



the quarterly newsletter of Audubon Miami Valley, in Butler and Preble Counties, Ohio

Baja desert reveals wonders to scholarship winner

Thanks to the Rosie Bloom Scholarship and Audubon Miami Valley, I had the privilege of traveling to Baja California, Mexico this summer.

As part of Project Dragonfly at Miami University, Oxford and in conjunction with Earth Expeditions, this trip was the first step in my journey toward a Master of Zoology.

The course description was rather vague, citing themes such as field methods, introduction to the ecology of desert ecosystems, marine investigations, inquiry-driven learning, community-based conservation, and participatory education. These do not begin to cover the true amount of knowledge gained from this phenomenal experience.

As an Ohio resident for most of my life, I had never seen the desert. Hollywood had led me to believe the landscape would be barren, lifeless, and unforgiving. What I saw as our group drove down the Baja peninsula were beautiful geographical formations millions of years in the making, 100-year-old Cardon cacti lining the road, elephant trees covered with witches hair, and the tall, slender Cirio cactus reaching for the desert sky with its Dr. Suess-like appearance.

Arriving at the Rancho San Gregorio ranch, we met Rafael Galvan Villavicencio, who knows medicinal uses for endemic plants that rival the effectiveness of modern pharmaceuticals.

We explored the canyon and its surrounding ranges, practicing field methods such as forming quadrants to

Another Baja student will tell her story in February. See the calendar, page 7.



Photo by Kathi McQueen

Seussian Cirio cacti surround a Cardon cactus in the beautiful Baja desert.

count species or measure biodiversity.

One of the main components of Project Dragonfly is learning about inquiry-driven education. When you use inquiry as a teaching tool, people are encouraged to observe nature, ask questions, and explore the possible answers as citizen scientists.

Someone reaching an answer through the inquiry process is more likely to remember and appreciate what is learned.

On our last day at the ranch we hiked up the mountainside to watch the sun rise. Orioles, hummingbirds, ravens, hawks, and many others dotted the sky, sang from the underbrush, and flew gracefully past us while all we could do was watch in amazement.

(Continued on page 3)

Did you know that the National Audubon Society
hadn't held a national conference in 13 years?
Under the leadership of David Yarnold, representatives

