



# TELESCOPE

The Newsletter of the Death Valley Natural History Association

## From the Desk of the Director

David Blacker, Executive Director  
DVNHA

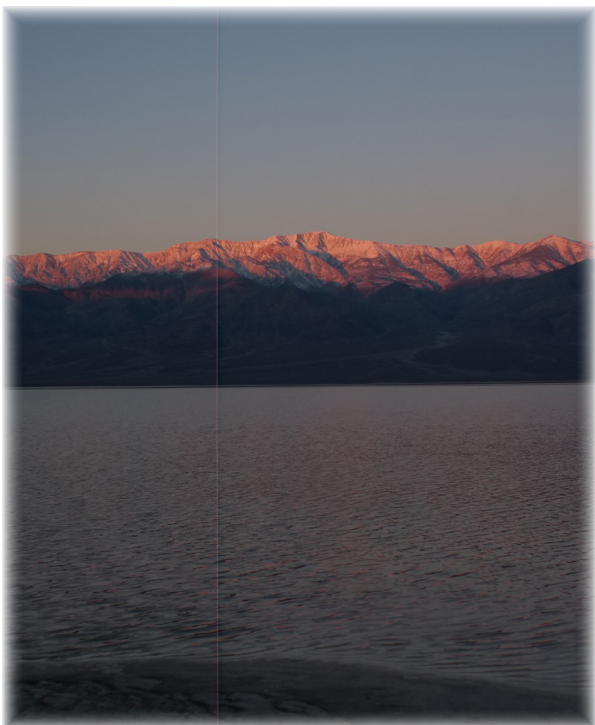
## Desert Blooms and Lake Views: Unexpected Wonders

Living and working in Death Valley, it's easy to forget to pause and appreciate the wildflowers. During my latest trip to town, the vibrant wildflower bloom caught my eye, a spectacle often overshadowed by the excitement surrounding Lake Manly. Seeing so many kayaks in a desert is unusual, yet little attention has been paid to our wildflowers. Desert Gold has blanketed the wash edges and hillsides, and a hint of green at higher elevations signals more blooms to come. For those who visited during the perfect mix of flowers, the lake, and mild temperatures it was definitely a sight to see.



In recent news, our partners at Ash Meadows recently celebrated their 40th Anniversary in April. What a grand celebration it was, look on our webstore, [store.dvnha.org](http://store.dvnha.org), to get your 40th anniversary merchandise.

There have been many inquiries about road conditions. We've reopened 1,323 miles of roads, including backcountry roads though Titus Canyon might be closed for over a year due to storm damage. These storms, including Hurricane Hilary and an atmospheric river, brought significant rainfall, leading to park closures and contributing to the lake and wildflowers.



Are you curious about how our nonprofit fared last year? Despite losing the last month and a half of the fiscal year due to a hurricane, we achieved sales of \$1.8 million. We raised an additional \$250,000 through fundraising, supporting Death Valley NP and Ash Meadows NWR substantially.

We've also introduced new programs this year. Private tours of Scotty's Castle have been particularly popular, and we're excited to resume them in October 2024. Our Night Sky programs have also been a success, showcasing the wonders of the night sky through binoculars and a 20" telescope. In the future we look forward to hosting the Death Valley Institute's first Messier Marathon, an all-night star-gazing event.

If you're considering a visit before the heat sets in or planning one more spring trip, don't wait. The wildflowers are still vibrant but the heat is starting to creep in.

# Death Valley National Park

## Information & Updates

### ***Hurricane Hillary in Death Valley NP***

On August 20th, 2023, Death Valley National Park had its rainiest day ever, receiving more precipitation than it normally does in an entire year. All roads in the park, including CA-190, were damaged and the entire park was closed for just under two months. Remnants of Hurricane Hilary caused extensive flash flooding, which eroded material, undercutting road and leaving unsupported pavement and drop-offs in many places.

On October 15, CA-190 and part of Badwater Road, reopened, allowing visitors to access about 10% of the park. This included many of the popular day trip locations including Zabriskie Point, Furnace Creek Visitor Center, the DVNHA Park Store, Badwater Basin, Artists Drive, and the Mesquite Sand Dunes. Roads continue to open as repair work is completed. Crews have also been working to repair backcountry dirt roads. Many roads in the park were closed due to flood damage. National Park Service officials stated that these temporary closures were necessary for safety and to prevent damage of natural and cultural resources which occur when people drive offroad around damaged road sections.

