

# People-powered conservation

Putting your dollars, muscles, and brains to work to protect the Sky Islands



# RESTORING CONNECTIONS

Spring 2017



# SKY ISLAND ALLIANCE

# Director's Field Notes

Growing up in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, I loved to explore—to find a new fishing hole or swimming spot, to catalogue the birds I saw in trees around my home, to examine a blooming flower I'd never seen before and determine its identity. My natural curiosity and interest have always drawn me to take notice of the life around me, whether scrambling through a canyon high in the mountains or just sitting on my back porch in central Tucson. So I studied science. But that was just the beginning.

As I went through my studies, I was constantly seeking the purpose behind the observation. After graduation, I was fortunate to find Sky Island Alliance and the beautiful connection between careful observation of the natural world by individuals and purposeful work to keep life safe and thriving in the Sky Islands. I started to meet people like you, who share my interest in observing for a purpose. In my time at Sky Island Alliance, I've seen the growing power of integrating information we collect as citizens of the Sky Islands into new understanding about the creatures and ecosystems around us to drive conservation approaches that provide protections or a helping hand.

## Our conservation of pathways for wildlife is powered by your citizen science.

Many of you have worked with us as citizen scientists for years to monitor the natural world—to help us understand which animals are where, how many there are, where they are moving, and what they might be eating. Doing this work weaves a story of what is happening all around us in the Sky Islands and provides a view over time of how things are changing. Your contribution has been particularly important for understanding how wildlife move in our Sky Islands, helping us protect safe pathways so they can reach new territories, find mates, and secure food and water.

**The contribution of citizens just like you to document pathways for wildlife, monitor precious springs, and support native plants is astounding. In 2016, volunteers donated over 12,000 hours of time with Sky Island Alliance, and doubtless gallons of sweat, to further our understanding and enhance our Sky Islands.**

Never underestimate what a passionate group of volunteers can accomplish through steady observation. Your work has been a foundation of conservation action for Sky Island Alliance for decades, and this contribution is increasingly important as our world changes around us due to climate disruption. As Sky Island wildlife trackers, wildlife camera monitors, springs surveyors and monitors, and BioBlitzers, you are safeguarding the natural treasures of our Sky Islands and powering the essential protection of pathways for wildlife into the future. Thank you for your dedication to our Sky Island wildlife.

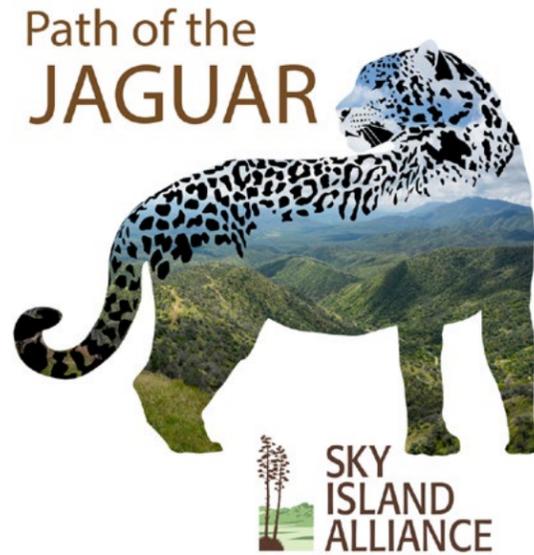
I hope to see you in the field!

*Louise Misztal*

Executive Director



*Cover photo: Volunteers Tom Swenson-Healy, Steve Marlatt, and Ed Grant measuring spring-time flow at a spring in the foothills of the Santa Theresa Mountains.*



# Thank you!

*You launched our Pathways for Wildlife campaign with a bang! We've raised \$18,173 to support the Path of the Jaguar in the Sky Islands!*

A MESSAGE FROM VICKI & GERRY WOLF, LONG-TIME SUPPORTERS OF SKY ISLAND ALLIANCE:

Throughout our lives, we have lived frugally, taken care of what we had, and worked carefully to invest towards our future. We similarly choose to invest in our region by contributing our time and limited financial resources to Sky Island Alliance. As volunteers for SIA, we have seen firsthand how this effective organization not only scientifically documents and restores wild places in the United States and Mexico, but also, and importantly, brings like-minded people from both sides of the international border together to work toward the common good. Now is the best time to take care of what we have to ensure that the Sky Islands' future will be brighter. We invite you to contribute!

