Volume 57
Issue 2

TELESCOPE

The Official Newsletter of the Death Valley Natural History Association

Partnership: Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

It is well known that the Death Valley Natural History Association has a long standing partnership with Death Valley National Park dating back to our inception in 1954. A little lesser known, is that we have a similar agreement with Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge. In this issue we seek to shed some light about this partnership, what kinds of assistance we offer to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and how you can contribute.

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR) was established June 18, 1984. It is located in Amargosa Valley, NV within Southern Nye County. If travelling to Death Valley National Park from the Las Vegas Area, you can see it just off the Bob Rudd Memorial Highway West of Pahrump and before Death Valley Junction.

Ash Meadows has over 24,000 acres of spring-fed wetlands and alkaline desert uplands. It is home to a wide array of wildlife, at least 26 plants and animals found nowhere else in the world and 14 listed as endangered or threatened. The highest concentration of endemic species in the U.S. distinguishes Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge from other refuges. Ash Meadows is a unique and valuable example of desert oasises that have now become scarce in the southwestern United States.

AMNWR's objectives are to restore the wetland and desert upland habitats to what was found on the refuge prior to 1960 before many of the waters were diverted for irrigation purposes. This provides habitat for resident and other migratory wildlife. However, they also seek to provide a wildlife oriented recreation experience that can be enjoyed by everyone.

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Photo courtesy of: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cyndi Sousa.

Numerous environmental education programs are scheduled throughout the year in addition to opportunities for hiking, hunting, and volunteering. Wildlife observation including birding is a popular activity for visitors. A bird list is available at the refuge office or can be found online at:

www.fws.gov/desertcomplex/ashmeadows/bird_list.html

Many visitors hoping to catch a glimpse of the Devils Hole Pupfish are often disappointed to find that Devils Hole is fenced off when they arrive. A very close relative, the Ash Meadows pupfish, can easily be seen at Point of Rocks or Crystal Spring. Longstreet Cabin is definitely worth taking a look at and Longstreet Spring is an amazing example of the restoration work that has been completed in recent years.

Our partnership with Ash Meadows allows us to assist the refuge by receiving and distributing donations and grant funding. During our partnership so far, we have been able to support various educational programs, pay stipends to volunteers, and provide support for internship programs. We were also able to assist with the Upper Carson Slough Project, returning the water system to its natural flow.

The refuge is developing their interpretive programs as well as a new visitor center and other visitor facilities. Our store at the Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge office has been in operation since 2008. Many of the products we offer at this location are Ash Meadows specific items.

If you have never had the opportunity to visit Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge before, we invite you to stop by the refuge office and walk the Crystal Springs Interpretive Boardwalk Trail. We're certain that you will be able to see the natural beauty of the area, the abundance of life, and see why this habitat is so important for the survival of these native species.

If you ever have any questions about visiting Ash Meadows or about how you can volunteer at the refuge please feel free to contact the refuge office at 775-372-5435.

Ash Meadows updates facebook with refuge events and photographs of wildlife:

www.facebook.com/AshMeadowsNWR

From the Director

By David Blacker, Executive Director

As I recall my first visit to Crystal Spring, I can tell you that the pool was the most incredible shade of blue that I had ever seen. The center roiled as water came in from the underground spring and pupfish darted around the bottom. I could hear birds in the trees and at one point ducks flew over me. Ducks! I stepped back and looked around again and yes I was still in the desert; in fact, I was only few miles from my house in Death Valley. Needless to say I had entered another world.

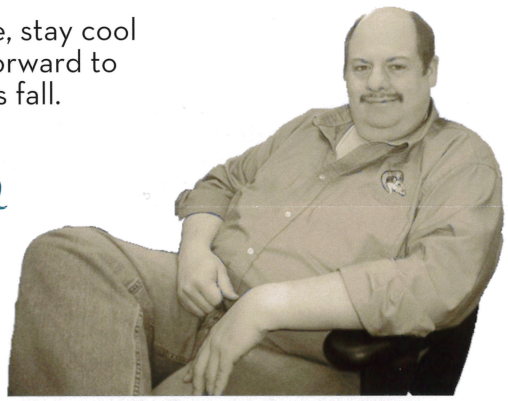
Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR) is truly like no other place on earth. If you ask the staff they will tell you they are second only to Cuatro Ciénegas of Coahuila Mexico which has the highest concentration of endemic species in North America. AMNWR is a series of underground springs coming up from a deep water aquifer located under the Amargosa Valley. It's home to Devils Hole, but I have to tell you that Devils Hole is the least scenic place on the refuge. I have had the good fortune of being able to watch the incredible work being done there by a staff of only four. When I first visited the refuge they had completed the interpretive boardwalk to Crystal Spring, the largest in the refuge and the closest to the refuge headquarters. Since then, they have completed boardwalks to Longstreet Spring and Point of Rocks, and have begun the restoration of Upper Carson Slough.

Next time you come to visit we hope you will take the time to stop by and experience this incredible place, and if you have been to Ash Meadows please go to our Facebook page and let us know how much you like the refuge and some of your great experiences there.

