

ASDMI NEWS

A newsletter for friends of the
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
ASDM NEWS > JULY - AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2013

the Iconic Mountain Lion

By Peggy Pickering Larson,
History Archives Project/Library Coordinator



The first George L. Mountainlion pictured in his cage in the early days of the Museum. A community fundraising effort to “Uncage Our Cats” in which school children filled milk cartons with

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coins, allowed construction of natural habitats known as Cat Canyon. The Desert Museum achieved international acclaim and changed zoo exhibits forever by creating homes for George and the other cats. The two aging mountain lion siblings recently retired from exhibit are housed in “assisted living” quarters to assure their comfort and quality of life.

“The animals are ambassadors for their kind in the world of humans and the Desert Museum is their embassy,” stated Bill Carr, co-founder and first director of the Desert Museum. He might well have added that the Desert Museum’s finest diplomat was George L. Mountainlion.

A young, male, personable mountain lion arrived at the Desert Museum sixty years ago on George Washington’s Birthday. Named George (for Washington), L. (for Leo the Lion), and Mountainlion (combined for his surname), the original George and his successors became famous for a variety of reasons.

them were called to assist in recovering a frightened ringtail after she bolted from the set to the high beams of the TV studio while filming of the Museum’s program was in progress.

George became well known and respected as a newspaper columnist. He was assisted in producing these weekly contributions by a variety of helpers, including Mrs. Musky Mayflower (an administrative assistant skunk) and a variety of Museum staff. A likely suspect contributing to the early columns was Bill Carr. George’s byline included the title “Chief Wildlife Ambassador,” and occasionally “Research

“You know it’s so easy to please human beings. All the things I do in my enclosure like turning somersaults, chasing my tail and standing up and jumping, I’d do anyway, just to amuse myself. Humans seem to think I do these things for their benefit so I never let them know otherwise. It keeps them happy that way. I put on a special show for the people once in awhile, but most of the time I just act natural.”

“Another reason why people come to a zoo is that they think animals are funny. Well, we think humans are funny, too. I guess it all proves that God has a sense of humor, and I’m glad.”



.....
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.....

A good sense of humor served George well. While being led around the Museum grounds on a leash by Lew Walker, George was introduced to a large group of Museum visitors and reported his reaction.

“When I took a walk down in front of the steps of the main building, there were just hundreds of people lined up looking at me and taking pictures. It was like being a lion in a Roman arena only they didn’t give me any Christians to eat—thank goodness!”



Although at times George expressed some mild displeasure with the human race in comparison to his esteem for fellow members of the animal world, he did have some favorites among Homo sapiens—“It takes children to really appreciate a lion.”

Not least among these was the fact that George was a literate lion. George wrote at least one book, received and wrote numerous letters, and became a well-known columnist for the Arizona Daily Star.

Associate in Human Behavior.” George’s writing style tended to be chatty, loquacious, informal, and friendly, but at times seemed a little pompous or caustic.

Over the years several George L. Mountainlions have filled the paw prints of the first George. Additionally, numerous other Museum lions, lionesses, and a few litters of kittens have resided here and charmed visitors. After personally knowing George L. Mountainlion, Carr wrote, “There will always be mountain lions at the Desert Museum.” And so, now in the Museum’s sixtieth year, a beautiful, new male cub continues the legacy.

On one occasion George wrote a number of thank you letters to various first responder agencies. This was after eight of

George was particularly good at making pithy cats-eye observations on the human race.



MOUNTAIN LIONS & *the Desert Museum's* NEWEST CUB

By Shawnee Riplog-Peterson,
Curator of Mammalogy & Ornithology

A spectacular and majestic symbol of America's wilderness, the mountain lion has served as the Desert Museum's mascot for 61 years – fostering love and appreciation of the species among the Museum's many visitors.

Mountain lions (*Puma concolor*) are the largest of the small cats and even though they are referred to as "lion," they lack the ability to roar. They are consummate predators with a small head, muscular body, powerful shoulders, strong legs, large paws, and long tail. Males measure 6 to 8 feet from nose to tail tip and weigh 110 to 180 pounds; females measure 5 to 7 feet and weigh 80 to 130 pounds. The lion's upper body coloration is brown with a white-ish chest and belly. The muzzle area is white bordered with black. The tail is heavy, measures two-thirds the length of the head and body, and is tipped with black.

