



TELESCOPE

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Death Valley Natural History Association

From the Desk of the Director | David Blacker, DVNHA Executive Director

Time has an exciting way of moving within Death Valley National Park. While observing rocks and geological processes, time might appear to be standing still. Yet, in other instances, it flies by in the blink of an eye; it only takes a moment for a meteor to burn up in the atmosphere while observing a Death Valley night sky. For me, this has indeed been a “shooting star year”!

We embarked on the fiscal year in October 2022, still grappling with the aftermath of the floods we experienced in August and September. Many roads were closed, including Highway 190 from Stovepipe Wells to Lone Pine and Ridgecrest. Several backcountry roads, including Titus, remain closed or heavily damaged, and we have yet to recover fully.

The Summer rainfall led to the big question, “Will we have a super bloom?” The weather, however, continued to bring cold temperatures into March. It wasn’t until Easter weekend that we witnessed the onset of a widespread bloom. Although pleasant, it fell short of a super bloom. For those who still wish to appreciate some flowers, the higher elevations of the park continue to revel in the bright colors of spring.

In February, Death Valley NP hosted its largest-ever Dark Sky Festival! During this festival, DVNHA successfully held its first two Night Sky Binocular Programs. We are excited to announce even more night sky programs in our upcoming Death Valley Institute schedule. Additionally, we concluded another season of Scotty’s Castle Tours. We aim to share the schedule of upcoming tours with our members by the end of September, so stay tuned and ensure our emails are not landing in your spam folders.

Many might have heard that Death Valley NP is transitioning to a cashless system. However, those who hold the steadfast belief that “cash is king” need not worry. Only the NPS is going cashless. If you still wish to pay your entrance fee with cash, you can visit our bookstore at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. Speaking of our bookstores, we expect some fantastic new products for the upcoming fall season. These include a new Pupfish Mini Building Block Kit and fresh t-shirt designs. You can look forward to a sneak peek of one of these exciting new products in our upcoming E-Newsletters.

FYI, this April, I celebrated my 20th anniversary as the Executive Director of DVNHA. Once again, time flies!



Flood damage on Badwater Road. Photo courtesy of NPS.



David Blacker celebrating 20 years.

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TELESCOPE

DEATH VALLEY NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

dvnha.org

Death Valley National Park

Information & Updates

Women of Change Exhibit

The National Park Service has opened a new exhibit at Death Valley National Park, showcasing the stories of lesser-known women who have made significant contributions to the park's history. The exhibit features five women who worked in various roles at the park, including a botanist, a rancher, and a teacher. The women's stories offer insights into the challenges they faced as women working in a male-dominated field. The exhibit includes photographs, artifacts, and personal stories from the women themselves or their families. It is a part of the National Park Service's effort to highlight the contributions of women and underrepresented groups in the park system's history. The exhibit is located at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center and is open to the public. The park service hopes that the display will inspire visitors to learn more about the park's history and the people who have contributed to it.



Women of Change Exhibit in the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. Photo Courtesy NPS.

Marijuana Grow Clean-Up

In an impressive joint effort, the National Park Service (NPS) and partners recently took action to clear an illegal marijuana grow site in Jail Canyon. The successful removal of hazardous chemicals and trash has resulted in the reopening of the area for public enjoyment. Over 10,000 marijuana plants, estimated to be worth a staggering \$7 million, were eradicated from the site. The growers responsible for this illicit operation had abandoned the area, leaving behind litter and hazardous chemicals that posed a threat to the environment.



Trash removed from Jail Canyon. Photo Courtesy NPS.

Park rangers, along with dedicated members of the American Conservation Experience (ACE), navigated dense vegetation to access Jail Canyon, where they collected and bagged various remnants of the illegal operation, such as tubing, tarps, and bedding. The California Air National Guard also played a vital role in the cleanup efforts by utilizing their Pave Hawk helicopter to collect debris.

