

PROJECT WILDLIFE: BISBEE

By Carmen Faucon

Carmen is the leader of our group. It was her garden which first inspired us to create a Wildlife Corridor through the City of Bisbee for the at-risk small flora and fauna of the Southwest.

The Accidental Gardener

By Carmen Faucon

I remember the first time I planted a seed in a Styrofoam cup with dirt and watched it grow to become a seedling. I had brought the seedling home from school to show my family and then my mother placed it gingerly up on the kitchen windowsill. However, sadly several days later, horrified, I noticed this once-thriving seedling shriveled beyond redemption; someone had forgotten to water. Yet there was still that tiny glimpse of a miracle, even if short-lived.

Other than a horticulture class I took in college, my gardening experience was pretty non-existent. Later into my adult life I would do a stint in Eswatini, Africa, assisting with several community gardens. At the time, my efforts focused on finding monies for generators, pumps, pipes, seeds and extension agents. I did have my own plot though, set close to the river at the bottom of the hill, just in case the equipment I had procured for pumping water unexpectedly failed.

The locals knew more about growing crops than I did. Though there was one person who appeared to know less: my Swazi roommate, Della Tshabalala. One afternoon in my garden I could hear Della calling out to me from her section at the top of the hill "Guru (my Swazi name). Come see what I am doing!" She had just returned from school and was still dressed quite nicely. To my disbelief, in a kind of showoff fashion, she said, "Look Gugu, I am planting seeds using my high heels!" That one act surely demonstrated 'efficiency of movement', since I was planting seeds the old-fashioned way, stooped over, using a stick.

I became interested in gardening for wildlife in 2008 and soon after registered my garden with the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). I was living in Yuma at the time, an unbelievably hot spot in the summers. I became motivated to help indigenous critters, learn about Waterwise native plants and, not least, help myself by saving moolah on my water bills. I wasn't sure what my neighbors thought about all this activity, but when my official NWF Wildlife Habitat sign arrived, I promptly and proudly displayed it. Several days later though, I noticed my neighbors across the street were erecting a sign of their own. This sign had a picture of a squirrel: the caption read, "A nut doesn't fall too far from the tree." Ouch.

After I left Yuma and moved to Bisbee I couldn't believe how lush everything was. The previous owners of my home had left me with quite a head start on the yard. Soon I again added native plants and erected another NWF-certified Wildlife Habitat sign. This time the sign garnered genuine interest and curiosity, opening a community dialogue on the importance of planting for our fellow creatures.

There are compelling reasons to keep our wildlife in mind when gardening. Climate change, habitat fragmentation, man-modified environments and pollutants challenge the survival of many species needed to support a healthy ecosystem for both wildlife and ourselves. Our wildlife has been at quite a disadvantage, but by thoughtful and purposeful gardening practices we can help to promote a healthier coexistence.

Join us in connecting our yards in the creation of a community-wide smorgasbord for wildlife. Interested in learning more? Questions? E-mail: plantnativeinbisbee@gmail.com