*You can hear from more of our donors about why they give on page 10.*

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- Sami Hammer, Conservation Biologist & GIS Specialist
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# Driven by data, powered by people: conservation in the Sky Islands

by Scott Wilbor

Sky Island Alliance has been using data collected by people like you to conserve our treasured and threatened Sky Islands for over two decades. We rely on the curiosity, passion, and “inner scientist” of hundreds of volunteers to help us better understand the region’s wildlife, waters, and landscapes. The stakes are rising, and we’re facing increased urgency to conserve our diverse wildlife and ecosystems. Whether it is new proposed infrastructure along the border, highway construction or expansion, development, mines, or the steady march of climate change, we need strong data and the most current science when working with planners, government agencies, and our elected officials.

Having led a citizen-science program for 10 years at Tucson Audubon prior to coming to Sky Island Alliance, I know that it is individual volunteers and their collective impact that make possible huge advances in our

understanding of remote rivers, deserts, and montane ecosystems. I also witnessed the profound impact that discovering and documenting new natural phenomenon can have on a volunteer’s field experience.

**Imagine finding Mexican spotted owls nesting in a slot canyon oasis, stumbling upon an unexpected seep or spring in the remote Galiuros, or seeing the fresh tracks of javelina crisscross with coyote, bobcat, and fox in a desert wash after a night’s rain.**

We depend on our intrepid volunteers to document and map new discoveries, monitor trends, and provide essential information to ensure our Sky Island Region remains a unique hot spot for biodiversity, evolution, and wild habitat. Your efforts drive our conservation actions to maintain this special region as a bridge between natural and human communities, north and south of the border.

## Defending science and taking action on climate change

Read more about where we stand on the current Administration's stance on science and climate change in a recent blog post from our Executive Director Louise Misztal. In it she offers a powerful message celebrating our community's willingness to unify in defense of science:

*"With science and a spirited work ethic, we can curb some of the worst impacts of climate change and help ecosystems and species transition and adapt. Ultimately, healthy human communities and our quality of life in the Sky Islands depend on healthy, thriving natural areas."*



Sky Island Alliance is leading a number of initiatives to collect data on ecology, hydrology, biology, and human use of ecosystems to guide management decisions to conserve wildlife and ecosystems across the Sky Island Region.

Our *Sky Islands Waters Initiative* is powered by people like the more than 25 dedicated Adopt-a-Spring volunteers, who survey the condition of springs and monitor changes in their flow through time. Our staff and citizen scientists have completed surveys of springs in the Santa Cruz River and Cienega Creek basins. And this year, we are working with our agency partners and citizen scientists to survey springs in the Lower San Pedro River and Aravaipa Creek basins. Surveys are planned and conducted in a scientific manner to gather data that allows us to make inferences across the watershed to aid meaningful water resource management decisions made by our partners at the Coronado National Forest and Bureau of Land Management. This data also informs our policy work to secure water for natural areas through new water law—or tweaks to existing law. And this year, we’ll use our springs data to inform a binational landscape conservation design blueprint for the “Madrean Transboundary Watersheds” that will ultimately direct our restoration efforts to fit into a coordinated and strategic application across this landscape. Data in action!

Through our *Wildlife Linkages Program*, the people power of our volunteers provides data on wildlife use in critical corridors to advance the protection of wildlife by preserving pathways they depend on to move between sky islands. These corridors, or linkages, are necessary for wide-ranging species movement that sustains resilient wildlife populations and overall ecosystem health. As threats to connectivity increase, we are working to better integrate the documentation of wildlife pathways with our work to survey and monitor springs and our on-the-ground restoration efforts. This year we are building our capacity to collect data on regional wildlife movement, especially across the U.S.–Mexico border and the major highways that bisect wildlife pathways. We rely on volunteer wildlife trackers and remote camera monitors to help us determine the value of individual linkages to species of concern, such as jaguars and others that have dispersed populations throughout the Sky Islands. Look for more wildlife tracking news throughout the year as we ramp up!

