



September 2026

Echoes from the Canyon is a regular publication of the Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists. A printable PDF version is available for download on the website's [Echoes From the Canyon Archive](#) page.

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

Welcome Back to the Canyon



If you found yourself staying in Tucson for all or part of the summer, hopefully you had a chance to take part in some of the activities offered by the Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists (SCVN).

In June, at the Visitor Center, the popular *Summer Storytime* resumed for the summer. Children ages 3–6 were treated to a different themed story every week, along with a game, dance, song or craft.

For adults and kids, there were early morning bird or lizard walks led by an experienced naturalist.

SCVN led hikes every week on Mt. Lemmon, and *Ask a Mountain Naturalist* and *Bird the Lemmon* were again offered at the Palisades Visitor Center.

Our members were out and about participating in special events like Summerhaven's 4th of July parade, Smokey Bear's 82nd birthday, and National Trails Day. A few naturalists shared their expertise with a group of desert ecology students and their faculty from Wichita State University, taking them on a bird and nature walk in the canyon

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](#).

Fall Fun Things to Do

Here are the activities from September 15 to October 15. For more information on any event or presentation check out our [Event Calendar](#).

- **Last of the early Summer Bird Walks:** Sunday September 20, 6:30–9:00 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Sabino Canyon Bird and Nature Walk:** 1st and 3rd Sundays starting October 4, 8:00–10:30 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Mt. Lemmon Nature Hike:** 2nd and 4th Wednesdays starting October 14, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. See [Event Calendar](#) for meetup location.
- **Last of the Summer Lizard Walks:** Saturday October 3, 7:30–10:00 a.m. Meet at the Visitor Center.
- **Friday Trail Hike:** 1st and 3rd Fridays starting October 16, 8:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. See [Event Calendar](#) for specifics.
- **Panning for Garnets:** Thursdays starting October 22, 9:00–11:00 a.m.. See [Event Calendar](#) for location.

Educational Presentations

All presentations are located in the plaza outside the Visitor Center unless otherwise noted.

- **Birds of Sabino Canyon Table:** 2nd and 4th Sundays 8:30–10:00 a.m. New time starting October 11, 9:00–11:00 a.m.
- **Skulls and Pelts, Wildlife of Sabino Table:** Tuesdays 9:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., starting October 13.

As the temperatures cool down, the Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists will be providing more activities and educational presentations. A sneak peak into what's to come; *Discovering Sabino Canyon Geology Walk, Tuesday's Plant and Bird Walk, Geology Table, and Saguaro Table*.

Sabino Canyon *Seek and Find* Game



Can you find this particular crested (cristate) saguaro in Sabino Canyon? You may have noticed these strange saguaros and wondered why they grow this way. It seems scientists aren't totally sure what causes this mutation. Here are some fun facts:

- Supposedly Asa Gray, a 19th century botanist, gave the saguaro its scientific name, *Carnegieagigantea*, in honor of Andrew Carnegie, due to his role in supporting scientific research in the Sonoran Desert. But according to wikipedia, George Engelmann had a hand in giving the saguaro its scientific name, so this requires further research.

- The saguaro blossom is the Arizona state flower. The first flowers

appears after the saguaro has reached at least 30 years old.

- Saguaros can hold on to a lot of water, some weighing more than a ton.

- It can take a saguaro more than 50 years to grow an arm.

Now for the fun part, your clue in locating the saguaro in the photo: ***You May Get Loopy on the Trail Looking for this Cactus.***

Read more about saguaros on the [Desert Botanical Garden's website](#) and at the [Saguaro National Park website](#).

White-Lined Sphinx Moth and Datura

By Naturalist Brent

Sphingidae is the scientific name for a group of moths that includes about 1,450 unique species. Commonly called hawk moths, hummingbird moths, or sphinx moths, you may have seen a caterpillar variety called the tomato worm voraciously consuming tomato plants in your garden.

The white-lined sphinx moth is common in Arizona. Because of the sound of their flying, plus their size, hovering, and quick darting behavior, sphinx moths are sometimes referred to as hummingbird moths. While hummingbirds are typically active during the day, these moths are most active during dusk, dawn, and night hours. Known predators in Arizona include birds, bats, spiders, and wasps, which feed on both caterpillars and adult moths.

Eggs are typically laid singly on host plants and initially start green but turn brown as they develop. Host plants include nightshades (tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, potatoes, and datura), evening primrose, four-o'clocks, purslane, grapevines, and elm. Sphinx moth caterpillars have a horn on their rear segment and can consume large portions of plants in a single day. The caterpillars can be yellow, green, brown, or black.

