

Friends of PINNACLE PEAK PARK Newsletter

Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park • PMB 288, 8711 E. Pinnacle Peak Road • Scottsdale AZ 85255 • www.pinnaclepeakpark.com

TIME FOR ANOTHER NEST HUMMINGBIRD

By Diane McCoy-Berney

Stop, Look and Listen!

Pinnacle Peak Park visitors often have a lasting memory of a special animal sighting. Wildlife sightings increase by being observant, so stop, look and listen. Seeing wildlife in a natural setting is unforgettable. Among the many intriguing wildlife sightings at Pinnacle Peak Park, the following is my favorite memory of a Costa's hummingbird.

Building the Nest

One January, a Costa's hummingbird decided to build a nest on a branch of the huge ironwood tree just across the bridge at Pinnacle Peak Park's trailhead. The bird drew my attention as it zipped about carrying bits of nesting materials of vegetation and fibers to her chosen location. She attached tiny dried leaves to the nest's exterior. To keep the loosely built nest intact, the hummingbird hen then wrapped the nest with spider silk (web strands). The elasticity of spider silk would allow the nest to expand to accommodate the growing young. The finished nest was drab-gray, bowl-shaped and no larger than a 25 cent piece!

A Typical Nest—Almost

It remains a mystery as to why the hummingbird selected such a "hectic" trailhead location. Perhaps she had successfully raised a brood in the same tree during prior years. This phenomenon

is referred to as "site fidelity"; when birds instinctively return to their prior home to nest year after year. Nevertheless, the location had a constant flow of visitors (several thousand) who unknowingly entered and exited the park, from dawn to dusk, under the Costa's watchful eye. And even though most visitors were not aware of the nest, they could have easily reached overhead and touched it.



PHOTO: MARK JOHNSTON

Other than the hectic location in the Park, the hummingbird was behaving somewhat typically. Arizona Breeding Bird studies in desert scrub areas found Costa's hummingbird build their nests about six feet above the ground! Although palo verde trees made up nearly 70 percent of nest site locations, ironwood trees were among other top choices. Our park "hummer" was nesting seven feet above the ground in a desert ironwood. I believe the hen laid the "typical" number of two eggs. Hummingbird eggs are the smallest of all bird species.

Surviving Inclement Weather

Those aware of the nest were concerned when inclement weather became the norm for the next several weeks. The hen endured heavy rain, strong winds, cooler than normal

temperature and hail while she incubated the tiny little eggs. Each dawn found the Costa's faithfully sitting in the nest. She proved to be one tough bird. It is important to mention however, that although hummingbirds are hardy, prolonged freezing temperatures resulting in frozen food sources and destroyed flower heads can be deadly.

Note: *During such periods, hummers can use a little help from their human friends. A nectar feeder in a sunny location will help sustain them until spring flowers are in full bloom.*



Hummingbird nest

Hatched

Costa's hummingbirds incubate their eggs between 15 and 18 days before they hatch. Once hatched, photos of hummingbird hatchlings reveal that they aren't exactly a pretty sight. They look like little raisins. Nevertheless, the hen tends to the nestlings and feeds the growing birds a diet of protein rich tiny insects and eventually nectar.

The Park hummingbird fed her hungry brood gnats she picked off the trailhead buildings. She even caught insects mid-air. She regurgitated the gnats deep into the tiny chicks' craws. The pattern continued daily for the next few weeks. One day, it was noted that only one feathered nestling was visible in the nest. What happened to the nest sibling? We do not know. We do know that fledging success rates range from approximately 17-60 percent and often only the stronger sibling survives long enough to leave the nest. Fledging occurs after approximately three weeks and the mother hen will continue to feed the young for another week after fledging.

Time for another Nest

Within days, the mother hen was once again observed carrying nesting materials to the ironwood tree and it became obvious that she was building another nest! The new nest was constructed approximately four inches away from the old nest! The facts are that hummingbirds producing two or more clutches per year do not use the same nest twice. Some hummingbird species, however, have been known to construct a new nest right on top of an old nest!

Conclusion

This Costa's hummingbird story is just one of many wildlife sightings at Pinnacle Peak Park. To increase chances of seeing wildlife in the Park and in other natural settings, take time to stop, look and listen.

Good Luck Diane McCoy-Berney



Diane Berney has a passion for wildlife. She grew up near Pinnacle Peak and has been a constant supporter of the Park, and desert wildlife education. Diane has written the feature article for all of our newsletters, and has written for other publications as well, including The Peak magazine.

Diane has decided to take a sabbatical from writing for our newsletter so she can devote more time to other activities. A new project she has taken on is leader of a community project to help eradicate Desert Broom (sounds like a future article). She also leads the annual Audubon Society bird census for North Scottsdale. She has recently taken up acrylic painting and found another way to express her passion for wildlife.