You play a vital role in all these data-driven conservation efforts. Watch your email for announcements with your chance to get out there and drive the conservation and protection of the Sky Islands' grand biodiversity and natural resources—and the values they provide for human communities!

## Tracking wildlife in Mexico

Wide open grasslands, the green vein of the San Pedro River, and a fantastic 360° view of our Sky Islands provided the backdrop for our Wildlife Track and Sign Identification Workshop in April 2017.



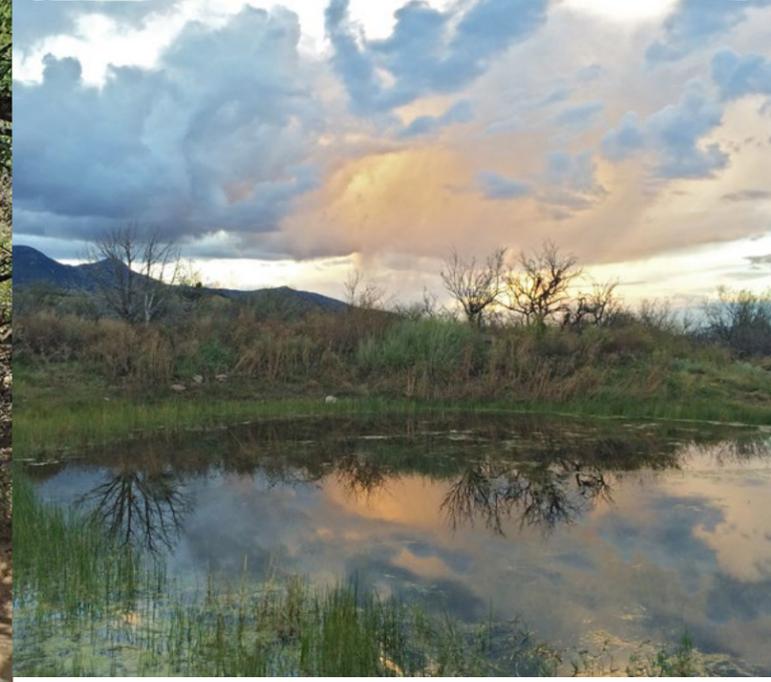
Photo credit: Luis de la Fuente

Over four days at Naturalia’s Área Voluntariamente Destinada a la Conservación Rancho Los Fresnos, in Sonora, Mexico, we trained two professors and 13 students from Universidad de Sonora’s Mammology Club, along with one dedicated U.S. volunteer.



These trackers will collect data to record species presence and movement across our arid landscape, increasing the capacity of our Mexican partners to further conservation efforts in the region. After all, wildlife knows no boundaries, so it takes people from both sides of the border to protect our Sky Island Region.

# People-powered restoration brings life to our Sky Islands



by Carianne Campbell

When you donate time to Sky Island Alliance, you are the people power that creates vibrant habitat and secures pathways for wildlife and plants throughout the Sky Island Region. As the climate changes, making habitat resources available to species on the landscape is urgently important. And this work is getting trickier as the spring season hurdles toward summer at an ever-quicken pace and water sources are becoming less secure.

Much of our on-the-ground endangered species conservation continues to be centered on protecting and expanding open-water aquatic habitat. Although our pond-building projects are designed with the most imperiled species that depend on year-round aquatic habitats in mind (like the Gila topminnow, Chiricahua leopard frog, and Mexican garter snake), these ponds provide access to water for more common wildlife too. As the climate continues to warm, naturally-occurring pools become harder for migratory and wide-ranging species to find, so our ponds may be the only source of water for miles. Because these water sources are so important to so many species, we are working with our partners—and with data gathered by our volunteer citizen scientists—to strategically locate these projects where they do the most good to support species such as monarch butterflies, deer, javelina, and a slew of bats and birds. This means hundreds of hours of muddy volunteer effort to salvage native plants,

excavate ponds, place heavy liners, and then maintain the ponds to make sure they provide suitable habitat and remain free from invasive species.