These animals have powerful claws and their jaws are equipped with impressive canines. They are ambush

hunters and deer are their favored food. However, lions will consume a wide variety of wild animals as well as cattle or sheep if hunger and opportunity present themselves. The lion stalks its prey, crouches, moves closer, and then attacks. It strikes from the back and kills with a bite to the back of the prey's neck. Occasionally the attack may be to the throat – crushing the windpipe.

The Desert Museum houses and exhibits only captive-born or orphaned lions – animals which are not suitable for release into the wild. Our newest addition, a five-month old male cub, was found emaciated and starving at a residence in San Jose. Rescued and nursed back to health by California Department of Fish and Wildlife and unsuited for reintroduction

into the wild, his adoption by the Desert Museum was arranged by the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

Once the cub was ready for transport, California department agents traveled nine hours with him to rendezvous with Desert Museum staff in Blythe. After arrival at the Museum the cub was quarantined in his night-holding area where he was trained to shift from the holding area to the big boy's exhibit. The cub's favorite fare includes freshly thawed rats, mice, and quail. To keep the cub physically active, a variety of toys have been introduced to encourage his curiosity and to provide lots of opportunity for play.



On your next visit to the Museum, please stop by to welcome the newest furry member of the Desert Museum family!



Retired mountain lion (L.) and new mountain lion cub (R.), photographed by Rhonda Spencer in the same location in the lion enclosure.

20th
ANNUAL *Desert* GALA

Special thanks to the generous sponsors and donors; Gala Chair Cathy Davis and the committee; David Scott Allen, graphics guru; and David Fitzsimmons, cartoonist.



The grounds of the Museum dazzled with lights and music as festively dressed guests arrived on a warm Sunday—April 28th. A sell-out crowd celebrated 60 years—and wild as ever! with cocktails, silent and live auctions packed with treasures, and topped off by a gourmet meal.

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The gross Gala revenue thus far totals \$262,440 and final proceeds are predicted to exceed last year's record of \$166,400. This annual event has raised \$1.5 million to support the Museum and now accounts for 5-6% of charitable income for the year.



Beat the heat and experience the magic of the Sonoran Desert at night every Saturday until 10 p.m. through August. Many animals are more active at night – especially beavers, wolves, and all the cats! Even plants get in on the action, with many night bloomers! Experience celestial wonders, a cacophony of nighttime sounds, fluorescent minerals, night pollinators, and more.

This year’s summer evenings kicked off with a new exhibit called “Diamonds of the Desert”. “Just like Queen Elizabeth is celebrating her “diamond jubilee” so is the Desert Museum,” states Stephane Poulin, the Museum’s Operational Chief Curator and herpetology expert. “However, the Sonoran Desert’s diamonds are not gem stones but the living kind of diamonds – diamond-backed rattlesnakes. I think visitors will be surprised and intrigued by the nature of the displays,” Poulin continues. This exhibit, featuring seven rare-colored diamond-backs paired with diamonds, provided by Sheffield’s Diamonds, premiered on June 1 and runs through August 31.

Each Saturday night is an entirely different experience, with themed activities and programs, such as “Astronomy Night”, “Native Cultural Night”, “Pets & the Desert” and “Insect Insanity”. Many activities are designed especially for families and children.

Please note that the price for admission will not be discounted for Cool Summer Evenings (aka Summer Saturday Evenings). Full summer rates will apply to all non-members.



From *Abutilon* (Indian mallow) to *Zauschneria* (desert fuchsia) and over 150 species in between, the Desert Museum’s Plant Sale will have what you need for your landscape this fall. Save-the-date and join the staff and volunteers of ASDM for 13th Annual Sale.

As the heat breaks, the soil is still moist from the summer rains, and several months of growing season lie ahead, October is the prime month for fall planting. This sale will offer several colors of desert globemallow and torch cactus, many agave and cactus selections, and a number of plant species not offered at previous sales. Add to or start your butterfly garden with milkweeds, passionflowers, and pipevines. Entice hummingbirds with queen’s wreath, Mexican tree ocotillo, and betony.