The rugged terrain of Death Valley National Park requires increased vigilance to detect and prevent new instances of illegal cultivation. Visitors are urged to exercise caution when exploring remote areas of the park, maintaining awareness of their surroundings. Indicators such as modern trash, well-trodden human trails, or irrigation tubing, should be promptly reported. If a grow site is encountered, it is vital to leave the area immediately and inform the NPS by visiting a nearby visitor center or contacting the NPS tip line at 888-653-0009.

Through a combined dedication to environmental stewardship and the protection of visitor experiences, the NPS and its partners continue to combat the detrimental effects of illegal marijuana grow sites, safeguarding the natural beauty of Death Valley National Park for generations to come.



California Air National Guard utilizing their long line helicopter operation. Photo Courtesy NPS.

Education Efforts

with Anastasia Roy

Learning Comes Alive at Death Valley NP!

Anastasia Roy, DVNP
Education Director

A place like Death Valley inspires so many questions. Bringing students to Death Valley allows them to connect to their natural sense of curiosity and take great leaps in learning.

As the new Education Director, I'm excited to connect kids to Death Valley National Park through field trips! Through canyons, salt flats, and sand dunes students will be exploring, questioning, and learning in the best classroom there is. They go home with questions to puzzle over and with a new sense of their parks and their place in them. Teachers return having accomplished science standards and having created a memorable experience for their students.



NPS Park Ranger leads a program. Photo courtesy of NPS.

Schools work hard to plan field trips, recruit chaperones, arrange lunches, buses, and other logistics. At Death Valley National Park, we're lucky to be able to work with the Death Valley Natural History Association to offer school travel grants. Thanks to funding from the Death Valley Natural History Association and the National Park Foundation (NPF) Open Outdoors for Kids Grant Program, teachers can apply for transportation grants to help make their trips possible. Applying is easy, and interested teachers can get the conversation started in an email to us at DEVA_Education@nps.gov.

In 2022, we connected with kids virtually through our Virtual Learning studio! State of the art streaming equipment and new curriculum was made possible through a grant from DVNHA and NPF in 2021-22, and our rangers relished introducing students from across the country to Death Valley National Park.



About Anastasia Roy

Death Valley National Park's Education Director, Anastasia Roy, recently moved from Yosemite National Park where she built a distance learning program and ran a Yosemite Leadership Program for college students. Getting her start teaching 1st through 3rd grades in a one-room schoolhouse, she then worked with middle schoolers in an overnight program at Acadia National Park, families in Yellowstone, and students K-12 at Grand Canyon National Park's south rim. Introducing kids to their parks is one of her great joys.



Students on an Adventure Hike. Photo Courtesy NPS.

We Need Your Support

Night Sky Viewing Area

Where the Stars Meet the Sand | Kendra DeSomma, DVNHA Media Specialist

We've embarked on a journey of the utmost importance at the Death Valley Natural History Association. As city lights outshine the stars and disconnect us from the cosmos, we aim to raise funds and construct a dedicated Dark Sky Viewing Area within Death Valley National Park. This initiative brings the universe's beauty closer and highlights the significance of reconnecting with our celestial roots.

Park Ranger Matthew Lamar, a devoted stargazer, states, "We live during this amazing time where we collectively know more about the night sky than at any other point in human history. Yet, as individuals, most of us have never been more disconnected from the night sky." A staggering 80% of North Americans can't see the Milky Way from their homes. Lamar believes a dedicated viewing area can change this, enabling improved programming to reconnect visitors with the night sky, a resource that has inspired people for centuries.

As artificial lights and screens continue to dominate our lives, the allure of the stars remains strong, as evidenced by the popularity of Night Sky Programs at Death Valley. Park Superintendent Mike Reynolds states, "Night Sky Programs at Death Valley have literally exploded in popularity in recent years and are by far the most popular public events held in the park." However, these programs can draw large crowds, overtaxing existing facilities. Changes must be made to accommodate everyone safely and comfortably, including adequate parking, walking paths, and space for telescopes. With a designated viewing area, we can ensure the legacy of these programs, passing down the joy of stargazing to future generations.