One of the more incredible and lasting impacts was the lake at Badwater!

It was such a big attraction for visitors and a beautiful place to capture a reflection of the mountains on a still day. Shortly after the storm the lake was deep enough to kayak on! Even with the lake gone Death Valley is still a treasure, so come see us soon and stop at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center to see the rangers and the DVNHA Park Store.

Nichole Andler, Chief of Interpretation & Education DVNPA



*Flood damage on Highway 190*



*Badwater Basin, Taken September 2023*

### ***How to Navigate USA Jobs***

Employment with the National Park Service or the National Wildlife Refuge System provides a unique opportunity to contribute to the nation's natural and historical legacy. The process starts by visiting the USA Jobs Website at [www.usajobs.gov](http://www.usajobs.gov) and creating a user profile. Here, you can search for job openings, carefully review job announcements, and understand the specifics of each role. It's essential to tailor your resume to match the job requirements, ensuring it highlights relevant education and experience. Gathering the necessary documents listed in the job posting is another crucial step. The application process also includes reviewing and responding to online assessment questions, which requires updating your resume to demonstrate how your skills align with the job's needs. Finally, the application is submitted by clicking 'Apply'! The process requires attention to detail and a thorough understanding of the job requirements in order to increase the chances of success. For an in-depth guide, visit [dvnha.org/usajobs-guide](http://dvnha.org/usajobs-guide) or scan the QR code.



[dvnha.org](http://dvnha.org)

# Volunteering in DVNP

## *Volunteering in Death Valley NP!* | Ray Thompson, Volunteer DVNP

My first experience with Death Valley took place in 1967. Be assured it was definitely not love at first sight. For a young boy it was a terminally long drive for a weekend camping trip. And when we finally got here, much to my dismay, there were no trees! How do you go camping if there are no trees? It was not until many decades later I learned to appreciate what Death Valley had to offer.

Somewhat ironically my return to Death Valley, home to North America's lowest point, was stimulated by a desire to climb the mountain peaks here in the park. It was that re-exposure which then ignited the love affair which exists now. It seemed with every trip to the park an entirely new and different subject matter would present itself. As the Death Valley onion kept revealing its many layers, each new layer would necessitate yet another return, and with it still more discoveries.

As a volunteer I spend most of my time working at the information desk in the park's Visitors Center. It's equal parts tour guide, concierge, naturalist, geologist, meteorologist, historian, off-road vehicle consultant, elementary school teacher, and camp counselor. The variety of questions the visitors will ask is absolutely breathtaking! And I think it's that variety that I enjoy the most. It certainly keeps one on their toes and requires a commitment to constant learning.

In the summertime the vast majority of the park's quests are foreign nationals, mainly European or families with children. This is one of the reasons I particularly like working here in the summer. While our job is to impart knowledge to those visitors, I feel like I am the one who is learning with every one of those interactions . . . even as deeply comical as some of those conversations can be with the differing levels of language fluency. If I've learned absolutely nothing else in Death Valley, engaging people with a few simple pleasantries in their native language opens hearts and minds.

It is those many positive experiences, along with the magnificent sunrises and sunsets, and the wonderful park community, that make the Death Valley volunteer experience so richly rewarding.



[www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

## *About Volunteering at Death Valley NP*

Death Valley NP offers long-term volunteer opportunities during the fall and spring, including roles like campground hosts, visitor center volunteers, maintenance workers, and assistants to scientific researchers. These positions typically require a minimum three-month commitment. Volunteers with motorhomes are preferred due to limited housing, with full hookup sites available at no cost. Additionally, visitors can contribute to citizen science by sharing wildlife data on [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org), including observations and photos, under the "Death Valley Wildlife" project. More information can be found at [www.nps.gov/deva/getinvolved/volunteer.htm](http://www.nps.gov/deva/getinvolved/volunteer.htm) or by scanning the QR code.

# We Need Your Support

## Scotty's Castle

### Scotty's Castle Update | David Blacker, Executive Director DVNHA

Probably the most asked question I get is "What's going on with Scotty's Castle"? The easiest answer is "a lot". As we approach the 9th anniversary of the flood that closed Scotty's Castle, I thought it would be a good idea to give you a detailed update. So far Death Valley National Park has funded 45 projects worth 54.4 million dollars. These projects included flood protection structures and installation of a new HVAC system. This fiscal year's projects include water and wastewater distribution projects and rehabbing the Gas Tank House as a Temporary Visitor Contact Station. Outlying projects include Telecoms and new alarms before any historic furnishings can return to the castle and the grounds can be reopened.