Consult desertmuseum.org for the full list of plants to be available.

Members Only Plant Sale
Friday, September 27, 2 – 6:30 pm

General Public Plant Sale
Saturday, September 28,
7:30 am – 3 pm




New from the
**ARIZONA-SONORA
DESERT MUSEUM PRESS**

A Natural History of the Santa Catalina Mountains, Arizona, with an Introduction to the Madrean Sky Islands. Enjoy this comprehensive book by Dr. Richard C. Brusca and Dr. Wendy Moore about the spectacular mountains that dominate Tucson’s skyline. Discover more about the natural wonders in your back yard! \$24.95. Order directly from the Museum’s website at www.desertmuseum.org/books/ or purchase it in the Museum Giftshop and in local bookstores.




Putting an End to Plastic

In an effort to reduce the Museum’s “eco-footprint”, bottled water will not be sold at the Museum after Oct. 1, 2013. Our oceans, waterways, and landscapes are polluted with plastic trash that makes it into food webs and harms wildlife. Over 80% of the 50 billion water bottles produced in the US each year are not recycled. The production of these bottles consumes enough oil to fuel 100,000 cars for a year and releases millions of tons of carbon dioxide. You are invited to bring and fill your reusable water bottles with high quality Desert Museum tap water during your next visit.

CLASSES and TRIPS

adult



For registration information go to desertmuseum.org/adultclasses or call 520/883-3086. Add 10% to fee for non-members.

Going Bats

July 20

They use night as their cover and are shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. But we'll throw some light on one of the most intriguing desert animals – bats! Learn how they make our desert more beautiful and more livable. Learn to separate fact from fiction on the 28 different bat species in southern Arizona. **\$36**

Prickly Pear Harvest

August 10 or 18

August is the season that the beautiful red fruit of the prickly pear cactus ripens. You will join us in harvesting this fruit; in making jelly, frozen sorbet and in preparing nopalitos, the tender prickly pear pads, which have been a Mexican staple for over a millennium. Other desert foods such as tepary beans and mesquite will be part of the menu. This is an occasion to not only don your apron, but also enjoy a desert foods feast. **\$60**



Desert Grasses

September 7

John Wiens and George Montgomery will lead you through the natural history of grasses discussing their origins, ranges and structure. You will walk the Desert Grassland exhibit as well as nearby King Canyon for real world practice at field identification. **\$36**



Perfect Pruning

October 5

Learn the basics of pruning from horticulturalist Erik Rakestraw, including tree anatomy, how trees grow, and how they heal. You will discover the philosophy of pruning, tool maintenance, and practice your new skills on some Museum trees. **\$36**

Natural History of the Sonoran Desert

October 19 and 20

Would you like to be more knowledgeable about the animals, plants, and landscape of our desert? This popular two-day course covers desert ecology, climate, mammals, birds, reptiles, venomous animals, plants, geology and ethnobotany. You will also hear about the current threats to our desert such as invasive species, water and climate change issues, endangered species, and recovery programs. **\$120**

Death Valley: Where Wonder Reigns

November 17-23

Be awed by the remote beauty and scope of this wondrous place! Visit the lowest point in North America with geologist Amazing Bob Scarborough. Explore rimming mountains to the valley floor! Discover remote, rugged, narrow canyons, long-abandoned mining works, and fabled Scotty's Castle. Deluxe accommodations, small group comforts. **\$2495 ***

Living on the Edge

Jan 27-Feb 1, 2014

Explore the dynamic geology of southern California's deserts, palm canyons, mountain wilderness, Salton Sea and lots more with geologist Amazing Bob Scarborough. Adventures by day, Hilton comfort at night! Small group comforts. **\$2,395 ***

The Best of Baja - Whale Watching & Natural History

March 7-15, 2014

Join Baja's Frontier Tours 47th year with the friendly gray whales of fabled Scammon's Lagoon: boating, birding, botany. Discover forests of Boojum, and immense cardon cacti. Enjoy two days boating on Scammon's Lagoon, the gray whales' largest and best-protected migratory destination. Fabulous fresh seafood! Small group comforts. **\$2,895 ***

** For registration and details on these trips please contact Baja's Frontier Tours at 520/887-2340 or email piet@bajasfrontiertours.com.*



YOUR Gifts

You provide staff and volunteers the opportunity to inspire people to love, appreciate, and understand this unparalleled desert region.