**I can't help imagining that the newly-documented jaguar in the Dos Cabezas Mountains might have stopped to sip water from our ponds at Ash Spring, Hermitage Seep, or Camp Rucker as it traveled north from Sonora.**

We're also taking action to restore vital plant resources impacted by climate change. The timing of when important food and cover plants bloom and set seed is shifting, which has significant consequences for pollinators and other wildlife. We're getting people out on the ground to collect seeds locally for our nursery partners to grow the carefully selected native plants that provide the best food resources. Then, our staff and volunteers are spending thousands of hours installing and caring for these native plants, mostly in riparian areas. This makes life a little more secure for bats, butterflies, bees, moths, and hummingbirds!

The flip side of our planting activity is making room for all of these native species in areas where they have been crowded out by non-native, invasive plants that do not provide pollinator resources. The battle against invasives continues in Bear Canyon to eradicate fountain grass and in Aravaipa Canyon removing veritable mountains of vinca. And this year we're also setting our sights on Johnson grass and tree of heaven

in Parker Canyon. The idea is to restore pollinator pathways by clearing the way and providing the right plants in the right places to create islands of dense and diverse pollinator resources in areas that were effectively pollinator "food deserts."

## Restauración impulsada por personas da vida a nuestras Islas Serranas

por Carianne Campbell, traducción por Mirna Manteca

Cuando donas tiempo a Sky Island Alliance, eres el poder que crea un hábitat vibrante y que asegura senderos para la vida silvestre y las plantas en toda la Región de las Islas Serranas. A medida que el clima cambia, asegurar la disponibilidad de recursos para las especies en el paisaje es de gran importancia. Este trabajo es cada vez más complicado, conforme la primavera se convierte en verano a un ritmo cada vez más rápido y las fuentes de agua son cada vez menos seguras.

Gran parte de nuestro trabajo de conservación de especies amenazadas continúa centrándose en la protección y expansión del hábitat acuático de agua abierta. Aunque nuestros proyectos de construcción de estanques están diseñados con especies en peligro, que dependen de los hábitats acuáticos durante todo el año, en mente (como el charalito, la rana leopardo de Chiricahua y la culebra de agua mexicana), estos estanques también proporcionan agua para la vida silvestre más común. A medida que el clima continúa calentándose, las pozas de

*You are the people power!* Thanks for choosing to spend your hard-earned time off with us in wild places, getting dirty, exploring the magnificent Sky Islands, and creating pathways for wildlife.

origen natural se vuelven más difíciles de encontrar para las especies migratorias y de amplia distribución, por lo que nuestros estanques pueden ser la única fuente de agua por kilómetros. Debido a que estas fuentes de agua son tan importantes para tantas especies, estamos trabajando con nuestros socios—y con datos recopilados por nuestros científicos ciudadanos—para realizar estos proyectos estratégicamente donde resulten en un mayor beneficio para especies como mariposas monarca, venados, jabalíes, y muchísimos murciélagos y aves. Esto significa cientos de horas de esfuerzo voluntario en el lodo para salvar plantas nativas, excavación de estanques, colocación de forros pesados, y mantenimiento de los estanques para asegurarnos de que provean hábitat adecuado y permanezcan libres de especies invasivas.

**No puedo evitar imaginar que el jaguar recién documentado en la Sierra de Dos Cabezas podría haber llegado a beber agua a uno de nuestros estanques en**

*continúa en la p. 9*



# Connecting the Path of the Jaguar

by Tadeo Pfister

I often take my kids to a magical place in the Santa Rita Mountains not far from Tucson. It is here that we hike along the Florida Canyon trail and find inspiration in nature and feel the wildness of the pine-oak woodlands.

**I watch in wonder as the natural surroundings inspire our imagination, renew our sense of freedom, and satisfy our need for adventure. It is in wilderness very near here that the jaguar named El Jefe roamed! As I play with my kids along the creek, we talk about how exciting it is to know that occasional jaguars still roam the Sky Islands.**

Few species inspire a sense of wildness in our hearts like the mighty jaguar. It was the jaguars known as Macho B and Corazon that inspired local artist and Alliance board member Pat Frederick to give life to the spirit of jaguars in sculpture.