As you can imagine, it's getting hot here in the park now and as visitation slows down and becomes more Eurocentric, the work of DVNHA, however, is not slowing down at all. Currently we are continuing our planning for the Death Valley National Park Visitor Center Grand Re-Opening on November 4th. We have confirmed that the 20 Mule Team will be here and will probably stay through the Death Valley '49ers Encampment. We are also finishing up plans for new fixtures for the Visitor Center Store that will match with the new Park Service information desk. Work began last week on building new Museum exhibits and should be finished by the end of August. Of course, we are also beginning our work with the park for this season's Death Valley ROCKS Education Programs as well. A special "atta boy" goes out to advisory board member, Tim Kendziorski, and our Membership Director Geneil White for their work to get the DVNHA web store back up and running.

Until next time, stay cool and we look forward to seeing you this fall.

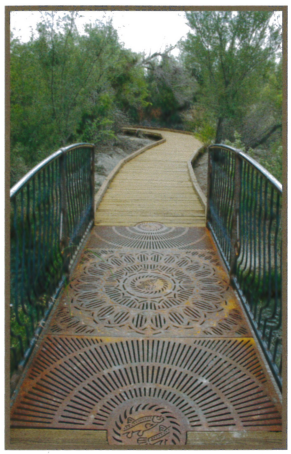
David



Introducing
our new line of water bottles
made from 100% recycled aluminum
& BPA free materials.
Comes with easy off and on cap.
American Made by
Liberty Bottle Works, Yakima, WA.

Liberty Water Bottle
$19.95

Where the Desert Springs to Life



Along Point of Rocks boardwalk, Ash Meadows NWR. Photo courtesy of: Cyndi Sousa, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

By Cynthia Souza, Visitor Services Specialist, Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge is a beautiful, important, mysterious place and a true conservation success story. It is the largest oasis in the Mojave Desert and it was almost lost forever. During the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's the area was used for farming, ranching, mining and it almost became a mini-city. Thanks to the efforts of a few conservationists wanting to protect endangered desert fish, a landmark Supreme Court ruling was passed in 1976 limiting ground water pumping. This eventually led to the establishment of the refuge in 1984 but by then the land was ravaged, the springs were nearly pumped dry and habitats were destroyed. Some species went extinct like the Ash Meadows poolfish and we suspect the Ash Meadows montane vole which has not been seen in the area for decades. There was a lot of work to be done.

Native vegetation and trees were planted. Action was taken to remove harmful invasive plant and animal species. The man-made ditches were removed and the natural flow of the springs was restored. As visitors stroll along the boardwalks today they can see the Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish and the Spring-loving centaury plant which are just two of our endemic species (found no place else on earth). A visual testimony for what commitment to conservation can accomplish.

We go one step further to promote conservation and nature through public events and our Children in Nature program. These programs are funded by a partnership with Death Valley Natural History Association, Amargosa Conservancy, and the Southern Nevada Agency Partnership. In 2011, programs were held at both the Refuge and in the classroom for 475 local 3rd and 4th grade students from Pahrump, Amargosa, Beatty, Death Valley, and Shoshone. Our 'Let's Explore' program for the general public treated 255 participants to an outdoor experience featuring wild birds, snakes and lizards, night time creatures, quests for the bighorn sheep and more.

Our efforts don't stop there. Restoration continues with areas like the Carson Slough. The slough, once a massive marshland was completely drained and mined for peat. Today the slough is smaller in size but it is still an area of major importance. This seasonally wet area with its high groundwater levels covers most of the Northwest portion of the refuge. The water and saline soil here create the conditions needed to sustain a unique desert wetland ecosystem. This system supports a variety of endemic plant species such as the federally endangered Amargosa niterwort *(Nitrophila mohavensis)* and the federally threatened Ash Meadows gumplant *(Grindelia fraxino-pratensis).*

However, there is hope. Two new species of bees, believed to only exist in Ash Meadows, were discovered in 2009. Perhaps one day we will discover the Ash Meadows montane vole isn't gone after all and that will truly be a day for celebration.

October 1969 (Pictured left)

October 2010 (right)

These before and after photos reveal the incredible transformation that has taken place since the restoration process was first initiated. Both photographs are of Kings Pool which is found along the Point of Rocks boardwalk, Ash Meadows NWR. Photos courtesy of: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

DEATH VALLEY NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION
est.1954

TELESCOPE
Volume 57, *Issue 2*

WHO WE ARE:

Maryann Argyres
Board Chair

Kimber Moore
Board Vice-Chair

Dan O'Brien
Treasurer

Terry Feinberg
Member at Large

BOARD MEMBERS

Steven Hoffmaster
John Kopczynski
Tom Moritz
Marcelle Rice
Dr. Steve Rowland

David Blacker
Executive Director

Geneil White
AP/Memberships/Telescope Editor

JJ Graham
Office Manager

Steve Acton
Warehouse Manager

BOOKSTORE STAFF

Justin Baldino
Charlotte James
Wesley Massey
Bill Pelkey

NEWSLETTER DESIGN

KimberMoore Design