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ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM | YOUR newsletter!

The next edition of **ASDM News** will feature submissions from you, the members. This is your chance to tell how the great promise of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum has affected your life. Enter the following contests to win a place in the fall newsletter.

Cover Contest:
Enter your artwork to be considered for the cover of the publication. Even if your work is not selected, it may appear throughout the publication.

Writing Contest:
In prose or poetry chronicle your experience in any or all of the following themes:

>>> entry rules

Contests are for active members only.
Initial art submissions and photos are to be emailed in low resolution. If selected, you will be asked to submit your artwork in 8x10 format at 300 dpi.
Written submissions may be either 100 or 250 words.
Submissions become the property of the Desert Museum with full permission for use in any manner. A clear photo of you must accompany your entry.
Email all written entries in Word format, and all initial art and photo submissions in low resolution to yournewsletter@desertmuseum.org.
Deadline is 5:00 p.m. Friday, July 26, 2013.

- Themes:**
- Memories:**
What is your most vivid memory of visiting the Museum or having the Museum visit your classroom?
- Mission:**
How has the mission of the Desert Museum changed your life or the life of your family?
- Membership:**
if you are among countless members who have remained loyal for decades, why?





EXHIBIT: Ironwood Gallery

Cita Scott: Hummer & Bricolage:

A Four Year Journal

Wil Lala: Sculptural Tapestries

Thru August 17

Cita Scott shares her photographs documenting four years of Broad-billed hummingbirds who inhabit her Tucson garden. Wil Lala creates "green art" by turning recycled aluminum cans into shimmering landscapes and paintings.

MUSEUM EXPLORERS SUMMER CAMPS

Grades 1-6

July 22-25 and July 29-Aug 1

Observe live animals, get behind-the-scenes with Museum staff, conduct science experiments, create desert art, sample desert foods and more!

New for Grades 5 and 6: Desert and Sea Camp with a focus on the Warden Aquarium and regional aquatic life. For information go to http://desertmuseum.org/kids/camp_page.php

EXHIBIT: Ironwood Gallery

Botanical Art of the Sonoran Desert:

Past & Present

August 24 – October 27

Opening Reception:

Saturday, September 14, 2-4 p.m.

A partnership project with the Sonoran Desert Florilegium Program, this exciting exhibit of original artwork celebrates the art form and educates about traditional and contemporary botanical illustration. Juried artists will create original botanical art and illustrations, accurately depicting plants from the Sonoran Desert Region.

Member's Pancake Breakfast

Sunday, September 1, 8-11 a.m.

Celebrate the Desert Museum's 61st birthday with a special pancake breakfast. Purchase breakfast tickets that morning at the Museum's ticket windows. Details to follow in a postcard mailing!

The mission of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is to inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world by fostering love, appreciation, and understanding of the Sonoran Desert.



Beth Nielsen Chapman Concerts

Coming November 15th And 16th

The Oasis Project, the entertainment program of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, is pleased to announce its second concert event featuring award-winning singer/songwriter Beth Nielsen Chapman. Chapman has been celebrated for penning such chart topping hits as Faith Hill's "This Kiss" and Martina McBride's "Happy Girl," among countless others by artists as diverse as Elton John, Waylon Jennings, and Neil Diamond.

The concert weekend will take place during the Leonid meteor shower weekend. This meteor shower, known for producing some of the greatest meteor storms in history, is the optimal time to celebrate *The Mighty Sky*, Chapman's recent collection of songs about astronomy. This is an astronomical performance experience you will not want to miss.

For more information, please visit the Oasis Project online at www.oasisproject.desertmuseum.org or call (520) 989-0901.

REGULAR HOURS

Open 365 days a year.
October – February 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
March – May 7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
June – September 7:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
June – August 7:30 a.m. – 10:00 p.m. on Saturdays

ADMISSION

Museum members free
Adults (13 and older) \$12 June - August
\$14.50 September - May
Children (4 - 12) \$4 June - August
\$5 September - May
Children 3 years and younger are free
Ask about special group rates

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