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TELESCOPE

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Bighorn Sheep Get a Checkup

By William Sloan, Wildlife Biologist
National Park Service, Death Valley National Park

In a collaborative effort between the National Park Service (NPS) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), 12 desert bighorn sheep were captured in Death Valley National Park in November 2017. Eight ewes and four rams were captured during the operation from pre-selected targeted polygons within the park. The capture work went very smoothly, and several volunteers were excited by the opportunity to assist NPS and CDFW biologists in handling the animals.

The desert bighorn sheep were tested for disease and then fitted with radio and satellite collars to facilitate tracking and relocating. Although the results of the disease testing are not yet known, upon examination, all the animals appeared to be in good health. A wide-spread disease outbreak resulting in pneumonia and death was first observed in the Mojave in 2013 and has spread throughout much of the region, but visual monitoring suggests it is possible the disease has not impacted the sheep population here in Death Valley National Park.

Helicopter bringing captured desert bighorn sheep into a centralized Death Valley National Park location for assessment.

Sheep were blindfolded to eliminate the need for tranquilizer use, then released back into the wild where they can be tracked.

Photo Courtesy of Volunteer: Birgitta Jansen.



DVNHA Education Intern, Valerie Newcomer, working with biologists to assess captured sheep. Aside from education and working with kids, Valerie is also keenly interested in learning about wildlife. When Valerie discovered that there would be a sheep capture event she wanted to know one thing, "Can I go to see this?" She arrived at the Furnace Creek Airport where the first base camp for the sheep capture was set up, hoping to be able to watch. Instead she was invited on a team and taught what to do and why. "Here I was," she said, "learning about bighorn sheep in the middle of the desert where I didn't expect much wildlife. It was awesome." We are thrilled to have Valerie here with us in Death Valley National Park this season. Photo Credit: Birgitta Jansen.

Besides the disease issue, much more information about the bighorn population in the park will be gathered. The use of radio and satellite collars will prove invaluable in studying the demes of sheep within the park. In biology, a "deme" is a term for a local population of a particular species that actively interbreed with one another and share a distinct gene pool. Home ranges, intra- and intermountain movements, population numbers, lambing success, recruitment, relative herd health, mortality causes and other demographic factors will be collected and analyzed. This information is important in understanding overall herd health and long-term survival of the desert bighorn sheep here in Death Valley.

Staff and visitors are encouraged to report all bighorn sheep sightings. To standardize the reporting process, observation forms are available at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. Observations can also be reported to DEVA Wildlife Biologist William Sloan by emailing william_sloan@nps.gov or by calling 760-786-3252.

Death Valley's Amazing Night Sky

By Tim Kendziorski
Chair, DVNHA

No joke! Over the years, my wife, Kimber, and I have probably purchased one of each item that is available in DVNHA's store. We have a bookshelf stuffed full of the shopping adventures, memorabilia of the years we have been coming to Death Valley. We are here at least two times a year, sometimes more. It doesn't matter if we are camping out of the back of our car or living in the lap of luxury in our vintage Airstream trailer, we stop at the store and peruse every shelf for some treasure we haven't seen yet. We find them too, because DVNHA's Executive Director, David Blacker, does an excellent job of making sure we have the most interesting and latest products available in the store. I would not be exaggerating if I said the average visit costs us \$100 or more. It's worth it, we love our souvenirs. Each visit to Death Valley is a trip that we remember with fondness.

One such trip was especially memorable. We came down to the valley to explore something new and stayed at the Stovepipe Campground. We don't normally stay there, but for this trip we were all settled in there and quite happy. As evening fell, we were treated to a wonderful sunset and delicious glass of wine with our dinner. But, we lamented that we didn't have our telescope with us for the evening. As amateur astronomers, we appreciate how a big telescope will allow you the ability to see the most magnificent details and colors in space objects that you may not have known existed.

No, all of that fancy gear was at home safe and sound. All we had was a pair of binoculars, a planisphere, and a green laser pointer. The laser pointer is often used in astronomy to point out the general location of objects in the sky. The planisphere is a very simple star chart that allows you to figure out what stars are in the night sky for any date and hour of the year. You simply dial it to the correct date and approximate time and you are in business. You can see what major objects (not planets because they are not stationary) and constellations are in the night sky.

After sunset when the stars were coming out in full, we rested in our reclining chairs with our wine and proceeded to have the most amazing evening of astronomy. One of us would find an item on the planisphere and use the laser pointer to guide the other to the object with the binoculars. Once the mysterious object was found, we would switch to both see what was there in the night sky. Hour after hour, we explored until we grew sleepy and couldn't observe anymore. It was a wonderful evening.

