



Volume 61
Issue 2

TELESCOPE

The Official Newsletter of the Death Valley Natural History Association

Summer 2016

Death Valley R.O.C.K.S.



Death Valley Natural History Association partnered with the National Park Service again this year rejuvenating the Death Valley Recreation Campaign for Kids through Study Program (R.O.C.K.S) through the new Every Kid in a Park Initiative. We were honored to provide transportation grants for regional school children to visit Death Valley and participate in Ranger-led field trips. Death Valley National Park Rangers also visited classrooms to inspire 4th grade students to learn about their public lands and

encourage participation with Every Kid in a Park passes.



The name Death Valley is a world renowned outdoor classroom for exploration and connection to the land of extremes. Kids of multiple age groups joined rangers for curriculum-based field trips uncovering the wonders of Death Valley National Park. Using National Park Service Centennial funding, NPS hired two seasonal educational rangers to organize and lead field trips as well as provide classroom programs totalling 64 programs and 1356 participants! Of these programs, 831 students were able to visit Death Valley as part of the 36 physical field trips that took place this season!

Two different curriculums were offered. The first, *Extreme Living at Death Valley* took place at Mesquite Flats Dunes and Salt Creek. Geology and biology came together in this inquiry-based ecology experience. Children explored how the sand dunes were formed and asked, why are there pupfish in Salt Creek? What adaptations help plants and animals survive in these extreme environments? Students hiked through dramatic environments and collected data to determine the answer to these questions, learned about the dunes as a habitat and did plant identification exercises at the Salt Creek habitat.



The second program, *Dynamic Death Valley*, took place at Golden Canyon and Badwater Basin. Participants explored ancient environments and found clues of the powerful forces that continue to shape Death Valley. They explored questions such as, what changes will the future hold? Students hiked through Golden Canyon, which reveals the dramatic changes in landscape and climate in this area. Golden Canyon focused on the stories rocks can tell. This included rock types (sedimentary, metamorphic, igneous). A flood game was played and students explored signs of flooding in Golden Canyon (very appropriate considering the events of October!). Lastly, students made and shared observations of rocks in the canyon. At Badwater Basin, powerful forces take the stage. How do these forces continue to shape what we see today? At Badwater, the students made observations on the salt. They also participated in a rainshadow demonstration in which they played parts of the landscape. They had fun getting wet and enjoyed the experience!

*A significant amount of funding for this year's transportation grants was provided by the Donald and Ruby Branson Foundation—a family foundation established in 2006, in Lone Pine, CA for the purpose of making grants to support environmental, educational and social progress in America.

If you would like to make a contribution to help bring students to experience Death Valley please visit us at dvnha.org/donate or give us a call at 1-800-478-8564 ext. 10. Thank you!



FROM THE DIRECTOR

By David Blacker, Executive Director

4 Million, 13 Years, and a Dead Ficus

The ficus in my office died. Now I know this does not mean anything to most of you, but for me this was a big deal. On the first day I arrived in Death Valley, the acting Director, Esy Fields, told me that when I moved in the only thing in the house would be this ficus. It belonged to the previous Director, she had left it, and now it was mine. So, when I discovered that my inherited tree had died I began to get a bit nostalgic. Our Office Manger asked me how long I'd had it and I had to stop and think; it's been 13 years as of the end of April! Not bad for a ficus and not bad for an Executive Director.

There have been many other changes the last 13 years: two super blooms, four Superintendents, three Chiefs of Interpretation. We've partnered with Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and started the Death Valley Field Institute, partnered with Road Scholar to bring hiking programs here to Death Valley. We've raised funds for Death Valley R.O.C.K.S, initiated annual Scotty's Castle Organ Concerts, held multiple History Conferences and the 1st Science Conference—so much has happened. When I sat down and took a look at the only metric that matters, guess what? At the end of May, DVNHA exceeded \$4 million in aid to Death Valley National Park, and over \$100,000 in aid to Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge!

I can't tell you how proud I am of these numbers and of the wonderful staff, incredible partners, and amazing donors and members that helped to make this possible. You are probably thinking, now that we have passed 4 million, there must not be anything left to do and I wish that were the case! The fact is if we had another 4 million right now we would still have more projects than money to spend it on.

Some of those projects include: the second half of the restoration and conservation work on the Organ Console and its components (\$30,000), conservation of the historic firearms collection (\$27,000), and conservation of the lace curtains in the Upper Music Room (\$20,000), and there are others that we don't have estimates on yet. As always, if you would like to help please contact us at 1-800-478-8564 ext. 10, donate online at: dvnha.org/donate, or mail a check payable to DVNHA, PO Box 188, Death Valley, CA 92328. Just be

sure to memo "Scotty's Castle" if that is the fund you'd like your dollars to go toward.

So what have we done so far? We've paid for curatorial intern support thanks to another educational grant from the Donald and Ruby Branson Foundation. These interns not only help provide a valuable service to Scotty's Castle, but the opportunity also provides them with a very unique educational experience that will help them move forward with the expertise they will need to succeed in their careers. We've also covered the cost of the conservation of the silver collection at the Castle. A large part of this project's support was made possible by a \$5,000 grant from Metabolic Studio. We also wrote a check for the first half of the work on the Scotty's Castle Organ thanks to the many donations that have come in since last October!