The proposed Dark Sky Viewing Area solves current challenges, but its importance goes beyond the immediate. It promises enhanced safety, increased accessibility, and a better visitor experience. Currently, stargazing can be hit-or-miss. Without designated areas, visitors may wander off trails, get lost, or inadvertently damage sensitive desert environments. A dedicated viewing area would have clear boundaries, safe paths, and the necessary amenities, making it an enjoyable, risk-free experience for everyone.

Moreover, it's not just about having space; it's about preserving the tranquility and beauty of the night sky. Light pollution is everywhere. Even small, seemingly harmless sources of light can profoundly impact our ability to see the stars. A designated viewing area will provide an unparalleled window into the cosmos, unhindered by the light of civilization.

DVNHA's fundraising initiative is more than just a project; it's a mission to preserve our access to the night sky and to enhance our means of appreciating its wonders. It's about recognizing our inherent bond with the cosmos and working towards strengthening this connection. As we look up at the stars, we're reminded of our place in the universe, a humbling and inspiring perspective.

With your help, we can ensure that the mesmerizing beauty of the night sky remains accessible and continues to inspire generations to come. Stargazing isn't just a fun activity; it's part of our heritage to protect and pass on. Please consider donating to get this process started and help us in this remarkable endeavor. Together, we can preserve the awe-inspiring spectacle of the night sky for ourselves and for those who come after us. **Scan the QR code on the right or go to <https://dvnha.org/night-sky-viewing-area-project-page> to learn more.**



Test Your Knowledge

Death Valley Denizens Puzzle

Guess the names of these Death Valley inhabitants!

1. My common name has two parts, but I am neither. In the evening, I emerge from my burrow and stuff my fur-lined cheek pouches with seeds. I can spend my whole life without drinking a drop of water, getting the moisture I need from the seeds I eat.

I am a _____.

2. Witness my majestic curved horns and powerful presence as I navigate the desert slopes with grace.

I am a _____.

3. Slithering through the shifting sands, I'm a stealthy reptile known for my unique sideways movement and rattling tail.

I am a _____.

4. With swift agility and a bushy tail, I dart across rocky terrain at night, showcasing my adaptability in the desert realm.

I am a _____.

5. Slow and steady, I am a desert-dwelling reptile with a hardy shell, patiently exploring the arid landscapes.

I am a _____.

6. With keen survival skills and a distinctive black mask-like pattern, I'm a swift desert runner known for my leaps and bounds.

I am a _____.

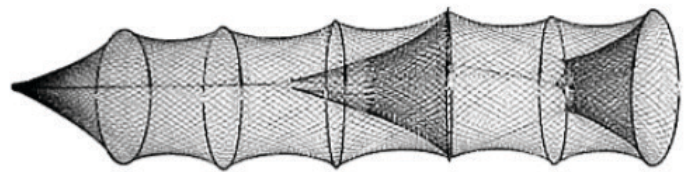
Check your answers on Page 7!

Ash Meadows NWR

Information & Updates

A Fishy Invader: Green Sunfish | Leah Simantel, Ecological Restoration Specialist

If you've had the privilege of visiting Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge lately, you've probably seen the large hoop nets stationed in the Crystal Spring outflow and wondered what they're for. The nets have kindled public curiosity, and they provide a real-world example of the intense effort required to remove an aquatic invasive species, in this case green sunfish. Green sunfish are native east of the Rocky Mountains and were introduced to the western states as early as the 1890s. They are highly adaptable, and prolific invaders! Green sunfish have been present at Ash Meadows for decades, and were presumably introduced to Crystal Reservoir as a sport fish. Known to be voracious predators, they eat anything small enough that they can catch - including the endangered Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish.