Mature larvae drop from the plant and burrow into the soil to pupate, sometimes over winter months, until emerging as adults to feed on nectar and to mate. The adult white-lined sphinx moth feeds on the nectar from flowers like pink penstemon or lantana and pollinates the poisonous sacred datura.

Archaeological evidence shows that sacred datura has been used by humans in the Southwest for more than 3,000 years. While this plant contains extremely dangerous toxins, in lesser doses the hallucinogen was used to boost sensory perceptions, thought processes, and energy levels.

Sacred datura is a member of the potato (Solanaceae) family. Every part of the plant contains dangerous levels of anticholinergic tropane alkaloids and is particularly concentrated in the seeds. Some people can react with contact dermatitis upon touching the plant. When ingested, parts of the plant can be fatal or can result in blindness, lethargy, and sweating. Survivors often have significant damage to their lungs, stomach, intestines, kidneys, and long-term mental impairment.

While hornworms safely tolerate and process the toxic alkaloids found in nightshades, humans and other animals are better off to avoid any contact with datura.

Check out this fact sheet by the [University of Nevada, Reno Extension](#) for kids and adults. It's pretty cool.

Sources: Wikipedia; [inaturalist.org](#); University of Nevada Reno ([extension.unr.edu](#)); Arizona Native Plant Society ([aznps.com](#))



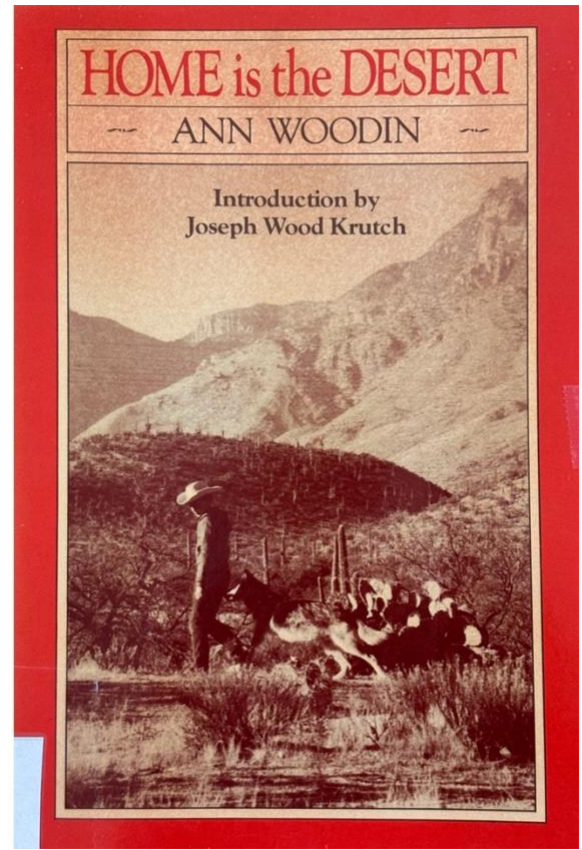
Photo of Sphinx moth pupa (left) by author Naturalist Brent. White-lined sphinx moth caterpillar (green variety) photo by Wendy Hanson Mazet and courtesy of extension.unr.edu

Book Review: *Home is the Desert* by Ann Woodin

Reviewed by Naturalist Rebecca

Following her graduation from Wesley College, Ann Woodin tied the knot with Bill Woodin, a herpetologist and desert ecologist who later became the esteemed zoologist for the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.

Picture this: residing in an adobe dwelling along a dusty road in Tucson during the early 1960s, Ann, alongside Bill and their two sons, settled on a 40-acre property blessed with a seasonal stream. Bordered by the Catalina Mountains to the north, the Rincon Mountains to the east, and volcanic peaks to the west, they watched as their family expanded to include four boys, now free to explore the desert and gather its treasures. Ann affectionately depicted her sons as "commonly cultivated and freely escaping." Her fervor for desert exploration mirrored a childlike wonder for its wildlife, plants, insects, and natural ambiance. Notably, the naturalist Joseph Wood Krutch, who penned the introduction for this book, proposed a more fitting title: "Living with Animals Can Be Fun."



Joseph lauded Ann for maintaining a tidy home where everything had its place. Dinner guests visiting would never suspect that the boys' rooms harbored an assortment of desert curiosities, from spider specimens and snake skins to desert rocks and various creatures. During dinner one evening, Ann's mother-in-law remarked about the owl resting on her bookshelf. Ann turned to look and was surprised to see it there, as she had never noticed or placed it there herself.