When Diane talks about the unique plants and animals of the Sonoran Desert you often hear her say "the more you learn the more you want to learn." Her enthusiasm is contagious. The Friends are grateful for her educational articles and continued support. Thank you!

HUMMER "ZIP" FACTS

- To date, 341 species of hummingbird have been identified
- Hummingbirds exist only in the Americas
- Arizona has 16 of 20 hummingbird species found in the United States
- Costa's and Anna's hummingbirds are seen year-round in Phoenix Metropolitan area
- Hummingbirds perch nearly 80 percent of the time.
- Hummers can not walk or side step on a perch
- Average life span is 4-5 years
- Predators include hawks, roadrunners, cats and large insects
- Hummers are the smallest species of bird
- Hummers can hover and fly up, down, sideways, backwards and upside down!
- Hummers move their wings in a figure 8 pattern
- Hummers beat their wings between 40 to 60 times a second

Spring Activities at the Park

Pinnacle Peak Park offers a wide variety of educational programs, talks and hikes that provide an insight into natural and cultural history of the Sonoran Desert.

Full Moon Hikes: This 1 ½ hour guided hike will walk to Grandview, slightly over ½ mile from the trail head. You will be able to enjoy the desert sounds, city lights, and views under the glow of a full moon. Registration is limited and will open 1 week before the scheduled hike. Full Moon hikes are scheduled for January 11th, February 9th, and March 10th. Dress accordingly for the weather and bring a flashlight.

Astronomy Talks: The heavens above become alive with the help of Park Volunteer Mark Johnston. With his powerful telescope and green laser light, planets, stars, and constellations are easy to see. Registration is limited and reservations will be accepted 1 week prior to the talk. Talks will be January 30th, February 27th, March 29th, and April 17th. Dress accordingly for the weather and bring binoculars if you have them.

Guided Hikes: Are conducted everyday, except Monday, starting at 10am. This 1 ½ hour moderate hike provides in-depth information about the geology, history, archaeology, flora and fauna of Pinnacle Peak. Bring water and good hiking shoes.

Wildlife Programs:

Liberty Wildlife, an organization that rehabilitates injured and sick wildlife, will have an exhibit of native animals of the Sonoran Desert in the ramada at the trail head. They will be in the park on February 21st from 10 am to noon. No registration for this activity.

Blacksmith Demonstration:

Local artist Paul Diefenderfer will demonstrate this important trade that was so vital to people living in the area 50 to 100 years ago. The blacksmith functioned similar to many aspects of a typical hardware store today. The demonstration is planned for February 7th at 10 am in the Ramada.

The Herpetological Society will be in the park on March 21st from 10 am to 12 pm. with a variety of reptiles native to the area. Learn more about the native wildlife with these very informative programs.

Do you wish to schedule a guided hike or talk for your organization, group, or school? Please call the park to arrange for a guided hike or talk.

For further information regarding all of these programs please call the Park at 480-312-0990.

PHOTO: FRANK BIONDO

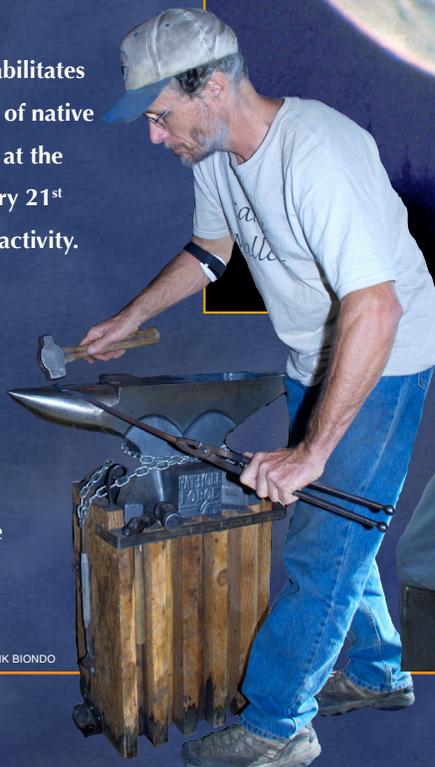


PHOTO: FRANK BIONDO

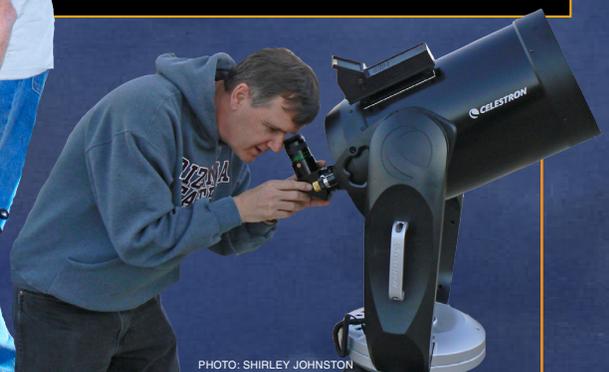


PHOTO: SHIRLEY JOHNSTON

Trail Maintenance: The Unseen Story

Believe it or not, there is a bit of science and strategy to building and maintaining our trail.

