



Echoes from the Canyon

April 2026

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

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Note: Click on photos to enlarge them. Click the View in Browser link above to translate.

Activities and Programs from April 15 to May 15

Here are the activities from April 15 to May 15. Next month's edition will show those that continue after May 15. For more information on any event or presentation check out our Event Calendar.

- **Saguaro: A Desert Giant Walk:** Sunday 10:00–11:00 a.m., April 19. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Summer Bird Walk:** 1st and 3rd Sundays 6:30–9:00 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Sabino Canyon Geologic Features:** Thursday April 16, 8:30–11:00 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Panning for Garnets:** Thursday April 16, 9:00–11:00 a.m. Meet at the bridge on the main road just above shuttle stop 3.
- **Let's Explore Sabino Hikes:** 2nd and 4th Fridays 7:30–11:00 a.m. through April. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Friday Trail Hike:** 1st and 3rd Fridays 8:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. through April. See Event Calendar for meetup location and varying times.
- **Mt. Lemmon Summer Hike:** Fridays starting June 5, 8:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. See Event Calendar for meetup location.
- **Hydrogeology Hike:** Saturday April 18, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Summer Lizard Walks:** 1st Saturday of the month, 7:30–10:00 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.

Educational Presentations

All presentations are located at the Visitor Center unless otherwise noted.

- **Quail Corner for Kids:** Sunday April 26, 9:00–11:00 a.m.
- **Birds of Sabino Canyon:** 2nd and 4th Sundays starting May 10, 8:30–10 a.m.
- **Skulls and Pelts, Wildlife of Sabino Table:** Tuesday April 21, 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
- **Summer Storytime:** Wednesdays starting June 3, 9:00–10:00 a.m.
- **Ask a Mountain Naturalist:** Saturdays starting June 6, 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. at the Palisades Visitor Center, Mt. Lemmon.

We Would Love to Have You Join Us!

Naturalist Kathy



It's getting hot—well, hotter—and the Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists teaching program is winding down for the season, which means it's now time for all those who would like to become a Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalist to submit their application. Don't let the word "application" scare you away. Just submit your contact info via our website, and someone will be in touch with more information. Easy peasy.

What does a Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalist do? For starters, you get to help our local youth, grades K-6, learn about Sabino Canyon's unique ecology and show them a world that, for some, they know nothing about.

There are also many public interpretation activities you can become involved in, including opportunities on Mt. Lemmon. Whether your interest is in geology, animals, or plants, we've got you covered.

You'll receive all the training you need to become a naturalist. Classes start in September or early October and last through January. After that, you will enter the internship program and get hands on experience, working with seasoned naturalists. A huge perk in becoming a naturalist is the ongoing continuing education classes you are privy to.

If you're a little apprehensive about working with kids, don't be. Having no experience working with children, I was very apprehensive, but after just a few times teaching, under the guidance of the naturalists in my group, I loved it. Click on the link [join-us](#) to sign up!

Photo: Naturalist Steve enthraling the kids at the puppet show with his buddy the Mountain Lion

What's a Chimney Cap?

Naturalist Mark

Sabino's cavity-nesting birds can mistake open chimneys—like the ones venting some of the new restrooms—for hollow tree snags. If they drop in to investigate a possible nesting or roosting opportunity, the plastic chimney may be too tight to fly out and too smooth to climb out. When that happens, they end up in the vault “basement” for a needless, nasty death.

Tucson Bird Alliance (formerly Tucson Audubon) calls these open chimneys “death pipes” and points out that bluebirds, flycatchers, sparrows, and woodpeckers are not the only at-risk wildlife. Lizards, snakes, and small mammals also have been victims.

On March 11 Tucson Bird Alliance's Applied Conservation Program Manager Olya Weekley, who was responding to an earlier heads-up from Naturalist Jean, coordinated with the Santa Catalina Ranger District and then supervised the installation of screened caps on the four vault toilets near the dam bridge. Open chimneys at the Bear Canyon turnaround toilets will also be capped. The remainder of the new Sabino recreation area toilets were built with proper caps.

[Click here](#) for more information or to report a hazardous death pipe you find on public lands.

Photo above: Tucson Bird Alliance crew installing screened pipe cap on vault toilets near the dam bridge teaching ramadas. Vertical pipes with open tops can trap birds and other wildlife. (Photo by Naturalist Mark)



Two Sabino Canyon Ruins You May Have Never Seen (And There is a Good Reason Why)

There is a myth that refuses to die: that Sabino Canyon in the Catalina Mountains was named for a wealthy rancher named Sabino Otero. Otero was born in Tubac during the 1840s and per Naturalist David "...variations of our canyon's name turned up too early to have been connected to him—including in 1834, years before he was born. And I found no reliable evidence that Otero had ever been interested in a canyon in the Santa Catalinas."

Sabino Otero did, however, own a cattle ranch in a mountain canyon, many miles southwest of Tucson, in the Baboquivari Mountains. That canyon eventually also came to be called Sabino Canyon. Hence the confusion for many people and even publications that have falsely claimed "our" Sabino Canyon was named after Otero.

