

OCOTILLO WELLS
DISTRICT

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST

- New OW Trading Cards
Page 2
- Niland Tomato Festival
Page 3
- Truckhaven Challenge
Pages 4 & 38
- They're Back
Pages 6-7
- Wildflower Walks
Page 7
- Junior Rangers
Page 8
- Auto Tours
Pages 9 & 10
- Meet Jeff & Charles
Page 11
- Historic Beer Cans
Page 14
- Meet Beth, Carl, Carleen
Page 15
- Coyotes Are Here to Stay
Page 16
- Critter of the Month
Page 25
- Bighorn Sheep Training
Pages 30-31
- Desert Plants
Pages 32-33

INSIDE THIS
ISSUE:

Cultural Resources	12-13
OW Maintenance	26-27
Heber Dunes Report	28-29
Biological Resources	34-35
Visitor Services	36-37

Blowsand Reads

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 1

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Superintendent's Notes

By Kathy Dolinar, District Superintendent

“If you build it, they will come” is a favorite quote of mine from the movie “Field of Dreams.” As I give thought to the closing of the year and to the beginning of 2009, this quote also describes Ocotillo Wells SVRA. We have spent a year continuously building, and now the people are coming—they are coming to enjoy the park, to experience new adventures and to welcome a break from the reality and pressures of life in big cities. People have been coming for years, of course, but in 2009 we offer them many new opportunities. We offer opportunities to become aware of and knowledgeable about the incredible resources the park has to offer, and to be educated about doing their part to make sure future generations can still enjoy the park (for example, by recycling and traveling on the roadside trail instead of the highway). We offer opportunities to use new facilities—to camp under the new ramadas, to use a brand new restroom at Heber Dunes, and to attend ATV safety courses taught by park staff here in the park. In short, we have given our visitors a chance to experience Ocotillo Wells...our own Field of Dreams.

In December I hit a major milestone with the state of California...30 years of service. To many that spells retirement; to me it says keep pursuing the dream for the park because my purpose here is not yet fulfilled. Since the day I arrived, I shared with many of you my dreams for what Ocotillo Wells could be. Thank you to those who joined the dream and shared my passion for making it better. To those of you who did not share the passion, doubted the dream, and kept working hard anyway, thank you as well. Together we have all made great strides in the service of our park. Remember, it is not the work itself, but the purpose behind the work that keeps us motivated.

The growth most visible to our visitors will likely be our development of an interpretive/education department, and the many new programs in which visitors can participate. A typical weekend now includes: Junior Rangers, live animal exhibits, ATV geology tours, auto tours at OW and Freeman, star programs, moon programs, and even coffee with an interpreter! While some people do not think of a SVRA as a place to teach visitors about the environment, I have found the opposite to be true. I cannot adequately capture the excitement

(Continued on next page...)

Superintendent's Notes *continued...*

on the faces of the people participating, or the smiles of the staff doing the programs, nor the sheer joy on the part of both. People now call our park to see what programs are going on so they can schedule those weekends to come out and ride. OHV and users give parks a great opportunity to reach out to future generations. They all benefit from the values inherent in the recreational opportunities that our park provides. At Ocotillo Wells you see all ages, from three to eighty. And it is through the passion and efforts of the OW team that these visitors are able to have such great experiences.

New Ocotillo Wells Trading Cards

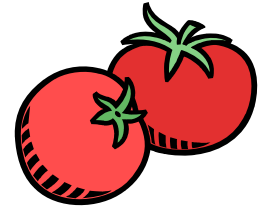


The OW Interpretive Department is proud to unveil its new trading card series highlighting Ocotillo Wells SVRA. The first series is titled, "Giants of the Desert" and includes such cards as the Giant Desert Hairy Scorpion, the tarantula, and the banded gecko, just to name a few. These trading cards have proven to be a wonderful tool for making long-lasting connections between the visitor and the desert around them.

Trading cards are handed out at all of our interpretive events and programs, so make sure to attend our programs and start your collection today!



Niland Tomato Festival



By Jeff Price, Interpreter I

Since I became an interpreter, I have had many opportunities to participate at county fairs. With a feeling of “I’ve done this many times before,” Charlie Eversole, Andy Fitzpatrick and I headed to the Niland Tomato Festival on Saturday, January 31st. Boy, I was in for a wonderful surprise! As soon as we set up our live animal display booth, we were almost immediately surrounded by fairgoers. The visitors showed a phenomenal interest in our live animals throughout the day! Usually at a county fair, you are competing with



carnival rides, food, and other booths and events. What was different at this festival was that we actually saw kids leave the rides to come back and see our scorpion, tarantula or gecko exhibits “one last time.” Being able to educate people about these little wonders of the desert—wonders that they had lived with their whole lives but about which they had never heard anything good—was probably the best feeling of the day. Many people told us that they would stop squashing the

scorpions and tarantulas, and would leave them to help keep the environment healthy and diverse. By the end of the day we had talked with over 500 people, and we hope we made a lasting impact on all. Many kids took our new critter trading cards home, and a number said they would take them to “show and tell” so they could tell their classmates about “their” scorpion, tarantula or gecko. It was a very special and successful day; my only regret is that I did not get to go on the tilt-a-whirl!



14th Annual Truckhaven Challenge



By Charlie Eversole, Interpretive Specialist

Ocotillo Wells SVRA Park Interpreters Charlie Eversole and Jeff Price found a very receptive audience for their live animal and stargazing program at CORVA's 14th Annual Truckhaven Challenge. The day started warm and sunny as we set up the terrariums holding a tarantula, scorpion and banded gecko. Lots of people enjoyed looking at the animals, and we were able to answer many questions about them, predictably "Does it bite?" and "Is it poisonous?" Once evening settled in, the darkness gave the scorpion the opportunity to put on its amazing fluorescent display, still a source of mystery and wonderment even to those of us who have seen it many times. This one is always THE crowd pleaser.