The trail at Pinnacle Peak is comprised almost entirely of decomposed granite (rough sand) with little organic matter. Organic matter in the soil helps hold the rock and soil together. The trail surface can feel slippery underfoot, especially on slightly steeper grades.

Ideal Trail Has Out Slope

With the trail, we strive to keep an easy flow. In an ideal situation we would build the trail with an out slope (this is the outside edge of the trail that slopes down) and a grade of less than 10%. The out slope allows water to run off evenly and to do as little damage to the trail as possible. The less the grade the easier it is to hike and to maintain.

Where Did Out Slope Go?

When we first opened in 2002, Pinnacle Peak trail had an out slope. Now, over 1 million hikers later, the out slope is gone. As a rule, people tend to hike in the middle of the trail which wears down the center and results in a berm on the outside (downhill) edge of the trail. And then there is the rain.

When it rains, water runs down the center of the trail and continues to flow down hill building up volume and speed until it finds an exit off of the trail. In time deep ruts are formed and the soil is displaced. If we had a proper out slope and soil with a higher

concentration of organic matter, Pinnacle Peak trail would be in better shape. But, that unfortunately is not the case. In some places along the trail we have actually lost over a foot of the original surface from the level of the trail.



Channel Water Off The Trail

To fix the problems created by the rain, we will locate the place where the water first entered the trail. At that point we will dig channels and even in some cases add a water bar (a drainage ditch set with stone or materials to divert the water) or drainage dip across the trail to transition the water elsewhere before it enters the trail. As most of you have witnessed, our trail crew works diligently to maintain the trail in the best condition possible. After rains, (and high use weekends as well), the crew will work to fill in the ruts, clean out the drains and restore the trail to an adequate user terrain.

In many places we have added steps. These steps are built in an effort to maintain a decent grade, reduce erosion, and to stabilize the structure of the trail. And, how about that work out they provide too!

Ongoing Process

Maintaining our trail is an ongoing process. Starting in mid-January, a trail crew from Southwest Conservation Corps will be at the park for 7 weeks. This workforce is coming to us through a grant we received from the Arizona State Parks. The crew will be working primarily on the retaining walls along the trail that hold many of the trail sections in place. Large chunks of rock will be located at the trail head and hand carried to the work site where it will be used to reinforce the existing granite walls. Most of this work will

be taking place between the ¼ and ¾ mile markers. They definitely don't need to keep all of the fun to themselves! Should you feel the urge to help with this project, join on in and carry a rock! The extra help will be greatly appreciated

Dick Luther

VOLUNTEER

If you have spent any time at the park, there is a chance you have spoken or seen Dick. His dedication to the park comes in a variety of forms! He is the secretary for the park's non-profit organization, The Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park, he volunteers for all of the events and activities that take place at the park such as the Jingle Hike to Santa, Adopt-A-Road, Wildlife talks and presentations, and has been on the trail at least once a week in his volunteer capacity since 2003.

The hours that Dick has put into the success of the park puts him into our Silver level status, which is between 500-999 hours.

Dick is a Rockford, IL transplant. He graduated from the University of Colorado, and moved to the valley in 1968. Dick retired from his Mechanical Engineering position with Allied Signal, took on another career with Maricopa

County, and retired from there too!

Wow! It appears that now he has made volunteering his most recent career!

Besides the time he devotes to Pinnacle Peak Park (which is a WHOLE bunch!), Dick makes time to volunteer at his church, and recently has become more involved with trail projects throughout the state with the organization, Volunteers for Outdoor Arizona.

Dick is an avid runner, logging between 3-5 miles at least 5 times a week. His most recent competition was the Fiesta Bowl 5k held in downtown Scottsdale. Which brings up a point - Dick lives in downtown Scottsdale! Not only is he logging numerous miles on his runs, his odometer too is logging a whopping 42 miles round-trip, each volunteer shift and activity he participates in! Thank you Dick for choosing to spend your time at the park, and traveling a good distance to do so!



PHOTO: FRANK BIONDO

PHOTO: DENNIS LIDDELL



Bob Fox of Wild At Heart releases a Great Horn Owl

COOKOUT AT THE RANCH - TERRIFIC SUCCESS

The Cookout at the Ranch at MacDonald's Ranch is an annual event benefiting local desert preservation, wildlife rehabilitation, Rotary charities and the Desert Foothills Scenic Drive. And it's a lot of fun. This was The Friends third year as one of the co-sponsors. Plan to attend next fall.