Fast forward to last spring—we once again found ourselves in Death Valley, car camping and without a shred of any fancy astronomy equipment. We once again found



Did you know that Death Valley National Park was designated an International Dark Sky Park in 2013? The skies here are affected by only the smallest amounts of light pollution, which classifies the park at the highest level "Gold Tier" designation of star-filled skies by the International Dark Sky Association. This prestigious designation is based on stringent outdoor lighting standards and innovative community outreach aimed at protecting and enjoying the dark night sky. Astronomical objects seen here can only be seen at the darkest locations across the globe.

ourselves at the DVNHA Bookstore in the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. There was an assortment of astronomy equipment available. I looked the gear over—all of it actually reasonably priced! I selected a very portable, compact and able tabletop Newtonian telescope. Once again, we sat out for hours at our picnic bench in Texas Springs Campground and enjoyed this wonderful little scope until the clouds started obstructing our views. If you want to know what we got, you can see it at: <http://bit.ly/2yJJOvx>.



If you are ever in Death Valley and want to try a new adventure, get a planisphere and a pair of binoculars and spend an evening or two exploring the night sky. You will be rewarded with the joy of discovery in our special Dark Sky Park. Don't worry if you don't have those things though – you can find them at our store!



Join us in Death Valley National Park Friday, February 23– Sunday, 25th

Death Valley is one of the very few places in the world where the extremes of our planet can offer a look into what may be possible in our Solar System and beyond.

This free event features keynote speakers, scientist-guided field trips to analog sites, an expo with hand-on activities, and a star party!

MarsFest 2018 is brought to you by: The National Park Service, Death Valley Natural History Association, SETI Institute, NASA Ames Research Center, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), and NASA Astrobiology Institute (NAI).



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FROM THE DIRECTOR

By David Blacker
Executive Director, DVNHA

How would you like to have a sneak peek into the plans for the new interpretive exhibits at Scotty's Castle? Here's your chance. Join us in Death Valley on January 31st and February 1st to review and comment on display alternatives. We will post more information on our website as it becomes available. The reopening of this historic site is now scheduled for 2020, but you can still join us for walking tours this season. They are scheduled twice a day, every Saturday, now through April 14, 2018. Online registration is required. Please visit our website at dvnha.org to see what dates and times are still available and reserve your spot today!

MarsFest 2018 will be in February. Join DVNHA, NPS, NASA, and SETI for a look at our universe from Death Valley National Park. DVNHA is also looking for a few good people to be board members; check out the section below this article to find out how to apply. November 30th was the last day for Linda Slater who has retired as Chief of Interpretation here in DVNP. We could not have had a stronger partner or bigger joy to work with. We wish her all the best.

Last but not least, a HAPPY HOLIDAYS to all of you from DVNHA! I look forward to seeing you all in the New Year: 2018 will be our best year yet!

David

Board Member Opportunity

Each spring some of our board members fulfill their terms of service, creating the opportunity to bring on new qualified individuals interested in serving on our all volunteer board. If you love Death Valley and Ash Meadows and think you may be interested in helping us achieve our mission by serving on our board of directors, we would love to hear from you!

To learn more about what the commitment entails and how to apply, please visit:

<http://dvnha.org/news/108-board-members>





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Keane Wonder Mine is one of the best examples and most accessible of historical gold mining sites in Death Valley National Park. Several structures can still be found at this historic gold mining location, including the remains of an aerial tramway that still has ore buckets hanging from cables. In the early 1900s, miners used the tramway to lower 70 tons of gold ore down the steep Funeral Mountains each day.

The National Park Service (NPS) closed the site to visitor entry in 2008 due to concerns over tramway stability, mine openings, and mill tailings. Since that time, the park has closed off entrances to mine openings and has stabilized the tramway towers, as well as the upper and lower terminals. Concerns about the content of mill tailings have been studied via multiple rounds of soil sampling.



Death Valley National Park celebrated the reopening of the Keane Wonder Mine on November 7th. Members of the Death Valley '49ers joined park staff and other visitors as Virginia Stockman, '49ers President, cut the ribbon. Keane Wonder Mine is now open every day and is accessible on a graded dirt road off of the paved Beatty Cutoff Road. A video on Keane Wonder Mine's reopening is available on Death Valley National Park's Youtube channel and on our website. This video was produced by the National Park Service in association with Bristlecone Media. Funding for this video has been provided through DVNHA by a grant from Rio Tinto.

Photos courtesy of: NPS.