Each chapter in the book unfolds a unique aspect of desert flora and fauna. The arrival of monsoon and winter rains brings rejuvenation to ephemeral streams, while spring showcases a tapestry of wildflowers and blooming weeds, alongside a sky filled with diverse bird species. Captivating family photos preserve memorable moments, from a son sitting across from a baby coatimundi, to another child ready to hunt lizards for his pet snake, and yet another asleep while a bobcat lounges nearby.

The chapters delve into diverse topics, from the stream and houseguests to encounters with bobcats and snakes, exploring the mountains and rivers, camping under the stars, and the essence of survival. Each page of this book offers readers a blend of joy, enriched understanding, and a newfound appreciation for the unique beauty of the desert.

Available for in-library use only at Pima County Public Libraries and the Tucson Museum of Art Library.

A Hike in the Shade

Naturalist Kathy

Yes, there *is* shade in Sabino Canyon and you'll find it on Creek Trail #52. It's one of my favorite hikes because it's where I've seen the most wildlife: fox, deer, coyotes, frogs, snakes (I haven't seen a rattlesnake yet, but they are there) and beautiful shade loving flowers. You can make this hike as long as you want, because there are several alternative routes along the way. Please note, during periods of high water this trail is not recommended. Directions:



- From the main parking lot (not the overflow lot) take the wide dirt path that heads east. In about .4 miles you'll come to a paved road.
 - Turn right. When you get to the bathrooms follow the road to your right, heading to Sabino Dam East.
 - Again you will come to another fork in the road. Turn left, still heading towards Sabino Dam East. There are a few picnic tables to your left along this road, in case you feel like taking a rest or having a snack. Keep a look out for Greater Roadrunners; they seem to like hanging around this road and I often see them or hear them calling.
 - At about .9 miles you will get to an area with picnic tables and a sign pointing you to the Sabino Dam Trail #33, which will take you to Creek Trail #52.
 - Head up a rocky trail to your right. This will take you to the upper dam area (if you are hiking with a stroller this short path is probably too rocky to be passable).
 - Follow the dirt path to your right and continue for .3 miles to Creek Trail #52. Eventually you will see a sign directing you to the Phoneline Trail #27, or to the Upper Sabino Rd. At this point you have gone about 1.6 miles. You now have options. Either head back the way you came, continue on for a longer hike to Phoneline Trail #27, or head up to the paved Upper Sabino Road. When there is water in the creek you will likely get your shoes wet trying to tip toe on rocks while crossing the creek to get to the Upper Sabino Road. Sometimes the creek is too high to cross, so use your own judgment.
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What's Happening Now

Naturalist Kathy

Things you may have noticed:



- What's happening to this poor Canyon Ragweed, *Ambrosia ambrosioides*? It's gall mites and they're most prolific on the plant during the growing season. The gall rarely kills the plant but can weaken it, making it susceptible to other insect invasions. Read more about it here, [canyon ragweed gall](#).

- If you've gone to the dam area you probably noticed a lot of little creatures hopping around. They're red-spotted toads that have graduated from tadpoles and are on their way to becoming adults. It's lucky to see them at all, because as adults they are mostly nocturnal, hiding in rock crevices during the heat of the day. To read more about these good-looking amphibians, check out this link [californiaherps.com](#).



- You may have noticed a lot of fallen saguaros and there are many reasons for this:
 - a) During intense storms soil can become saturated, weakening the wide, but shallow root system.
 - b) Older saguaros may have insect damage, fungal rot, or lightening scars that can weaken them.
 - c) Lack of rain can cause saguaros to become

dehydrated and brittle.

The photo was taken on Creek Trail #52.



- Butterflies everywhere! The ones you're seeing right now are mostly [American Snouts](#) and are known for their mass migrations. They use a wide variety of flowers as a food source and lay their eggs on our desert hackberry, [Celtis pallida](#). American snouts usually perch with their wings closed, but at this time of year you can see females perched with their wings open to attract males.



It was a "treat and a blessing," said Naturalist Phil, to see and record "Gil" the Gila monster relaxing and taking a drink at Naturalist Phil's home very close to Sabino Canyon. Click on the photo and you can see it, too.



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 the Become a Naturalist page on our website.



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VOLUNTEER NATURALISTS

Explore, Discover, Inspire

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