The new wildlife trading cards were enjoyed by the young visitors.



The scorpion, tarantula and gecko were quite a hit!

Darkness gave way to marginal viewing conditions for the telescopes because of bright lights, but we were still able to set up three small Astroscans and the large 11" Celestron. People were lined up to view Venus, which was very bright and prominent in the western sky right after sunset. Through the big telescope we were able to see that Venus is now half full just like a quarter moon. The crowd seemed pretty impressed when the telescopes were turned to the Orion Nebula (M42), a cloud of gas and dust where stars are born.

The CORVA people were very hospitable and really seemed to appreciate our efforts. When we began our exhibits, the Fun Run was still happening and we were able to watch as entrants came in to the final checkpoint. There were some pretty impressive off-road machines there, capable of handling even the most challenging terrain.

Check out the New Expanded Wildflower Guide

Immediately following the December rains, the Interpretive Department, with the help of the Natural Resources team, went to work on producing a new and expanded desert wildflower guide. Using images acquired in previous wildflower seasons, Beth Shugan was able to produce a magnificent 46-species, 8-page color booklet identifying the common desert wildflowers found in our park.

Make sure to pull out your copy included in this issue or pick one up at the Ocotillo Wells District Office.



OW Birthdays...

Joe Hopkins	February 6 th
Jeff Price	February 9 th
Gary Slattery	February 26 th
Charles Cawood	February 26 th

Jose Perez	March 7 th
Jordan Fenwick	March 22 nd
Peggy Hurley	March 23 rd
Todd Ramberg	March 26 th



They're Back!

By Steve Quartieri, Environmental Scientist

One of nature's greatest gifts has returned to the desert... Wildflowers!



Just like Mom's chocolate cake, desert annuals take just the right mix of ingredients to create an incredible treat! For desert annuals, the ingredients are water, temperature, and sunlight. So far this season, we have had just the right mix. The combination of deep soaking rains in December, warm, sunny days in January, and perfectly spaced showers in February has brought the return of one of nature's greatest gifts...desert wildflowers!

Many places in the park are already beginning to display various species of wildflowers. We have seen brown-eyed primrose, desert lilies, lupine, popcorn flower, dune primrose, sand verbena, Spanish needles and desert poppy just to name a few.

Desert wildflowers are an incredible treat. Get out and enjoy them while they are here...for soon...the heat will make them disappear!



(Continued on next page...)

They're Back! *continued...*

This season, the Ocotillo Wells interpretive staff is proud to be offering numerous wildflower programs. I hope you will join us for one or more of them!



Attend One of Our Wildflower Walks

Walk through the newly created Ocotillo Wells Nature Area.*

Every Saturday	9:30 am	now through March 22 nd
Every Sunday	9:00 am	now through March 22 nd
Wednesday, February 25 th	9:30 am	
Wednesday, March 4 th	9:30 am	
Wednesday, March 11 th	9:30 am	

Wildflower Off-Road Tours to the Freeman Property with Roger Riolo*

Wednesday, March 4 th	10:00 am
Saturday, March 14 th	10:00 am

Wildflower Off-Road Tours to Ocotillo Wells SVRA*

Thursday, March 5 th	9:30 am
Thursday, March 12 th	9:30 am



*For more information about these and other programs, please contact the Ocotillo Wells District Office at 760-767-5391.

Junior Rangers at Ocotillo Wells

By Steve Quartieri, Environmental Scientist

This season the interpretive staff is focused on building a strong Junior Ranger program at Ocotillo Wells. So far, we have reached over 200 kids with our live animal exhibits and programs on roadrunners, bobcats, animal tracks, poop, and desert wildflowers. Since many of our young visitors return frequently to Ocotillo Wells, our staff has worked diligently to develop programs with a variety of topics. Upcoming programs include Native American pottery, a geology hike, desert holes, the badger, and bugs, just to name a few. We now have quite a few new Junior Rangers in the state!

Junior Ranger meetings are held every Saturday at 1:00 pm at the Ocotillo Wells Ranger Station on Highway 78, and they are open to all kids aged 7 to 12. I hope you will bring your kids by so one of our naturalists can take them on a fun and educational journey into one of the many facets of the park.

During holiday weekends, additional Junior Ranger programs are also offered, so make sure to check out our program schedule, or contact us at (760) 767-5391.



Above and left: Ally Theriault and Sage Bare make plaster tracks of several animals during their recent Junior Ranger experience.



Left and below: Junior Rangers made valentines using rubber stamps of desert plants and animals.



Auto Tours at Ocotillo Wells

By Jeff Price, Interpreter I

We are proud to announce our kickoff of the Auto Tour Program at Ocotillo Wells and the Freeman acquisition! The tours occurring at Ocotillo Wells will focus on the “Gems of Ocotillo Wells” and will highlight some of the park’s most stunning features. Our first tour was held for ABDNHA members and it was a blast! We traversed the entire park during the tour, culminating in a ride through Tectonic Gorge. We saw gas bubbling out of the earth, many animal tracks, and even a desert lily blooming long before it should have been.



Above: Jeff Price interprets some of the special features of Ocotillo Wells during a recent auto tour.



Above: Visitors explore Shell Reef looking for fossils from a time long ago.



Left: Barrel Springs is a great location to spot wildlife tracks!

Freeman Property Auto Tours with Roger Riolo

The Ocotillo Wells

Interpretive Department is proud to announce a series of off-road tours through the Department of Parks and Recreation's and California State Land Commission's newly-acquired Freeman Property. Many of these 3-4 hour tours are led by local resident and renowned NAI Interpreter Roger Riolo. Join us as we discover some of the unnoticed wonders of Grave Wash, Palm Wash, Coral Wash and Big Wash on these incredible tours!



During our tours to the Freeman property, we will examine the geology, which tells the story of an ever-changing landscape, enjoy the desert wildflowers so dependent upon rain, or learn about the Native American culture of the past.



