



October 2020

CONSERVANCY CONNECTION

Distance is Bringing Us Closer

Conservancy Update



While COVID-19 has caused us to adjust many of our plans, it has also spurred some incredible innovation mixed with some creative thinking to fulfill our mission and respond to changes. There has never been more proof of just how resilient we are than during these trying times.

This year more people are spending time outside and discovering the mental and physical benefits of being in nature. While we are still holding off on our public activities, we are continually monitoring public health guidance to determine when we can restart and offer our activities. We are anxious to get back to those activities as soon as it is safe to do so.

In the Sonoran Desert, we take comfort in the consistency and slowed pace at which the desert lives. While the challenges are great, the Sonoran Desert reminds us that resiliency is a benefit, that the seasons will change, and we will bloom anew.

Welcome to Fall!

Justin Owen
Chief Executive Officer

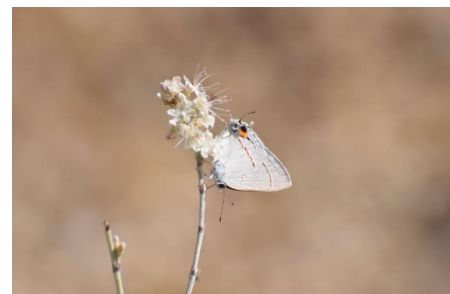


2020 Fall Butterfly Survey Results

By Doug Jensen
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy steward

In September, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Parsons Field Institute conducted our semi-annual butterfly counts in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Participation was limited to a very small number of experienced specialists due to the ongoing pandemic.

Six teams of counters observed only 25 butterflies in 5



species. As indicated by Dr. Ron Rutowski, who guides the effort, "definitely a record setting count...these are the lowest numbers we have seen in any count on the Preserve." Over the seven years we have been counting, a typical census generates around 700 butterfly sightings representing approximately 23 species. Of course, such variation is of significant scientific value. The data are leveraged by us and reported nationally to the North American Butterfly Association, co-partners in this research initiative.

We look forward to the time when we can again invite a broader audience, including the general public, to participate with this fascinating project.

**Photo Credit: Gray Hairstreak butterfly by Scott Sprague*



Education offerings traverse to online platforms



Since the pandemic began back in March, learning has been transformed from the traditional in-classroom model to one that resides in the virtual and outdoor space. Teachers and schools have worked hard to adapt to this changing learning environment while meeting the needs of both students and parents. The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy has also been focusing on finding ways to bring the Sonoran Desert into the homes of children and

adults alike.

Our work began in April with the creation of [Conservancy Kids Online](#), designed to help parents teaching at home inspire their children to explore the Sonoran Desert around their own homes. We are now developing Desert Discoveries, mini learning modules that bring the Sonoran Desert to life for teachers and students. In addition to Desert Discoveries, we are also redesigning Expedition Days into an online experience for the Spring. Using a combination of supplemental learning videos and guided activities, students will get to journey through the Sonoran Desert and better understand their place in this incredible ecosystem.

While the pandemic has presented numerous challenges for all types of education, the creativity coming out of this time will positively impact the structure of learning well beyond this period. We are discovering meaningful education can happen beyond the traditional classroom and we can use current innovations to make learning more accessible, engaging, and meaningful for diverse audiences.



Steward Mitch Louie shares his reasons for volunteering

Mitch Louie, steward, and his wife, Zarrin moved to Fountain Hills about three years ago after he retired as an electrical engineer for the federal government. Seeing the mountains surrounding the town is one reason why they moved here. Plus, they both really love the nearly 300-plus days of blue skies and sunshine!

Mitch said, "Hiking out here in Scottsdale is so unique, especially with all of the granite rock formations, giant saguaros and other cacti."

Mitch became a steward in 2019 because he was moved by the experiences he had hiking. He was inspired to help the Conservancy preserve the land and its history. Mitch also finds that being a steward offers a great network of other stewards all working together for the same cause.



Mitch is a trailhead ambassador at Lost Dog Wash Trailhead, hikes, attends heritage lectures, and helps out with the Citizen Science arthropods and corridor viability projects.

Our stewards, like Mitch, are continuing to serve the mission of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy while we continue to observe social distancing guidelines.



Toni Vallee: A hero you can relate to



Master steward Toni Vallee is our first featured Geared for Giving donor. Toni is not only a steward, but contributes regularly to the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy. She is truly a Conservancy Hero!

What's your first memory of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy?

I had ridden my mountain bike up to Tom's Thumb Trailhead, and while I was gasping for breath, I saw a little brochure encouraging people to become a steward. I figured it might get me out more often and I would get in better shape.

What has surprised you most about the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy?

The intellectual and organizational capabilities of virtually everyone I met - which enables the Conservancy to fulfill its mission.

What do you wish other people knew about the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy?

I wish more people knew we existed and what we offer to the public.

**Editors note: Visit our [website](#) and learn more about the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy.*

Why are you supporting the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy as opposed to other groups?

I feel I am making a specific and valuable contribution to one of the key issues of our time. I see tangible results from my and other steward's efforts while having a lot of fun!

What might someone be surprised to know about you?

I rode my bicycle cross country in between my sophomore and junior years of college. It helped me understand and appreciate the beauty of our country.

[Become a Conservancy Hero Today!](#)

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