*The Spirit of Corazon is one of two lifesize sculptures created by Patricia Frederick to celebrate jaguars and raise awareness for their plight in the Sky Islands.*

It is the plight of jaguars in the Sky Islands of Sonora, Mexico, that inspired Diana Hadley to devote her life to creating the Northern Jaguar Preserve. The preserve is the northernmost sanctuary for this noble species and the most likely source of the few jaguars sighted recently in the Sky Islands of southeastern Arizona.

As the newest member of the Sky Island Alliance team, my work now connects me more deeply to these mountains and the community partnerships necessary to preserve and restore the natural heritage of this region.

Sky Island Alliance plays a unique role in the work to safeguard species—like the jaguar—from extirpation. Our focus on protecting vital water sources and restoring healthy habitats helps create the conditions needed to encourage more jaguars to reestablish a foothold in the U.S. Sky Islands. This work is the perfect complement to the efforts of the Northern Jaguar Preserve and their rancher partners who safeguard the source population for jaguars in our Sky Islands. Together, we envision a future when these majestic cats roam throughout the entire Sky Island Region along the path of the jaguar.



# Conectando con el Sendero del Jaguar

por Tadeo Pfister, traducción por Mirna Manteca

Seguido llevo a mis hijos a un lugar mágico en la Sierra Santa Rita, cerca de Tucson. Es aquí donde caminamos por el sendero de Florida Canyon y encontramos inspiración en la naturaleza y sentimos el estado salvaje de los bosques de pino y encino.

**Miro con asombro como el entorno natural inspira nuestra imaginación, renueva nuestro sentido de libertad, y satisface nuestra necesidad de aventura. ¡Muy cerca de aquí es donde el jaguar llamado El Jefe merodea! Mientras juego con mis hijos a lo largo del arroyo, hablamos de lo emocionante que es saber que los jaguares aún deambulan por las Islas Serranas.**

Pocas especies inspiran una sensación de salvajismo en nuestros corazones como el poderoso jaguar. Fueron los jaguares conocidos como Macho B y Corazón quienes inspiraron a la artista local, y miembro del consejo de Sky Island Alliance, Pat Frederick, a dar vida al espíritu de los jaguares en sus esculturas. Fue la difícil situación de los jaguares en las Islas Serranas de Sonora, México, lo que inspiró a Diana Hadley a dedicar su vida a crear la Reserva del Jaguar del Norte. La reserva es el santuario situado

más al norte para esta especie noble y la fuente más probable de los pocos jaguares avistados recientemente en las Isas Serranas del sureste de Arizona.

Como el miembro más reciente del equipo de Sky Island Alliance, mi trabajo ahora me conecta más profundamente a estas montañas y las asociaciones comunitarias necesarias para preservar y restaurar el patrimonio natural de esta región.

Sky Island Alliance juega un papel único en la labor de salvaguardar especies—como el jaguar—de la extirpación. Nuestro enfoque en proteger las fuentes vitales de agua y restaurar los hábitats ayuda a crear las condiciones necesarias para alentar a más jaguares a restablecer un punto de apoyo en las Islas Serranas de los Estados Unidos. Este trabajo es el complemento perfecto para los esfuerzos de la Reserva de Jaguar del Norte y sus socios rancheros que salvaguardan la población de origen de los jaguares en las Islas Serranas. Juntos, imaginamos un futuro donde estos majestuosos gatos vagan por toda la región de las Islas Serranas a lo largo del sendero del jaguar.