A hoop net used to capture green sunfish; the net opening faces downstream to capture fish swimming towards the spring head.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, regular fish barrier maintenance was put on hold, potentially creating an opportunity for green sunfish to bypass the fish barriers and invade the upper Crystal outflow. When the green sunfish were discovered there in 2021, staff bolstered the existing fish barriers and got to work removing sunfish. Since the project began, over 200 green sunfish have been removed from the upper Crystal outflow.

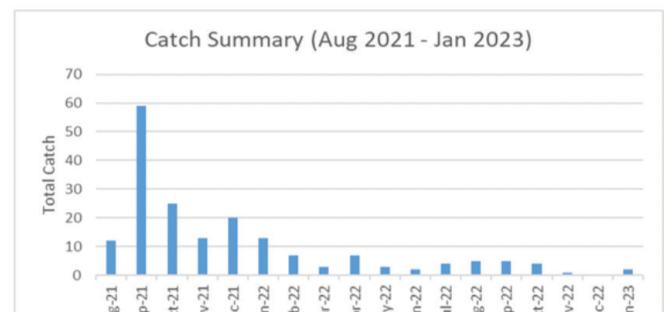


Green sunfish at Ash Meadows NWR.



Hoop net at Ash Meadows NWR.

The most recent snorkel survey in March 2023 resulted in zero green sunfish sightings - but they are good at hiding, so this doesn't necessarily mean that the sunfish have been eradicated from this reach. The story of the green sunfish invasion highlights the damage that invasive species inflict on their native counterparts. Even smaller species like aquarium fish can multiply and spread, competing with native fish for resources like food, space, and breeding habitat. Given the dramatic impacts on native species, agencies have little choice but to commit their limited staff and fiscal resources to these battles. That's why it's important to think twice before you dump fish, snails, or any other aquatic pet into a natural system! Keeping aquatic invaders out of our waterways helps protect native species for future generations.



Graph represents the Total Catch Summary from when the hoop nets were first installed (August 2021) to the last green sunfish encounter (January 2023).

Figure by Emma Priger, SCA.



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Death Valley NHA

Information & Updates

Salt Creek Updates

We are delighted to share the news that the Federal Highway Administration has generously allocated funds for the replacement of the Salt Creek Boardwalk, which suffered unfortunate destruction during last August's floods. Despite the fact that it is not a conventional roadway, this funding emphasizes the significance of the boardwalk and its value to the community. Recognizing the importance of public input, the National Park Service initiated a public comment period, during which ideas and concerns were attentively gathered. Following this, our Executive Director, David Blacker, played a pivotal role in an NPS design charette meeting regarding the future boardwalk layout.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated members of DVNHA whose generous Giving Tuesday donations will be utilized to replace the interpretive panels—a crucial component of the project that falls beyond the scope of the Federal Highway Administration and NPS funding. These contributions will help ensure that the boardwalk not only serves as a safe and functional structure but also as an educational resource, enriching the visitor experience. We look forward to the restoration of the Salt Creek boardwalk, allowing visitors to once again immerse themselves in the captivating beauty and educational opportunities it offers.



Salt Creek before the 2022 floods. Photo Courtesy NPS



Salt Creek after the 2022 floods.

Do You Love the Death Valley Area?

DVNHA is currently in search of qualified individuals with specialized skill sets who can effectively collaborate as a team to support our mission. Board Members advise, govern, oversee policy and direction, and assist with the leadership and general promotion of the Death Valley Natural History Association to support the organization's mission and efforts.

We kindly invite you to review the DVNHA Board Job Description to gain a comprehensive understanding of the responsibilities involved.

If you are enthusiastic about joining, email your resume or CV to our Executive Director, David Blacker, at director@dv nha.org, including "Board Opportunity" in the subject line.

Read the full description by visiting <https://dv nha.org/aboutus/board> or scanning the QR code on the right!



1. Kangaroo rat 2. Bighorn sheep 3. Sidewinder rattlesnake 4. Kit fox 5. Desert tortoise 6. Black-tailed jackrabbit



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Skelly Family Adventures

