

The Nature Preserve Has a New Manager

By Carolyn Shafer

Luke Reese is the newly appointed manager of the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve. Reese has a degree in forestry and worked part-time at the preserve in 2012, as a member of AmeriCorps, a civil society program. Providing education and outreach, he worked with volunteers in stewardship activities such as managing trails and mapping the size and location of every Fremont cottonwood tree on the preserve.

Reese and his fiancée, Anna, arrived in early July, during the summer rainy season. That means that, right now, a lot of his time is taken up with controlling plant growth. (Reese notes that his biggest concerns are two invasive species: Johnson grass [see article on page 10] and Tree of Heaven.) As manager, he plans to focus on offering educational outreach programs, increasing the number of visitors to the preserve, creating a volunteer program, working with the community on its Firewise program, and keeping the Arizona chapter of The Nature Conservancy apprised of water-related issues.



The Conservancy's first acquisition in the State of Arizona was 312 acres along Sonoita Creek at the south end of Patagonia, purchased in 1966. Since then, it has made this the centerpiece of the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, adding five more tracts of habitat for a total of roughly 920 acres. It has also facilitated the establishment of conservation easements along riparian areas on approximately 450 acres of private property in the area. The area of wetland bordering a stream,

known as the riparian zone, is a critical place for plants and new life to take hold. In Arizona, such areas (even if they are dry for part of the year) compose less than one-half percent of the state's total land mass but are considered the most productive habitat for ecosystem diversity. They are also crucial wildlife corridors for migrating birds.

People from all over the world travel to Patagonia to visit the Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve, described as "some of the richest of the remaining riparian habitat in the region." The preserve, which contains the first two

miles of Sonoita Creek's permanent flow, is an Audubon-designated Important Bird Area, providing critical habitat for several species. It also protects an area of riparian forest populated by magnificent examples of the rare Fremont cottonwood and Gooding willow and provides habitat to a wide array of species.

The Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve is open Wednesday through Sunday year round. From March through October its hours are 6:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., and from November through February it is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. There is no entry fee for Patagonia residents.



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Can't guess what animal makes these tracks?
See answer on page 22

Carolyn Shafer

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