

Canyon Chronicle

SANTA CATALINA VOLUNTEER PATROL

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Current Answers to Common Questions from Visitors to Sabino Canyon

Flora and Fauna—(Adapted in part from the Southern Arizona Nature Almanac). The rains of January have brought a brilliant white to our peaks which then fade and re-appear with more snowfall. Strangely, white is also the first color of spring in the Canyon and its desert surroundings. From the first fluttering of white-winged butterflies to the white petals of desert chicory, desert onions, ajo lilies, prickly poppies, and many others, the white color—often very subtly—peeks from behind granite boulders, muscles its way through sandy soil and shines like miniature lanterns along trails and roads. These wings and petals of white, first seen in early to mid-February, herald the arrival of spring to the low walls and floors of Sabino Canyon. As the days of the month advance, other colors will begin to abound: pale pink fairy duster, fuchsia penstemon, yellow desert groundsel and evening primroses and purple verbenas. The welcome and life-giving rainfalls in January increase our optimism that the spring will bring a colorful show of wildflowers. In fact, some experts are predicting it!

With a fragrance that is fresh and promising, our lengthening days are bright with clean light washed by the winter rains. After a few warm days, lizards are out lounging in the sun. Hummingbirds are on the scene, eagerly awaiting spring's first flowers while they set up their nests and begin breeding. And at night, the incessant thrice-asked question "who-who-WHO" is posed by the great horned owl, who also begins nesting in February.

Weather--Average February temperatures are 68 degrees maximum and 40 degrees minimum. Even after the clouds and rains of the first few days, February can well be a beautiful month in the Canyon, with bright skies and warm temperatures that reach 80 degrees. But caution should be heeded, spring may still be distant: cold winter rains can bring temperatures down to the 40s, a common occurrence during the month. Several nights below freezing are normal as well. Snow will continue to fall in the mountains, and a bright, sunny day on the desert can cause floods in the Creek and washes at lower elevations, as we have seen.

Sabino Creek—The rains of mid-January raised the water level dramatically and quickly stranded walkers at several points in the Canyon. After reaching a peak of almost 750 cubic feet per second (cfs) of flow, the Creek in recent days has receded to a 50 cfs level. Normal average flow is only 5.6 cfs. Hikers should exercise extreme caution; especially at the bridges near Stops 5 and 6, water is very swift and deep. Of course, current conditions are conducive to rapid changes, and hikers should check for updated conditions at the Visitors Center before starting to hike.

Trail Information—All trails are open in the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area and nearby foothills. Recent rains have caused no trail damage. However, trails which involve stream crossings, such as the Seven Falls Trail, are reported to be treacherous, with water at knee level and above. Again, checking at the Visitors Center is essential.

Road and Building Repair—No damage has resulted from recent rains and heavy stream flow. Tentative plans call for rest rooms at Stops 2, 4, and 6 to be renovated in the future. The Shuttle provides service to Stop 9, departing every day every half hour from 9:00 to 4:00. The cost is \$8 for adults for the 50-minute circuit. The Bear Canyon shuttle is running hourly from 9:00 to 4:30 every day for \$3.

Wildlife Sightings—Mountain lion activity has been high in the last month, prompting the following message to be issued by Josh Taiz, Forest Service District Wildlife Biologist:

“In recent days there has been an increase in reported and confirmed lion sightings and interactions in Sabino Canyon. Those of you who make public contact in that canyons should make mention the increased activity citing the information in our lion brochure. I do not intend that we strike fear in the visiting public because there has been no aberrant lion behavior other than the broad daylight sightings and close proximity to humans and at least one incident where people came between the lion and her young. Some points about the recent activity that are important to share are as follows:

- a.. Sightings are clustered in the vicinity of the Rattlesnake/Sabino confluence, but they could be anywhere.
- b.. Several reports of lion with two kittens.
- c.. No untoward lion behavior, but lions are very protective of their young.
- d.. Do not get in between mother and young or in a position too close to kittens”.

In light of this high activity level it is a good time to review Forest Service guidelines on lion encounters:

- If you encounter a mountain lion, stay calm and do not run. Slowly back away and keep your eyes on the lion.
- Make yourself look bigger. Raise your arms over your head.
- If the lion becomes aggressive, fight back with whatever you have and stay standing.
- Supervise children; keep them close and in sight at all times.

- Be aware of surroundings. Don't use cell phones or listen to music because it reduces your level of awareness.
- Report all sightings to Arizona Fish and Game at 628-5376.

Other-- SCVP members Mark and Jean Hengesbaugh continue to lead the project for removal of the invasive *Arundo donax* (Giant reed). Volunteers are needed for the remaining work sessions scheduled from 7:45 to noon on Sunday, February 7 and Sunday, March 7. To assist please RSVP to Tucson.arundo@gmail.com or phone 520-971-2385.

Website— SCVP now has our own website: www.SCVPTucson.org

The Sabino Canyon Volunteer Naturalists website – www.scvntucson.org - has some information and links that may be helpful to patrol members. Further information on Sabino Creek hydrology and temperature can be found at www.sabinocreekarizona.edu.

Questions, comments or suggestions: Contact Warren Icke at icke63@gmail.com. Thanks to contributors Veronica Forrest, Josh Taiz, Marylee Peterson, Maribeth Morehart and the [Southern Arizona Nature Almanac](#).