Photos by Roger Riolo

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| February 14th | Exploring Grave Wash |
| February 28th | Palm Wash |
| March 4th | Desert Wildflowers I |
| March 11th | Coral Wash |
| March 14th | Desert Wildflowers II |
| March 28th | Exploring Grave Wash |
| April 11th | Big Wash |

All tours start at 10 am

Meet at Holly Road on Highway S-22;
approximately 3.5 miles west of Highway 86.

Space is limited so please sign up by calling the
Ocotillo Wells District Office at (760) 767-5391.

Meet Jeff...

By Jeff Price, Interpreter I

Hello everyone! My name is Jeff Price, the new Interpreter I here at Ocotillo Wells, and I would like to take a little bit of time to introduce myself.

I have spent most of my life, until now, living in the San Francisco Bay Area. From a young age I was roaming the foothills, exploring the ocean, rambling in the redwoods and everything in between. These experiences when I was younger set me upon the path that I trod today, as I was instilled with the love of the outdoors and everything connected to it. College came around and I had the opportunity to take on an internship for a new class I was taking, Natural and Cultural Interpretation. The park I chose was Seacliff State Beach, an area in which my family had camped since I was very young. Needless to say, I found that interpretation was what I wanted to do and was eventually hired after my internship. What followed was a whirlwind of parks in the Santa Cruz area as I moved from place to place to try and experience it all, finally ending at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, at which I spent about 2.5 years. Well, as much as I loved that park and everyone I worked with, I felt that it was time to move on, and when the position at Ocotillo Wells showed up in the mail, I knew that was where I wanted to work as they say “the rest is history!” The month that I have been working with all of you has been a wonderful experience, one that I expect will continue to get even better as time goes on. Thank you all for your continued support of the Interpretation Department at OW; we wouldn't be able to do it without you!



Meet Charles...

We welcome Charles Rennie who is joining the Administrative Staff. Charles, with his wife, lives in Borrego Springs; they are recent transplants from Pennsylvania. Charles and his wife have 4 children and 4 grandchildren.

Charles is semi-retired after working 34 years for a Philadelphia-based Refining and Marketing Company; where he worked in a variety of positions with most of his time in the financial organization. Charles enjoys bicycling, hiking, swimming and time on the computer when away from work.



Archaeological Site Stewardship Program

By Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist

On December 5th, 26 eager volunteers met at the Begole Archaeology Research Center Library to learn how to help preserve archaeological sites throughout the Freeman Properties. Sponsored by both the Colorado Desert and Ocotillo Wells Districts, the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP) presented an Archaeological Site Stewardship Program Basic Training Course right here in Borrego Springs. Led by Beth and Chris Paden, the program taught volunteers the ins and outs of monitoring an archaeological site.

Day One of the two-day training began in the classroom. Here, volunteers first learned about what the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program (CASSP) is and why it is so important. CASSP is a volunteer program that began nine years ago as a way to increase the protection of archaeological and historical sites and to increase the public's knowledge and enjoyment of them.



Joan Schneider, Associate State Archaeologist, showing a group of volunteers what to look for when monitoring an archaeological site.

Archaeological sites are very fragile, and once lost, they are lost forever. When protected and maintained, archaeological sites give us a wealth of information about our predecessors, our communities, and ourselves. Volunteers participating in the program also learned about laws protecting archaeological sites and, thanks to Supervising Ranger Vic Herrick, how to stay safe when monitoring a site.

Day Two of training was spent out in the field. The volunteers were taken to two different

archaeological sites within the Freeman Properties and shown what to look for when monitoring sites. Not only were they getting familiar with artifacts within the sites, volunteers also learned to assess the sites for damage. Before visiting the archaeological sites, the volunteers signed confidentiality agreements concerning site location information and other sensitive data from the official archaeological records about their sites.

After completing the training, volunteers will regularly visit (about once a month) assigned sites within the Freeman Properties to inspect for damage, both from natural erosion and from deliberate or accidental damage from visitors. After each visit, the volunteers will complete a report,

(Continued on next page...)

Site Stewardship Program *continued...*



Volunteers discussing the complexities of the second site of the day.

which they will then submit to the coordinating archaeologist. If there is any damage noted, the archaeologist, in conjunction with the local ranger, will assess the damage and determine if any repairs can be made and/or what preventative actions must be taken.

In order to supply groups across California with this much needed program, CASSP is funded and supported by hundreds of volunteer participants, as well as the Society for California Archaeology, the Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, National Park Service, and by the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division of California State Parks.

Don't despair that this training is now complete. If you are interested in participating in CASSP, there are always more opportunities to do so. Please keep a lookout for future programs with Ocotillo Wells SVRA, as well as ongoing programs at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. In order to participate in a Site Stewardship Program, participants must be at least 18 years old.

**The volunteers
and
archaeologists
at the end of the
training.**



Historical Beer Cans

By Margaret Kress, Assistant State Archaeologist

Did you know...?

In 1934 the first flat top beer cans were produced by the American Can Company and had to be opened with a “church key,” produced by the Vaughn Novelty Company. This was the original use of the church key, but they were eventually used to open cans of evaporated milk and some juices, as you see today.



Flat top beer cans – the first beer can produced in the US.

top was used after World War II. Between 1942 and 1947, domestic production of beer was stopped as all cans of beer were specially designed and shipped to soldiers fighting in the war. By the end of the 1950s, very few cone-topped cans were being produced.



The church key—used to open beer cans, as well as evaporated milk and some juices.

In September 1935, Continental Can Company began producing cone top beer cans similar to the one found in Ocotillo Wells SVRA at the Toner Turkey Ranch. This particular type of cone



A cone top beer can found on the Toner Turkey Ranch in Ocotillo Wells SVRA.

Meet Beth...

