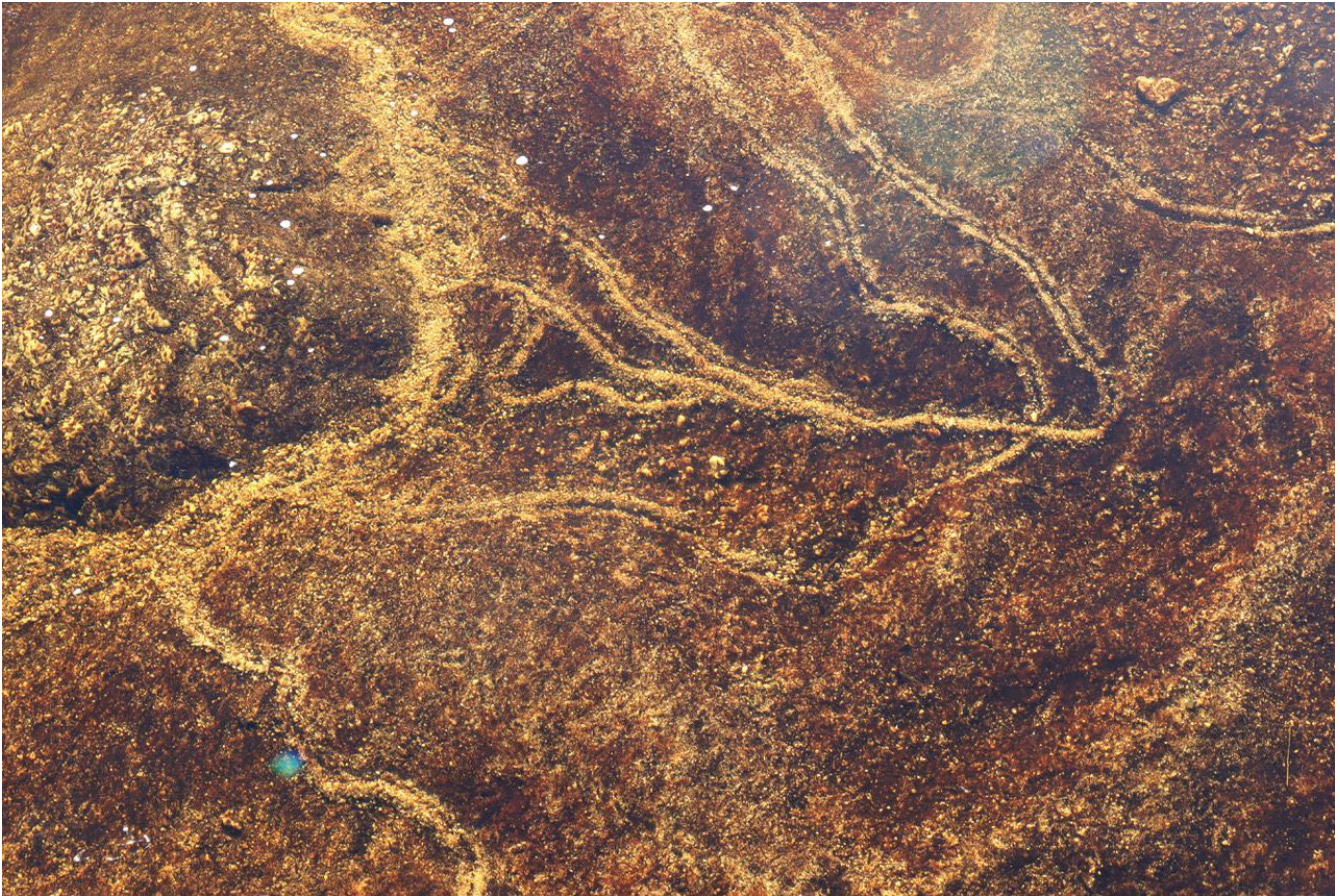
- Hopi rituals and myths, including the Hopi snake dances and traditional mystery tales suitable for younger audiences
- Pima folklore, such as the tragic story of a doomed young pregnant woman that has been passed down through oral tradition
- The 1975 Snowflake UFO encounter, a well-known Arizona mystery involving a reported extraterrestrial abduction
- Lost treasure legends, such as John Lee's hidden gold, a treasure found and lost again
- Dark frontier tales, including accounts of vengeance and violence between Apache groups and wealthy Mexican cattle ranchers—stories that are more adult in tone, with themes of retaliation, kidnapping, and frontier justice

The collection ranges from family-friendly folklore to harsher, more dramatic historical accounts, all capturing Arizona's rugged and sometimes eerie past.

Available at Pima County Public Library as an eBook or in-library use only.



Dragonfly Larvae Trails Story and photo by Naturalist Marty



Dragonflies have three phases in their incomplete metamorphosis life cycles: eggs, larvae/nymphs/naiads, and adults. The nymph stage is underwater, locally in slow-moving, sandy/mucky sections of Sabino Creek. The nymphs are carnivorous and leave trails across the sand at the bottom of the stream (pictured above) as they traverse an area seeking prey. They grow and shed their exoskeletons multiple times before leaving the water for a final molt, emerging from their exuvia and plumping into their adult form to fly away.

In case you missed this video in last month's Echoes from the Canyon, [Click here](#) to see a short time-lapse video of a dragonfly growing wings. *(Editor's note: If you get an advertisement first, just click the "skip" button.)*



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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