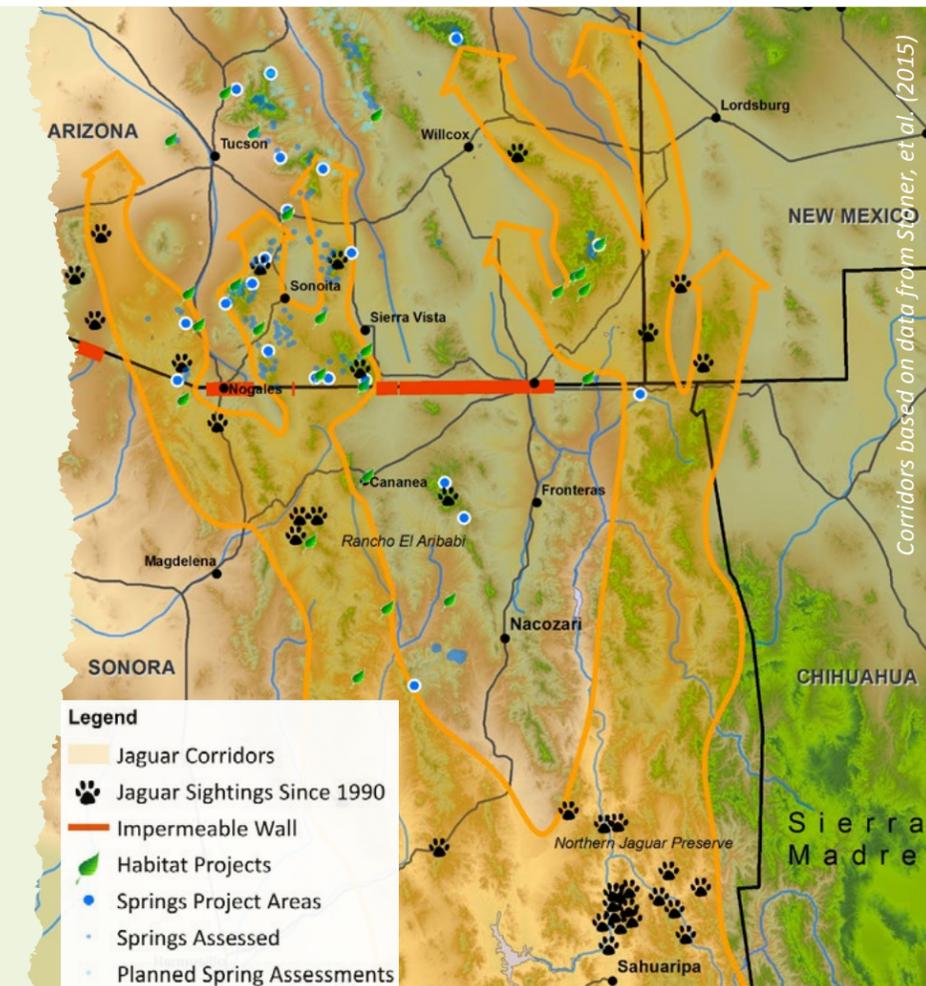
## Mapping the Path of the Jaguar

The path of the jaguar isn't a literal road or trail. On their journey north to stake out new territory, jaguars need regular access to clean water and food, and they need safe passage through wild areas free of development and disturbance.

From the presence of El Jefe in the Santa Rita Mountains near Tucson in 2016 to more recent jaguar sightings in the Dos Cabezas in far southeastern Arizona and the Huachucas near Sierra Vista, we can see that jaguars belong here in Arizona.

Sky Island Alliance is working to protect the pathways these majestic creatures need to travel here from Mexico and provide healthy open space for them to live in when they arrive. We'll achieve this by monitoring and restoring springs to keep clean water flowing and by building an engaged corps of citizen scientists to track signs of wildlife in essential crossborder pathways. Will you join us in this work?

Volunteer or donate at [www.skyislandalliance.org](http://www.skyislandalliance.org)



# Why I Give...

We asked folks why they gave to our Pathways for Wildlife campaign on Arizona Gives Day. Here's what a few of you had to say!

Many things, social and environmental, are bigger than profits or politics. My support for Sky Island Alliance projects—jaguar mobility included—is to provide a known, "hands-on, get it done," non-governmental provider with resources to act on those bigger issues. That, in turn, helps me to still believe that we as a people can do many good things, if we just step up individually and as groups, to meet today's special challenges.

BILL MCGUIRE

The jaguar pint glass is beautiful, but not as beautiful as the gracious cat that the proposed border wall threatens.