We welcome Beth Shugan to the OW Interpretive team. After a career in marketing management, Beth and her husband Ron took an early retirement in 2000. Since leaving NH, they have traveled the US and part of Canada while living full time in their 35' fifth wheel. For the past few years, Beth spends her summers volunteering in Denali National Park in Alaska, and her winters in Borrego Springs, where she remains an active volunteer at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. Beth is enjoying her part-time diversion from retirement here at OW.



Meet Carl...

Carl Johnson moved to Ocotillo Wells three years ago after being raised on farms in Ohio and West Virginia. He joined the Navy at 18 and served for 23 years.

Carl has two daughters; Carla works in the medical field, and Cassandra is a senior at Helix High School and is the reigning Miss Teen Lemon Grove. Riding his motorcycle is one of Carl's favorite hobbies. We welcome Carl to the Maintenance team!



Meet Carleen...

Carleen Roberts joins us after working in Borrego Springs for a real estate developer for four years and volunteering at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. In the spring of 2007, she left for Lake Tahoe/D.L. Bliss State Park where she worked as a Senior Park Aide for the summer season.

Carleen and her partner John Lynn are full-time work campers. When Carleen met John, he had a trailer at Desert Ironwoods, where he spent his days off-road riding for ten years. Carleen is happy to return to OW to work with old friends and the enthusiastic OW staff.



Yippee! Coyotes Are Here to Stay!



By Donna Hopkins, Environmental Services Intern

Historically despised and persecuted, maligned even by Mark Twain (who called him “scrawny,” “cowardly,” and “homely”!), the coyote has survived it all to become a cherished symbol of the American West.

Supremely adaptable, the coyote is one of only a handful of species, whose range continues to grow. Once limited to the area between the Rockies and the Great Plains and from southern Canada to northern Mexico, the coyote’s range now extends as far north as Alaska, as far south as Central America and into each of the lower 48 states.

Even with a bounty on his head, the coyote was able to move into new territory as other top predators, such as wolves and cougars, were being eradicated from those areas. As more land was cleared for farming and ranching, suitable habitat was being created for the rodents that are a favorite food source for coyotes.

Originally strictly a “wilderness” creature, coyotes now can be found in rural, suburban, and even occasionally urban areas—in short, anywhere there is adequate food and cover.

One key to the coyote’s success is its variable diet. Coyotes will eat insects, lizards, snakes and birds, as well as rabbits, squirrels and many other kinds of rodents, yet up to 40% of their diet can be vegetation. They occasionally hunt in pairs or in small groups (their nighttime “yips” sometimes signaling a kill) but are more often solitary.

Not picky eaters, coyotes are scavengers as well as hunters. They have been known to use the cawing of ravens to alert them to a carcass. As you can see, coyotes are quite capable of finding food on their own. Please don’t attempt to feed them.



Photo by John Lynn

Coyotes mate for life and both sexes help care for their young. They will den just about anywhere—a hollow log, an old badger den, a hillside burrow, even under a porch. Coyotes are even able to compensate for a decrease in their population by increasing the size of their litters!

Once reviled as a useless “varmint,” the amazing coyote deserves our admiration and our respect!

DESERT

WILDFLOWER GUIDE

Ocotillo Wells SVRA



Sand Verbena, *Abronia villosa*
Common, in sandy soils throughout the park



Phacelia, *Phacelia crenulata*
Common, under shrubs in sandy, gravelly soils



Desert Heron's Bill, *Erodium texanum*
Occasional, in sandy soils near Ranger Station



Desert Five Spot, *Eremalche rotundifolia*
Occasional, in gravelly soils east to County Line



Spanish Needles, *Palafoxia linearis*
Common, all areas of the park except clay badlands



Arizona Lupine, *Lupinus arizonicus*
Occasional, in most areas of the park



Orcutt's Aster, *Xylorhiza orcuttii*
Common, in washes in northern area of the park



Chia, *Salvia columbariae*
Unusual, seen a few times near Barrel Springs



Salton Milkvetch, *Astragalus crotalariae*
Occasional, throughout the park



Arrow Weed, *Pluchea sericea*
Abundant, in washes throughout the park



White Rhatany, *Krameria grayi*
Occasional, in dry sandy, gravelly soils



Dyeweed, *Psorothamnus emoryi*
Common, throughout the park except clay badlands



Bristly Gilia, *Langloisia setosissima*
Occasional, in sandy, gravelly soils in western area



Desert Ironwood, *Olneya tesota*
Common, in western low plains and beside washes



Desert Willow, *Chilopsis linearis*
Common, in San Felipe Creek wash



Indigo Bush, *Psorothamnus schottii*
Common, on slopes, benches and in washes



Spectacle Pod, *Dithyrea californica*
Occasional, in southern area of the park



Smoke Tree, *Psoralemmnus spinosa*
Occasional, in washes



Apricot Mallow, *Sphaeralcea ambigua*
Common, in southeastern areas in disturbed soils



Ocotillo, *Fouquieria splendens*
Common, in dry rocky soils



Catclaw, *Acacia greggii*
Occasional, in sandy soils in western area



Honey Mesquite, *Prosopis glandulosa*
Common, in sandy washes



Fourwing Saltbush, *Atriplex canescens*
Common, throughout the park



Frost Mat, *Achyronychia cooperi*
Common, in sandy areas



Ground Cherry, *Physalis crassifolia*
Common, in rocks at base of East Butte



Burro Bush, *Ambrosia dumosa*
Abundant, throughout the park



Creosote Bush, *Larrea tridentate*
Common, throughout the park



Blue Palo Verde, *Ceridium floridum*
Common, in washes throughout the park



Chinchweed, *Pectis papposa*
Common, throughout the park after summer rains



Hairy Lotus, *Lotus spigosus*
Frequent, on flats and plains



Sweetbush, *Bebbia juncea*
Frequent, on plains east of County Line



Brittlebush, *Encelia farinosa*
Occasional, in rocky soils in western area of park