Below are the ruins of Sabino Otero's ranch house (top photo) and dam (bottom photo) in the Sabino Canyon found in the Baboquivari Mountains. (Photos by Naturalist David, 1986)



Book Review:
Fear Falls Away
And Other Essays from Hard and Rocky Places
By Janice Emily Bowers
Reviewed by Naturalist Barb

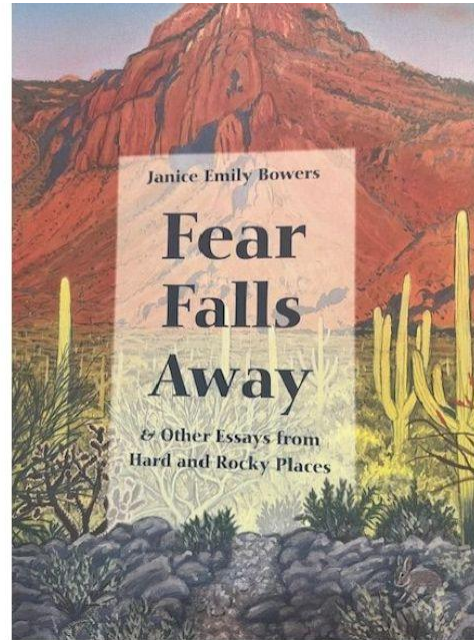
This short book contains 19 essays by botanist and author Janice Bowers describing her explorations of the mountains surrounding Tucson. Known for her guides to Sonoran Desert plants and wildflowers, Bowers wrote this volume as one of three essay collections in the late 1980s and 1990s reflecting on her desert garden, the Rincon Mountains, and other nearby ranges. Several essays focus on familiar locations in Sabino Canyon, including the Phonline Trail and Blackett's Ridge.

Originally from California, Bowers moved to Tucson in the late 1960s and at first disliked the desert landscape, missing the green hills and oak forests of her home state. Over more than two decades, however, she developed a deep appreciation for the Sonoran Desert. Writing with a lyrical and thoughtful voice, she reflects on the small details of the landscape and what they reveal about both nature and her own life.

Her observations are often insightful and sometimes cautionary. In one essay about Blackett's Ridge, she notes how a beautiful spring wildflower bloom—where she counted 73 species along the trail—was already being threatened by the spread of invasive red brome, a concern that feels even more relevant today.

Though written more than 25 years ago, the places she describes remain familiar to local readers. With curiosity that extends beyond plants to animals, streams, and desert ecology, Bowers offers essays that are both informative and quietly meditative, making this an enjoyable and enlightening read.

Find *Fear Falls Away* at the Pima County Library as an eBook or for in-library use only.



Saguaros in The Circle of Life

Thanks to the Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum for giving Echoes from the Canyon permission to reprint this article. It appeared in their blog, "Desert Diaries" and was written by Michelle Miner, the museum's Education Specialist

The desert is filled with skeletons.



It's not just the remains of animals, but the inner artistry of plants too. As we humans know all too well, water means life, and water means weight. Life is especially heavy for the saguaro who can carry over a thousand gallons of liquid. But this weight isn't a burden, it's a boon. A saguaro skeleton supports a long, creative lifespan of up to about 200 years. Its strong, woody ribs are scaffolding for collaboration, innovation, and generosity.

The desert is filled with support.

In life, a saguaro is the architecture of a watery womb for the nests of birds, and for the aerial buffet of fragrant white flowers and juicy red fruits to fuel bats and all manner of helpful pollinators and seed spreaders. Even creatures without wings will occasionally find themselves in the heights—like a scaly snake slithering up to enjoy an egg breakfast, or a furry feline fleeing to escape a hungry predator.



The desert is filled with soup.



In death, a saguaro is a matrix of home and hunting ground. As a saguaro body decays, it transforms into an almost aquatic abode where beetles and bugs will live, feast, and be feasted upon. This mushy microhabitat can turn especially soupy with rainwater in the recipe. After flesh fades away, a skeleton long remains. Woody bones, now exposed, offer shelter once again as a place for scaly, squishy, crunchy, and fuzzy friends to find refuge and sustenance.

The desert is filled with cycles.

The saguaro shows us that just as life begets life, death begets life, too. For thousands of years, the Indigenous people of these lands have used the ribs of one saguaro to reach the fruits of another—and in mirroring the cactus' collaborative nature, give fruit back to the plants and soil while making sure to leave enough for our wild animal family. Perhaps as we admire these generous green beings standing tall with the weight they carry, and consider the legacy they each will leave, we can be inspired to reflect a little deeper on what we give and receive in a world of meaningful cycles of hardship and ease.



Photo credit: Gopher snake on saguaro by Anne Grodziki

Summer Storytime—Starting in June



Summer Storytime is a fun nature-themed story hour for children ages 3 to 6 years old, and their families. Older or younger siblings are welcome. Storytime happens every Wednesday through July at 9:00 a.m. Children must be accompanied by an adult. The storytime usually will include a desert-themed children's picture book or two, read aloud, a game, dance or song, and a craft.



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/>