

2014 Grant Report Asombro Institute for Science Education

Summary

The Asombro Institute for Science Education received a \$500 grant from the Native Plant Society of New Mexico to plan and host a public event focused on native plants. We are pleased to report on the success of “Plant It! Cactus Adoption and Native Plant Day,” which raised awareness about native plants for visitors from southern New Mexico and west Texas. We were able to use many of the same materials created for Plant It! to help raise awareness for 15 teachers during a workshop in July (funded by the National Science Foundation).

Activities

“Plant It! Cactus Adoption and Native Plant Day” was held on Saturday March 1, 2014 at Asombro’s Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park from 9:00 AM until noon. Eighty-five people attended the event. They got the chance to participate in seven activities:

- Native Plant Society of New Mexico booth – Members of the Las Cruces chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Mexico were on hand to discuss native plants with visitors. They passed out information, answered questions, and invited visitors to join their club.
- Jack and Martha Carter question and answer booth – Visitors met and chatted with the Carters at one of the most popular booths at the event. They learned all about native NM plants and had the opportunity to purchase the Carters’ books.
- Plant bingo – Kids of all ages got to play plant bingo, learning how to identify some of the most common native plants while having a great time.
- Dichotomous key – Visitors learned to use a simple dichotomous key (using toy lizards!) and then examined real dichotomous keys to help identify Chihuahuan desert plants.
- Plant booklet – the youngest event participants made a simple book with samples of creosote bush and honey mesquite, as well as drawings of fishhook barrel cactus and ocotillo.
- Doña Ana County Master Gardeners – Visitors learned from local gardening experts at this booth.



A young visitor plays plant bingo at the Plant It! Cactus Adoption and Native Plant Day.

- Cactus adoption – Participants could “adopt” a rescued cactus, either to plant at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park or in their own yards. The cacti were rescued in December 2013 by Asombro Board president Justin Van Zee (also a member of the El Paso Cactus and Rock Club). They were rescued in partnership with the El Paso Cactus and Rock Club in an area slated for development in El Paso. We provided adopters with extensive care sheets for each species as well as a brochure developed by the El Paso Cactus and Rock Club on laws about cactus harvesting on public lands. Visitors who chose to have their adopted cactus placed at the Nature Park received a photo of “their” cactus and GPS coordinates. We encouraged them to come back to the Nature Park to visit their cactus often!



Justin Van Zee plants one of the adopted cacti at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park.

On July 24, Asombro hosted a teacher workshop for 15 teachers from Las Cruces, Deming, and El Paso. Asombro staff shared information and resources that had been developed for the public event with teachers. This included letting them know that they could borrow class sets of Jack and Martha Carter’s Trees and Shrubs of New Mexico that they generously donated to Asombro for this purpose. Two teachers have already borrowed the books this fall semester.

Acknowledgements

We are extremely grateful to the Native Plant Society of New Mexico for the generous grant that allowed us to host this exciting new public program and teacher workshop. This seed money (pun intended!), along with more than 100 hours of time donated by 13 Asombro volunteers, made this project a success.