Desert Sunflower, *Geraea canescens*
Common, throughout the park



Desert Dandelion, *Malacothrix glabrata*
Rare, in western area of the park



Little Gold Poppy, *Eschscholzia minutiflora*
Occasional, in washes and disturbed soils



Evening Primrose, *Camissonia californica*
Occasional, around Ranger Station



Jimson Weed, *Datura meteloides*
Uncommon, near Benson Dry Lake



Desert Star, *Monoptilon belloides*
Fairly common, throughout the park



Rock Daisy, *Perityle emoryi*
Fairly common, in the western area of the park



Pebble Pincushion, *Chaenactis carphoclinia*
Occasional, in western alluvial and sandy areas



Desert Lily, *Hesperocallis undulata*
Uncommon, in sandy soils throughout the park



Brown-Eyed Primrose, *Camissonia claviformis*
Common, in sandy, gravelly soils



Dune Evening Primrose, *Oenothera deltoides*
Common, in deeper sandy washes and dunes



Ghost Flower, *Mohavea confertiflora*
Unusual, in sandy washes and gravelly slopes



Desert Chicory, *Rafinesquia neomexicana*
Common, under shrubs in sandy, gravelly soils



Popcorn Flower, *Cryptantha* sp.
Common, in sandy, gravelly soils

The Solpugid... Our Critter of the Month

By Charlie Eversole, Park Interpretive Specialist

My what big...teeth...or jaws...you have!

Our critter of the month is the “fearsome” solpugid. Undeserving of the sobriquet “fearsome,” the solpugid looks much worse than his bite. Most people, myself included, assume anything that ugly and scary looking must be dangerous. However, the poor solpugid is actually harmless unless you are an insect!

Members of the Arachnid order Solifugae, solpugids are found as far east as Texas, and as far north as North Dakota. They are aggressive predators, feeding on insects and small vertebrates, such as lizards. Reportedly, they consume more per day than any other arachnid, and although they are big eaters, they do not use venom to stun or kill their prey; rather, they rely on their powerful jaws. Makes me glad I’m not a beetle!



The solpugid looks fiercer than it's bite!

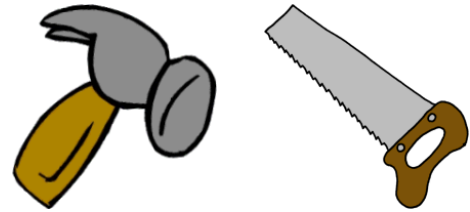


Solpugids are one of nature's “green” pesticides.

Solpugids are a common inhabitant of Ocotillo Wells. No matter how repulsive they are, never squish a solpugid. They help keep insect populations under control and the desert ecosystem in balance.

OW Maintenance

By Brian Woodson, Acting Maintenance Supervisor



These last two months have seen a lot of projects being accomplished here at OW. Across the board we have had both new construction and repairs to older systems. Some of the highlights since you've last heard from us include:



All of our maintenance stock items have been moved up on the hill into our storage barn where the crew assembled and organized the new shelving system.

The wind/sun blocking louvers project has been completed affording our modular residences some added protection from the harsh weather we get out here.

Charlie Spratt and Marco Guzman are attaching the louvers for the sun shade.

We incorporated successful field techniques for graffiti removal.



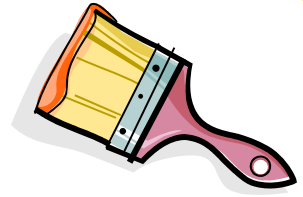
Before and...



...After

(Continued on next page...)

OW Maintenance *continued...*



Leon Jordan and Marco Guzman are busy attaching rain gutters.



Allan Garrity, Marco Guzman, and Leon Jordan pour concrete.

We have seen the completion of both the sidewalk and access stairs on the north side of the blockhouse office building, as well as the addition of all the retaining block walls that help to keep the entryways clear of storm run-off.

The Ranger Station Road combo building and the restroom building next to the District Office received new facelifts in the form of interior and exterior staining as well as new pipe insulation to reduce temperature drop for the showers (much to our visitors' appreciation), and some plumbing repairs, respectively.

More fencing went up around the residences, as well as along the Quarry Trail west of Ranger Station Road. The addition of this new fence down along the Quarry Trail will significantly reduce the impact on the natural resources along our southwestern park border. This, coupled with the fact that the area will also have hiking trails and our campfire center and day use area incorporated into it, made this fencing a necessity.

Well, that about sums up what we have been able to accomplish these last two months. We hope you join us again to see what's new here at Ocotillo Wells in March.



Fresh paint adorns the restroom building.



The Heber Dunes Report

By Vic Herrick, Supervising Ranger

During December Heber Dunes was blessed with near-perfect riding conditions. We were surprised with rain, which gave some off-roaders a thrill as they splashed through the water-filled clay playas. They, and their vehicles, became encased in a thick coat of gray clay. Like folks at a mud-pack health spa, they could no longer be recognized. Following the rains, the nights turned cool, in the mid-30s, and the frosty mornings were crisp and clear, usually followed after noon, by the gentle rays of the winter sun. Attendance was sporadic; the first few weeks of December were very slow, but the numbers increased after Christmas. Fortunately, Heber was again blessed with an accident-free month.

Much of our warm-weather wildlife has disappeared, but we still see a few stalwart friends, red tail hawks and road runners, and we hear the coyotes at night. In addition, we see various birds passing through, including an osprey, white pelicans and recently, a white-tailed kite.