THOMAS MEIXNER

I give to Sky Island Alliance because I support preserving, protecting, and restoring our unique ecosystem in Southern Arizona and Northern Sonora. I give to Sky Island Alliance because in a time when politicians insult and attack our neighbors, Sky Island Alliance is an organization that builds alliances and relationships with like-minded individuals and organizations in Mexico. I give to Sky Island Alliance because they give me the opportunity to contribute my sweat as well as my money. I give to Sky Island Alliance because they are providing me with a wonderful education about our environment.

BILL BEMIS

I give to Sky Island Alliance because I believe in the effort to keep the Sky Island chain intact. While I am a supporter of international conservation efforts, I also believe in caring for the environment on my home turf. Jaguars are the flagship species of the Sky Islands, but there are so many other components of this fragile ecosystem that are protected by the preservation of this habitat!

NANCY BENT

As jaguars move through deserts and mountains, we're reminded that we humans have always been a migratory species, and one so dependent on adapting to and being shaped by our connection to climate and place. I'm inspired to support the work of Sky Island Alliance because these mountains and deserts are our home, and we need to keep our home healthy, for jaguars and ourselves.

RON STEFFENS

The Sky Island Region is one of my favorite places on our planet. From my now-home on the coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, I still dream of Arizona sycamore in craggy canyons, alligator juniper and madrones reaching up to the deepest blue of skies, and the expansive views over the grassland seas. Even though I now rarely get the chance to visit the Sky Islands, it makes me happy to support Sky Island Alliance's hard work to restore and protect this special place for the diversity of life that calls the region home. Thank you for all you do.

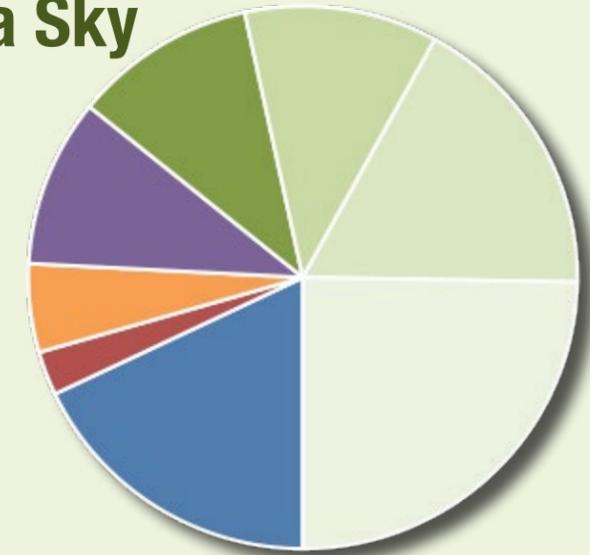
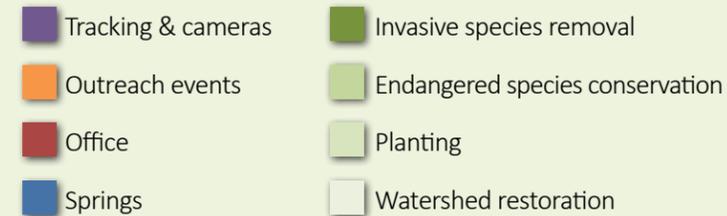
STEPHANIE WEINSTEIN

Read more "Why I Give" stories online:  
[www.skyislandalliance.org/calendar/blog](http://www.skyislandalliance.org/calendar/blog)

## Oh, the places you'll go (as a Sky Island Alliance volunteer)

In 2016, more than 600 volunteers donated 12,621 hours of time to Sky Island Alliance.

Where were all those hours spent to help achieve our mission? Everywhere, really! From the office to the wildlands, you make our work possible.