Of course, none of us are happy that it is taking longer than the original project timelines, considering that we had experienced pandemic closures, it threw a monkey wrench into our anticipated timeline. Plus, having to make the money before we can spend it makes the process move more slowly. We also ran into some issues along the way with certain projects causing the costs to go up leading us to restart the contracting process all over again. But there is hope for the future and the current projected date for the Scotty's Castle reopening is set for Winter of 2025.

### Scotty's Castle Still Needs Your Help!

Here at DVNHA we pride ourselves on raising money and supporting projects that are completed quickly by the best people possible. But sometimes things happen, and for us we have had two projects that were delayed by the pandemic and have had significant cost increases.

The restoration work on the Scotty's Castle Theater Organ project, had 3 of the 4 phases completed. The fourth phase consists of one final trip to fine tune the organ and install the new midi system. But the costs of having the restorers come to Death Valley is projected to cost us another \$30,000.

Reproduction of the leather curtains which is part of the larger "curtains project" has been mostly completed, however, with costs raised, some curtains in this project still need to be completed. Leaving us with an additional cost of \$22,500 to finish the reproductions due to the originals being damaged from years of use and the Death Valley sun.

I'm sorry that we need to come back and ask for your support on these projects once again, but here I am asking because these projects are too important not to finish. I thank you for your past support and for your continued support of these projects. To help us finish these Scotty's Castle projects please visit [dvnha.org/donate](https://dvnha.org/donate) or use the QR code. As always if you have questions, please feel free to contact me via email at [director@dvnha.org](mailto:director@dvnha.org).



Scotty's Castle, Living Hall



Scotty's Castle Curtains, Living Hall



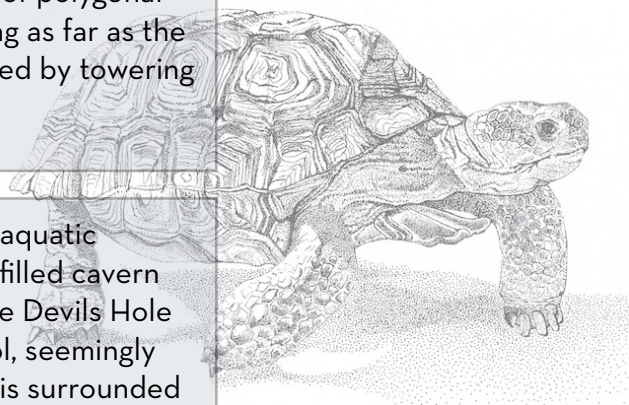
Support  
Scotty's  
[dvnha.org/  
donate](https://dvnha.org/donate)

# Test Your Knowledge

## Landscape Matching

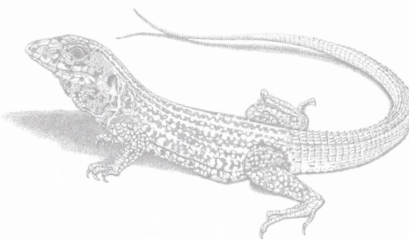
Draw a line to match the description to the correct location. See answers below!

1. Discover the lowest point in North America, a surreal landscape marked by vast salt flats. Here, the ground mimics a giant mosaic of polygonal salt patterns, stretching as far as the eye can see, surrounded by towering mountain ranges.



2. Encounter a unique aquatic habitat, a deep, water-filled cavern that is home to the rare Devils Hole pupfish. This small pool, seemingly an oasis in the desert, is surrounded by rock walls and desert vegetation, creating a stark yet beautiful natural phenomenon.

3. Step into this sandy wonderland where rolling dunes provide a stark contrast to the surrounding mountains. The constantly shifting sands create a dynamic landscape, offering a playground for photographers and nature enthusiasts alike.



4. Unravel the mystery of this famed viewpoint, where you'll witness a maze of eroded, golden-colored badlands. This surreal, undulating terrain offers a panoramic view of the valley, especially mesmerizing at sunrise or sunset.