One evening while enroute to assist/recover a stuck vehicle at sunset, Ranger Herrick saw a big puff of black smoke rise like a mushroom cloud behind the trees. He arrived quickly, and found several bewildered fellows watching in awe as their 4-gallon ATV plastic fuel can and a 10 ft. sq. sandy area downstream from the can were violently burning. It seems someone thought pouring more gasoline on the fire was a good idea, and the flames quickly followed the gas trail right up to the spout, igniting the plastic. Fortunately, the holder of the can was not burned; he dropped it and watched it burn. Lighting fires with gasoline is ill-advised, and we have seen several frightening incidents as a result. These same folks had a hydraulic-fluid leak a couple of weeks ago that caught their truck on fire, so Ranger Herrick advised them they had used up a lot of their “good luck” and to be cautious.

What happened here?



Answer:

With our never-ending interface with local agriculture, we had 300 freshly-fleeced woolly migrants, with hope in their eyes, travel briefly through the park enroute to the rich grazing in the new alfalfa field to the west. We were surprised at the churning action of so many cloven hooves on the sandy soil, revealing long buried shotgun shells and other items from times past. I suspect the coyotes also noticed the arrival of the sheep.

(Continued on next page...)

The Heber Dunes Report *continued...*

Heber hosted a CalPALS training, courtesy of the Riverside Sheriff's Department, where three lucky young riders learned basic skills and how to have a good time safely on an ATV. Ranger Vic also entertained and enlightened them with a live reptile display.

January at Heber was unseasonably warm, with pleasant 70-75° days and cool nights...perfect riding weather. In fact, it was warm enough that some of the brumating/hibernating lizards emerged from their hiding places to bask in the winter sun. The public also responded, and New Year's was a busy, but accident-free good time.

A few folks continue to get locked in (our gates close at 9:00 P.M.), and most of them have become stuck when they take their (or their parents'?) street legal cars and trucks into the dunes at night. These folks often don't come prepared, having no tow straps or shovels or rudimentary skills in off-road driving technique. Fortunately, the tradition of off-roaders helping one another continues, and many of our visitors assist folks who are stuck, but some people are *truly* stuck. They are the ones who sing the blues at the Ranger's door late at night. Getting stuck in the sand happens to most everyone eventually, and what a learning experience it is! A shovel is a very good friend to the off-roader...as is a sense of humor and good judgment.

A precious few rains have allowed some seeds to germinate, and green shoots are where you find them. We are always hopeful for some wildflowers, but the desert is fickle...

Our restrooms near completion, the final touches and inspections pending, and we look forward to opening them to public use soon. They are very well done, first class all the way. We are blessed with a lot of sunny days, so the solar panels should help with energy costs.



Bighorn Sheep Training

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

After over six weeks of conversation and negotiation, things finally fell into place for the bighorn sheep training class that was needed for the winning bidder, Scott Cashen, wildlife biologist from Walnut Creek, California, to get his permit. The peninsular bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*, formerly *O. c. cremnobates*) is listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. This gives the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) jurisdiction and its decision was that it would be advisable to get a permit. Scott has years of wildlife experience, but had no bighorn experience of any type; hence the USFWS was requiring that he and his staff undergo training.

Environmental Scientist Joe Hopkins was approved as a trainer based on his experience as a volunteer at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park where he has done thirteen of the annual Sheep Counts, given many programs on bighorn sheep to the public, and trained some of the park's interpreters about desert bighorn. However, because he had never worked on a field project nor had a permit for the species, another trainer was also needed with those qualifications. The few problems with training length and content were soon resolved, but locating a second trainer was becoming a real obstacle as one possibility after another failed to materialize. Then Joe became re-acquainted with a former instructor of his, Jim Cornett, a well-known desert naturalist, author of 29 books on the desert as well as over 70 technical articles, and curator for decades of the Palm Springs Museum's natural history wing before the museum became exclusively an art museum. Jim, unbeknownst to Joe, also had been running a consulting firm in the Coachella Valley while teaching,



The obligatory class photo at the Crawford Overlook along Montezuma Grade. (Photo courtesy of Nova Clarke.)

(Continued on next page...)

Bighorn Sheep Training *continued...*

writing, and working for the museum. In that capacity, he had done over 300 projects that involved surveying for peninsular bighorn sheep, starting twenty years before they had even been listed as an endangered species. Jim was approved in a little less than two weeks. Official approval for the training program that Joe had authored followed, and the training was finally a reality.

In addition to Scott and his crew leaders who needed the certification, Senior Environmental Scientist Eric Hollenbeck and Environmental Scientist Gary Slattery participated in part of the class in anticipation of some day in the future when our Resources Staff may have responsibility for bighorn sheep monitoring. Nova Clarke, the new seasonal interpreter at Anza-Borrego, also participated and Environmental Services Intern Donna Hopkins, who has years of bighorn experience, assisted Joe and Jim for a couple of days in the field.

While a number of days were spent at the Freeman Property, much of the training was done at Anza-Borrego where Joe and Donna had scouted various locations. They found great examples of tracks and scat and located ten sheep. The class was not disappointed either as eighteen more sheep were sighted during the actual training. Jim also had a great time in that he saw types of sheep behavior in the park sheep that were not at all characteristic of the behaviors he had observed in the sheep in the Palm Springs area. He also witnessed sheep browsing on ocotillo, a plant species that he is about to feature in an upcoming research project and book.

These hoof prints were part of a long line of tracks of a group of sheep that had hurried across a wash from one steep slope to another. (Photo courtesy of Nova Clarke.)



Desert Ironwood

By Peggy Hurley, Park Maintenance Assistant

The desert Ironwood is appropriately named. This tree has some of the densest wood in the world. It is so heavy that it will not float. Still, historically it was used for tool handles by the Native Americans. It is used now by the Seri of Mexico who carve it by hand into plant and animal shapes for commercial purposes. According to tradition, these ironwood carvings bring good fortune and long life to their owners.



The wood of the Desert Ironwood is so dense that it does not float!