### Restauración impulsada por personas continuación de la p. 7

#### Ash Spring, Hermitage Seep o Camp Rucker durante su viaje hacia el norte desde Sonora.

También estamos tomando medidas para restaurar recursos vegetales vitales afectados por el cambio climático. El ritmo en el que las plantas de alimento y plantas de cobertura florecen y granan está cambiando, lo que tiene consecuencias significativas para los polinizadores y otros animales silvestres. Estamos llevando gente a campo a recolectar semillas locales para que nuestros socios germinen las plantas nativas, seleccionándolas cuidadosamente para que proporcionen los mejores recursos alimenticios. Después, nuestro personal y voluntarios dedican miles de horas instalando y cuidando estas plantas nativas, principalmente en áreas ribereñas. ¡Esto hace la vida un

poco más segura para murciélagos, mariposas, abejas, polillas, y colibríes! La otra cara de nuestra actividad de plantación es el abrir espacio para todas estas especies nativas en áreas que han sido abarrotadas por plantas exóticas invasivas que no proporcionan recursos para polinizadores. La batalla contra las invasivas continúa en Bear Canyon para erradicar pastos invasivos y en Aravaipa Canyon quitando verdaderas montañas de vinca. Este año tenemos en la mira al zacate johnson y el ailanto en Parker Canyon. La idea es restaurar las rutas de los polinizadores despejando el camino y proporcionando las plantas adecuadas en los lugares adecuados para crear islas de densos y diversos recursos para polinizadores en áreas degradadas.

**¡Ustedes son el poder!** Gracias por elegir pasar su tiempo libre con nosotros en lugares salvajes, ensuciándose, explorando las magníficas Islas Serranas, y creando senderos para la fauna.

## Become a Sky Island GEM

By Giving Every Month, you provide the support we need to sustain our work to protect springs, secure safe passage for wildlife, and restore our Sky Island landscapes throughout the year.

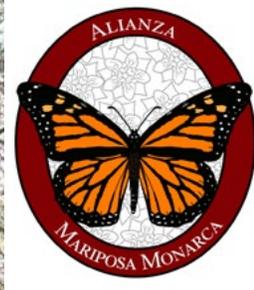
Make your monthly gift online at  
[www.skyislandalliance.org/donate](http://www.skyislandalliance.org/donate) or  
call Madeline at 520-624-7080 x25.

**Slow and steady wins the race.** We're counting on you to stand with us and make an investment in the future of the Sky Islands.



©Dean Goehring

Julian



## Sky Island Partner Spotlight

# My volunteer story: Alianza Mariposa Monarca

by Julián Francisco Ortega Botello

I was scrolling down my Facebook's feed when I first heard about the **Alianza Mariposa Monarca**. A random image of my friends giving a workshop in Punta Chueca, Sonora, popped up. At first, it didn't catch my attention. Months later, I attended the Congreso Estudiantil de Biología and took part in some of the workshops available for students, one of them being the Monarch Butterfly workshop.

**I was instantly captured by the beauty of the monarch. We learned the basics about this beautiful organism: how to distinguish it from other species that are morphologically alike, its conservation status in Mexico, and lots of very important stuff. At the end of the workshop, we were invited to join the Alianza.**

This semester I started assisting with the weekly Alianza meetings at Unison. Every time the meeting is over, we come out of it with lots of new information. Also, I started to notice that the Alianza is like one big family that shares a love, a passion, for conservation and for nature in general. I got to make a lot of new friends!

When one of the members came with the idea of building a garden center for pollinators at Centro Ecológico de

Sonora (CES), we were all excited. So, we started organizing ourselves to start the building of the garden center. People at CES showed a lot of support and provided us with tools. And so began a very important task for us all.

The first couple of days we were there, we focused on knowing the place, eliminating buffel grass, and cleaning up everything we could. We even got to sleep there once as part of the project! Very recently, we started building a greenhouse from scratch, creating a safe place for plants to survive their early stages.

**It is really an enjoyable and fulfilling experience to spend time working with people that share the same interests as you. If you, who are reading this, haven't had the chance to volunteer at a project with Sky Island Alliance, I highly recommend you do so!**

*The Alianza Mariposa Monarca is a group of student volunteers, organized by Sky Island Alliance in 2015, to study and advocate for the protection of Monarch butterflies in Sonora, Mexico. You can follow the work of this amazing group on Facebook. [www.facebook.com/Alianza-Mariposa-Monarca](http://www.facebook.com/Alianza-Mariposa-Monarca)*



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