As I look back on all we have accomplished, I'm always drawn back to the future and what we are ready to do next. We have a new Field Institute Director, Renee Rusler, who is taking over our Road Scholar programs and adding other exciting adventures this coming year. JJ Graham just drove off into the sunset to live on a farm in South Carolina. Ranger Brandi Stewart who did such a great job with the park's "Every Kid in a Park" program this spring will be back in a permanent capacity this fall! This means that "Death Valley R.O.C.K.S/Every Kid in a Park" is in capable hands and will be as strong as ever. All in all, DVNHA's future looks every bit as bright as our past. We look forward to all the challenges that the future will bring and to having all of you along with us as we create the future we all wish for.



P. S. Keep an eye out for a direct mail piece with more details about Scotty's Castle. Death Valley National Park has invited us to participate in the Scotty's Castle site plan. We will give you an update as soon as it is finalized.

Thanks for your continuing support!

David

Donations Make a Difference at Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

By Adrienne McGill, Visitor Services & Environmental Education Specialist,
Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge



Meet Hal Fairfield. Hal is a volunteer fish biologist with a bathtub full of endangered Pahrump Poolfish (*Empetrichthys latos*)—with permits of course! He is a retired machine operator and mechanical inspector who has had an avid interest in fish since his high school days. Currently, Hal is a major asset to Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR).

The Ash Meadows team is small and does not currently have an official paid refuge biologist. In fact, two years ago all of the Ash Meadows staff retired at once leaving Hal as the longest serving person remaining at the Refuge. He has essentially been acting as a refuge biologist and he isn't even a paid employee!

Hal first started volunteering at AMNWR in the summer of 2011 when he came to help clear cattails, and has been integral to the Refuge ever since. He has been involved in many projects over the past five years. He monitors and removes aquatic invasive species and maintains fish barriers to protect restored habitats for our endangered fish—the Ash Meadows Amargosa Pupfish (*Cyprinodon nevadensis mionectes*), the Warm Springs Pupfish (*Cyprinodon nevadensis pectoralis*) and the Ash Meadows Speckled Dace (*Rhinichthys osculus nevadensis*). He helps improve the habitat of the threatened Ash Meadows Naucorid (*Ambryus amargosus*) by clearing vegetation to promote algal growth and he assists Nevada Division of Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—Ecological Services with annual fish surveys. His attention to detail and his dedication to the resources has made him vital to the success of the Ash Meadows biological program.

Hal is able to do all that he does on the Refuge thanks to the assistance of the Death Valley Natural History Association (DVNHA). DVNHA has been supporting Hal and the work of other volunteers at Ash Meadows by providing a stipend to help offset costs for commuting to the Refuge. This work is critical in maintaining the health of the Ash Meadows ecosystems and their inhabitants. We hope to keep Hal around for many more years through the generosity and support of DVNHA. Thank you to everyone who's participated in the Adopt-a-Pupfish program or made other donations in support of this work at the Refuge. This funding truly makes a difference!



Hal, alongside a volunteer crew, clearing cattails from the Crystal Spring outflow. Although southern cattails (*Typha domingensis*) are native to the area, they can dominate the vegetation in the water system and alter the habitat for the pupfish and other species that live there.

Photo credit: Steve Dudrow/USFWS Volunteer.



DEATH VALLEY
NATURAL HISTORY
ASSOCIATION

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Inspiring a passion for
 Death Valley and Ash Meadows

Board Member Opportunity

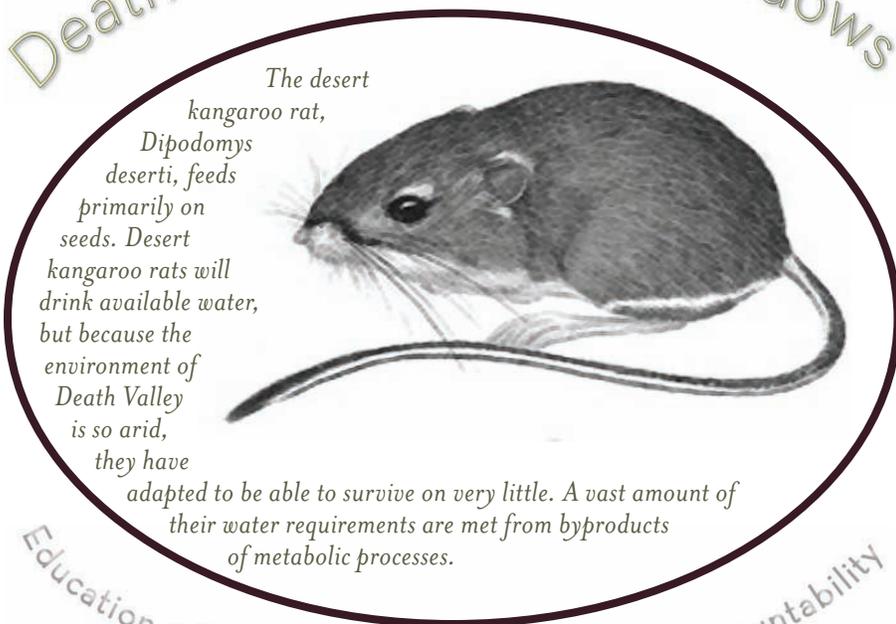
Each spring some
 of our excellent
 board members
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 service.



We are actively
 seeking qualified individuals who
 have specific skill sets, can work as
 team players, and are interested in
 serving on our all volunteer board.

If you love Death Valley and Ash
 Meadows and think you may be
 interested in serving on our board
 of directors, we'd love to hear from
 you!

Please visit:
<http://dvnha.org/news/108-board-members>
 to find out more about what the
 commitment entails and how to
 apply.



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