The thorny ironwoods are one of the largest and longest living trees in the Sonoran Desert and can live to be over 1,500 years old, though that is rare. They grow almost exclusively in the Sonoran Desert with their range being nearly identical to the boundary of the Sonoran Desert. Growing fifteen to twenty five feet tall, they can be found below 2500 ft elevation in dry, ephemeral washes.

The Desert Ironwood's Latin name is *Olneya tesota* and it is the only member of this genus. It is in the pea family and its nitrogen-fixing nodules on the roots and nutrient-rich leaf litter help to

(Continued on next page...)

Desert Ironwood *continued...*

fertilize the soil. The tree creates its own microhabitat by providing dense shade and enriching the soil. Because of this, the ironwood is especially important as a “nurse plant” to saguaro seedlings in Arizona.

Pink to white flowers cover the tree in the late spring. Brown bean-like pods follow with one to eight seeds inside. The Native Americans used the flowers as medicine and the seeds can be roasted and eaten or ground into flour. Animals feast on the seeds and rely on the tree’s shade during the summer.



Native Americans used the Desert Ironwood flowers as medicine.



The seeds of the Desert Ironwood were roasted or ground into flour by the Native Americans.



Desert ironwoods line Quarry Wash, making it one of the “shadiest” areas in the park. Because of these trees, visitors often utilize the wash for camping. While the ironwood is an important habitat tree for the desert animals, it is also appreciated by the desert humans.

Biological Resources

By Joe Hopkins, Environmental Scientist

Heading into the month of December, the calendar of expected events was pretty slim, ideal for getting caught up on data entry and beginning to compile the OW Annual Habitat Monitoring Report. Of course, we all know that around here the expected is the *unexpected*.

A few expected events did occur, more or less as scheduled. On the 3rd, Senior Environmental Scientist Eric Hollenbeck and ES's Joe Hopkins and Gary Slattery attended the quarterly meeting of the Interagency Coordinating Committee for Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Management (ICC). This meeting featured field visits to a few areas of the Yuha Management Area administered by BLM-EI Centro where crews from the Student Conservation Alliance (SCA) were performing miracles in land restoration. Through careful raking and blending of soils, adding seemingly natural wash features, and constructing vertical mulch (dead branches and sticks stuck into the ground in an arrangement that made them appear to be just a dead plant), badly hammered play areas of open riding virtually disappeared, thereby encouraging the next riders to stay on the established trails. Important discussion at this meeting also included the need to revise the Rangewide Management Strategy (RMS). The current RMS was written in 2003 which means that 2009 is just about the right time to review and rewrite the document. To start the process, a long list of management practices was brainstormed and compiled for future consideration. Also at this meeting, the deadline for submitting each agency's parts of the ICC Annual Report was announced. Joe and Eric were able to get OW's sections revised with our 2008 information including our successful Occupancy Surveys and the extremely successful pitfall trapping of flat-tails.

Senior Park Aide Willie Copeland finally started getting crews. While expected, it was not sure when these crews would become available because of the late rash of fires that broke out in the northern parts of the state. The arrival of the crews has allowed for the repair of quite a number of fences, some naturally damaged from flooding (the August flood in Eriogonum Wash) and some from out-of-control riders who don't take some of the curves too well (Devils' Slide Lane by the airport).

Willie also has had the crews start on a split rail fence project on the Toner Property.



One of the *unexpecteds* presented Gary with a great opportunity. Those wonderful rains of December 15 and 17 gave him the chance to transplant over 80 of his greenhouse specimens in various locations. Since many of these will go dormant in the winter, we won't know if the transplants were successful until next spring, but here's hoping. These rains also

Gary Slattery and Willie Copeland plant a new native palm tree.

(Continued on next page...)

Biological Resources *continued...*

created more crew work as the ensuing floods redamaged the fencing at Eriogonum and damaged other fencing in both Tule Wash and Arroyo Salado. Work there was stalled for a couple of days when the transport for the crews got stuck in the residual mud.

The rain, on the other hand, hindered one of the expected events, the first bird surveys by the contractor on the Freeman Property. Despite the loss of a day and a half to the rain itself and then more time trying to navigate some of the uncertain conditions in the washes, it took only a little extra time to complete the scheduled work.

The best *unexpected* also concerned the Freeman Property. The bighorn contract, which had been hung up with permitting issues with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), finally moved forward. USFWS was requiring that the contractor complete a bighorn training before he could be issued a permit. (Please see the separate article regarding this training.)



Photo courtesy of ABTT

This footprint of a kit fox shows the fur on its foot that enables it to cope with life on the hot sand.

Joe and Eric also entered into discussion with the newly formed Anza-Borrego Tracking Team (ABTT) about establishing some transects in OW that complement our mammal monitoring protocols. The ABTT, of which Joe is a member, monitors one transect in Grapevine Canyon that gathered data that may have helped derail the Sunrise Powerlink Project through Anza-Borrego and has just established a second one that will gather data to try to persuade CalTrans to construct a bighorn sheep overpass at the Narrows where a number of sheep have been struck by vehicles.

Despite all of this activity, some unfinished data entry from our monitoring surveys did get done. Alas, the OW annual report awaits our attention in another, less unexpected, month.

Further, the month for working on the annual report was not *January*. During the first half of the month, Joe was instructing the bighorn training class. Eric and Gary participated in a few days of the training and then attended the Natural Resources Training at Marconi. Eric did two presentations at the training—one on our Habitat Monitoring System and one on how he built the database system being used by the contractors on the Freeman Property. Eric, Gary, and Joe then attended The Wildlife Society (Western Section) Conference in Sacramento. This important conference brings together biologists and wildlife managers from throughout the West to examine issues that affect the important animal residents of our parks. That left the last week of the month to try to dig through the stacks of accumulated e-mail and phone messages and the odds-and-ends of unfinished tasks and projects, although Eric found time to attend a meeting with Colorado Desert District on the interim management of the Freeman Property, and to look forward to February with its furloughs on the horizon.