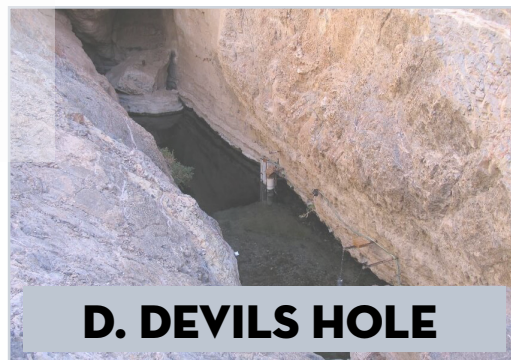
**A. MESQUITE FLAT SAND DUNES**



**B. BADWATER BASIN**



**C. ZABRISKIE POINT**



**D. DEVILS HOLE**

1. Badwater Basin 2. Devils Hole 3. Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes 4. Zabriskie Point

# Ash Meadows NWR

## Volunteering at Ash Meadows NWR

Jennifer Heroux, Visitor Services Manager Desert NWRC

When you visit Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), it won't be long before you cross paths with a volunteer. Perhaps they answered your questions at the visitor center or you saw them fixing the spring boardwalks or pulling invasive plants? With only three permanent refuge staff, volunteers provide critical assistance to the refuge. In 2023, volunteers contributed 5,000 hours to the refuge. The equivalent of almost 2.5 full-time employees!



Crystal Pool, Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

This year, we are honored that two of our volunteers, Mark Ackerman and Joyce Atkinson, have received the National Wildlife Refuge Association's 2023 Refuge Volunteers of the Year award. Since 2016, Mark and Joyce have volunteered over 11,000 hours at eleven refuges, including Desert and Ash Meadows NWR. Why do they do it?

*"We enjoy being able to use our existing skills and to learn new skills as we tackle projects. The Refuges we work with have an ongoing list of projects and never enough staff or volunteers to complete them."* –Ackerman & Atkinson

If you thought volunteering was just helping at a campground or answering questions, think again. Mark and Joyce prove that all kinds of opportunities are out there. To name a few of their accomplishments, they have: repaired and improved the water supply system at Cibola NWR; performed heavy equipment operations at Arapaho NWR; installed Motus bird tracking stations, along with designing and installing Wi-Fi networks at the Desert NWR Complex.



Mark Ackerman and Joyce Atkinson

Mark and Joyce want you to know that there are others like them.

*"The important thing for people to realize is that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service had 18,860 volunteers this year who worked tirelessly donating their time and expertise to make a difference."* –Ackerman & Atkinson

If you are looking for opportunities on public lands like Ash Meadows NWR, your first stop should be [Volunteer.gov](https://www.volunteer.gov). You will also need a volunteer resume, but if you don't have a lot of volunteer experience yet, don't worry! Building the resume is simple just list your relevant professional experience and don't discount your non-professional activities like Scout leader, church events, and any similar experience. Whether you want to teach children, fix solar panels, run heavy machinery, or help with data entry, there is a volunteer opportunity for you out there. Get involved and learn more about volunteer opportunities by visiting [www.fws.gov/refuge/ash-meadows/get-involved](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/ash-meadows/get-involved) or by using the QR code.



[www.fws.gov](https://www.fws.gov)



# ***Explore the Wonders of the Death Valley Region!***

## **Explorer Programs**

Explorer Programs are led by our DVI Staff and will take participants a level deeper than what they can learn on their own. With specific locations and educational insights from the DVI staff, participants will get an experience they will remember for the rest of their lives.

## **Platinum Programs**

Platinum Programs are focused on specific aspects such as geology, hydrology, and more. These programs are led by subject matter experts who have either done original research or published their research in written papers or books.



[www.dvnha.org/dvi](http://www.dvnha.org/dvi)



## **Discover Death Valley with DVI Private Tours!**

DVI now offers private tours, presenting a unique and personalized way to explore this majestic landscape. Each itinerary is tailored to individual preferences, ensuring a memorable and unique adventure! One Scotty's Castle private tour participant proclaims, "Wow! We can't thank you enough for your generosity and all the time that DVNHA staff devoted to helping us learn so much about Scotty's Castle, the Johnson's, and Scotty, and the opportunity to see so much of the Castle and grounds. DVNHA staff gave us a truly unique experience that will certainly remain a high point of all of my 2024 memories. Thank you."

**Interested in a tour? Go to the DVI Website to sign up!**



**DEATH VALLEY**  
**NATURAL HISTORY**  
ASSOCIATION

PO Box 188  
Death Valley, CA 92328  
1.800.478.8564

[dvnha.org](http://dvnha.org)

**SPRING 2024**

## Skelly Family Adventures