The Friends participation included a display of the eight newsletters that we've published showing animals and flora of Pinnacle Peak Park. Paul Diefenderfer, hosted the Friends display, which featured his recently completed artwork - a steel table depicting the Peak and the trail at Pinnacle Peak. A drawing for two metal hieroglyphic sculptures created by Paul was conducted after the event. The winners were Lori Montuori (see picture) and Lynda Gawf.



PHOTO: MORRIE CHERNIS

Desert Brittlebush

“encelia farinose”

PHOTOS: FRANK BIONDO

Desert Brittlebush, also called Incienso, can be found throughout the Park. This drought-deciduous scrub is a member of the sunflower family and grows to 2 - 5 feet high forming a rounded, leafy bush.

The leaves have serrated edges, and are broader at the base than at the tip. They are about 1-4 inches long. The leaves are covered with a thick mat of short hairs giving a gray-green appearance. The hairs form a blanket over the leaf and act as an insulating layer against the heat and cold. They also trap moisture in the air, and reduce the amount of water lost due to the dry air.

Bright yellow flowers bloom March to June. Flowers are disk shaped and resemble a sunflower, only in miniature form. Each flower is on a long bare stem, rising several inches above the mound of leaves, giving

an impression of a layer of color over the plant. Even meager winter rainfall will result in a magnificent show of vivid yellow flowers on this perennial.

The flowers track the sun to optimize exposure. A person viewing these plants with the sun to his or her back will see every flower straight on, in a blaze of color. As the growing season progresses, smaller hairier leaves are produced, and the larger, more water-consuming leaves are dropped. Finally, when conditions get dry, all the leaves are dropped, and the plant goes dormant. In its summer state the plant is leafless, and the long dead flower stalks stick out all over the canopy. These stalks break easily, giving the plant its name.

Brittlebush has had many uses in the past. The stems of the brittlebush secrete

a clear resin which was used by Native Americans from the Southwest as a glue and also as a gum. Ground up it was used by the Seri Indians of Mexico as a toothpaste. They also would sprinkle the paste on sores or heat it and spread it on their bodies to relieve pain. The early Spanish missionaries burned it as an incense.

Brittlebush helps control erosion and has been planted on roadsides in Arizona to lesson problems caused by wind and water carrying the soil away from roadbeds.

Like some other desert shrubs, the Brittlebush emits a substance that inhibits other plants from growing near it. In the competition for scarce water, anything goes in the plant world.

by Matt Luckey



Hiking the Peak

Recently while at the Park, I had the good fortune to meet some enthusiastic hikers, Debbie and Jay Seashore. Jay was introducing his bride of eleven days to Pinnacle Peak Park. It had been prior to the Park's existence that Jay had last hike the Peak and he wanted to share this with Debbie. They live nearby and plan to make this hike a part of their regular routine. Jay hikes the Grand Canyon and loves the “decent workout” he gets at the Park. The commented on the tight parking they are confronted with on busy days. Ah, yes, the draw of the Park!

Photo & Story: Morrie Chernis

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You may also contribute using Friends website (see below) Please mail your completed application and payment to.

Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park • PMB 288 • 8711 E. Pinnacle Peak Road, Scottsdale, AZ 85255

___ I am interested in volunteer activities with the Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park.

Website: www.pinnaclepeakpark.com • Email: info@fopp.org • Phone: 480-312-0990

The Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park

is dedicated to assist in maintaining the wonderful character of the Park and to support improvements and educational activities through fund raising.

The Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park Newsletter is published four times a year and is viewable on the website. Distribution of the newsletter continues to be made at the Park and selected sites in North Scottsdale.

Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park is a non-profit, 501 (c) 3 organization. Tax deductible contributions supporting the Friends mission may be mailed to the address below or made through the website.

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www.pinnaclepeakpark.com

PHOTOS: NANCY H

This Newsletter is published by the
Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park.
We welcome participation in the form of
story ideas, letters and comments.

Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park

PMB 288 • 8711 E. Pinnacle Peak Road • Scottsdale, AZ 85255

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Editor

Matt Lucky

Art Director/Graphic Designer

Frank Biondo

Contributors

Diane McCoy-Berney • Matt Lucky
John Loleit • Yvonne Massman

e-mail: Editor@MattLucky.com

Telephone: 480-390-0445

Frank Biondo Receives Appreciation Award



Frank Biondo has served on the Board since the beginning of the Friends. Additionally, he was in the first class of Park volunteers.

After a career as an art director and creative director in New York, Frank and wife Janet came West where he continues to use his artistic talents in many areas including the Friends newsletter and serves as ex-officio member on the Friends board.

We are lucky to have an award-winning graphic designer/photographer working with us to produce this highly praised newsletter each quarter. Frank's photographs have graced the cover of several magazines including The Peak. You will find his creative artwork in several galleries in Carefree, Scottsdale and Fountain Hills. See more of his work at:
www.frankbiondo.com