Visitor Services

By Jordan Fenwick, State Park Ranger



December was a very exciting month at OW as we had a storm come through the park and dump more than one-and-a-half inches of rain, causing extensive flash flooding in most areas of the park. Many of the trails were washed out or damaged by the flowing water, and even after the skies cleared up, we were left with evidence of the storms: several new bodies of water that lasted several weeks, mud throughout much of the park, and snow on the local mountains (the very local mountains). It was very interesting to watch as San Felipe Wash, Tarantula Wash and many others become raging rivers within a short amount of time. Snow could be seen to the north on the Santa Rosa Mountains, south on the Vallecito Mountains and to the west on the San Ysidro Mountains above Borrego Springs.

Christmas and New Year's weekends were very busy, with an estimated 155,000 visitors in the park during New Year's. Once again, the teamwork exhibited by the Rangers, Lifeguards, Ocotillo Wells Volunteer Fire Department, West Shores Ambulance and the Sheriffs was extraordinary! These groups from various agencies operate like a well-oiled machine during every medical situation.

On December 15th we had an all-employee meeting with great food and a gift exchange. During the meeting State Park Peace Officer



(Continued on next page...)

Visitor Services *continued...*

Andy Ahlberg and his partner K-9 Ranger Urban gave us a demonstration of Urban's highly-trained skills. Sector Superintendent Cris Sanguino played the role of a suspect holding a stick and being confrontational with officers. Urban used his power to help subdue the uncooperative "suspect." A special thanks to Cris for playing the role of the "suspect."



Above: K-9 Ranger Urban waits for a command from his partner Peace Officer Andy Ahlberg.



Left: Urban is protecting Officer Andy from the stick-wielding "suspect."

Right: Urban captures and holds "suspect" Cris Sanguino so she cannot run.



Above: Another job "well-done!"

CORVA Event in Ocotillo Wells a Great Success

By Rick Fisher, CORVA

The 14th Annual Truckhaven Challenge fund-raising event for CORVA was held in OWSVRA this year, and many participants expressed pleasure with the route and the event in general.

Over 200 vehicles followed the 26-mile marked route through the mud hills and canyons of the northeast corner of the park. This area of the park contains the most varied terrain preferred by four-wheel drive enthusiasts and had not been utilized much until CORVA and other organizations started holding events here last year. The drive was punctuated by three checkpoints where cards were drawn for the poker hands everybody carried. Each checkpoint also provided a game opportunity. Cash prizes were awarded for the best poker hands and game scores. Saturday evening over 500 participants gathered under the lights to enjoy a barbecue dinner sold by the Trailmasters Four Wheel Drive Club and win thousands of dollars of prizes in the raffle. The top prizes were a winch donated by Point Magu Four Wheel Drive Club and a set of tires donated by BF Goodrich.

The camp area that was used off of Holly Road has a permanent toilet and a ramada, and the park provided a dumpster. CORVA provided additional toilets for those without facilities. Unlike last year when it rained all Saturday night, making departure a challenge, the weather was spring-like and wind-free for the event.

CORVA appreciates the cooperation of park management and rangers in making this event a success.

Watch for Comet Lulin!

By Charlie Eversole, Park Interpretive Specialist



There is a new comet, named Lulin, approaching our planet. It will be closest to Earth on February 24th and has a distinct greenish glow. Comet Lulin was identified by Quanzhi Ye at Sun Yat Sen University in China in 2007 and was at first thought to be an asteroid.

As Comet Lulin approaches Earth, its brightness will increase and allow us to view the comet with just a pair of binoculars. Until now, the best viewing has been in the predawn hours, but after February 24th, the comet will be visible in the late evening, although the moon will start to interfere with ideal viewing conditions. The comet is moving upward in the east southeast past Saturn along the ecliptic, which is the path of the sun or the moon, and will be visible more toward the southeast as the month ends. Because the comet is moving in an orbit opposite to the Earth's orbit, it will appear to move very quickly across the sky.

DESERT WILDFLOWERS

These desert wildflowers may be seen in or around our park this season. See if you can find them in this word search. Their names never lie wholly in a straight line; they bend and twist in every direction to challenge your mind.

A S D S H B F E E D E S E R T B
 L E B U A R H N E I L O U A L N
 T N M B W O S H R S J E T I I R
 T I R B N F I N A P M O S P L K
 P D E Y E O R T D U N E E F Y A
 R A C S Y K R G E T M E V I R P
 I C H A N D V C I C O N E C R T
 M R O S E B E L U O R O N O W I
 L U P O L B R O T C E T I T O L
 N D I W T B I L T L T S N M A L
 A S N S E O W E S A S G G F R L
 L L E N S E S O R M I R P C O O
 B P H A C L O W E R C O R Y Q W
 D I T T E F D L R E I P T R E S
 E B A I L N E U S Y H O D C B E
 S E R T S U S E R T C P P Y A D

- Apricot Mallow
- Brittlebush
- Brown Eyed Primrose
- Desert Chicory
- Desert Lily
- Desert Poppy
- Desert Sunflower

Dune Evening Primrose

Lupin

- Forget Me Nots
- Orcutt's Aster
- Phacelia
- Sand Verbena
- Spanish Needles

The Weather Log...



December

High Temperature	Dec 1 st	80.7 degrees
Low Temperature	Dec 27 th	35.8 degrees
Average High Temperature		65.7 degrees
Average Low Temperature		48.4 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Dec 25 th	48.0 mph
Rainfall for the Month		1.77 inches

January

High Temperature	Jan 21 st	79.8 degrees
Low Temperature	Jan 27 th	40.2 degrees
Average High Temperature		71.9 degrees
Average Low Temperature		50.8 degrees
Maximum Wind Gust	Jan 29 th	41.0 mph
Rainfall for the Month		0.00 inches

Data recorded at the Ocotillo Wells Ranger Station, Ocotillo Wells, California.



Ocotillo Wells District

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