



# Restoring Connections

*The newsletter of Sky Island Alliance*

## Young conservationists speak up

We are delighted to partner this year with two groups of visiting students from *Round River Conservation Studies (RRCS)*, an organization dedicated to sustainable and community-friendly conservation strategies. Our experts are immersing these university students in the natural history and ecology of the Sky Island region.



One of the students, **Walt Emann**, shared his impressions:

*"To learn that the Sky Island region is one of, if not the most, biodiverse region in the country was mind-blowing! The mountains, the forests, the waterways – even the cities and towns – are like works of art ...*

*Every day is filled with satisfaction from the genuinely life-changing work that we are doing here ...*

*Conservation work isn't easy or cheap. The more people who pledge their service to these lands and the more people who back such efforts with their wallets, the better."*



## Measuring the darkness of our skies

Dark skies are a remarkable part of the Sky Islands. When darkness blankets the landscape, it not only unveils the stars—it also provides high-quality habitat for the region's numerous wildlife species.

However, lighting along the U.S.-Mexico border stands to disrupt the health and ecology of many of these species. In fact, **we've detected 70% of our Border Wildlife Study mammal sightings at night.**

In April, SIA and RRCS went out to measure light pollution along the border. We made visual observations of the constellation Leo. By counting how many stars we could see at each point along the border, we were able to document where important dark skies wildlife corridors are located.

So far, we've found that along our Border Wildlife Study, the San Rafael Valley has good sky quality and minimal light pollution. That puts it high on our priority list to protect from future border lighting.

## Border Wildlife Study hits one-year milestone

In March 2020, our Border Wildlife Study cameras began clicking away to document the wildlife community along the U.S.-Mexico border. In the following months, as the pandemic changed our lives and drought scorched the region, we saw dozens of species appear on these cameras.

Black bear and cub passed under wire border fencing in the San Rafael Valley and troops of white-nosed coati explored the southern parts of the Patagonia Mountains. The North American porcupine moved through the Coronado National Forest, proving that this species persists at its very southern range limit — despite increasing rarity in Arizona.

The Border Wildlife Study has documented a total of 109 species so far. These wildlife show us, time and again, just how rich a biodiversity we have in these borderlands, and how much we stand to save if we continue to protect these critical wildlife corridors from border wall construction.

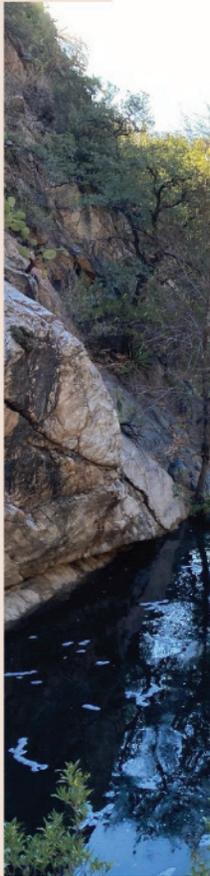
## El Estudio de Fauna Fronteriza alcanza el hito de su primer año

En marzo de 2020, las cámaras de nuestro Estudio de Fauna Fronteriza comenzaron a disparar para documentar la comunidad de vida silvestre a lo largo de la frontera entre los EE. UU. y México. En los meses siguientes, cuando la pandemia cambió nuestra vida y la sequía abrasó a la región, vimos docenas de especies que aparecían en esas cámaras.

Un oso negro y su cría pasaron por debajo de la cerca de alambre de la frontera en el Valle de San Rafael y tropas de coatíes de nariz blanca exploraron las regiones del sur de las Montañas Patagonia. El puercoespín norteamericano se movió a través del Bosque Nacional Coronado, mientras demostraba que esta especie persiste en su límite más sureño de su rango, a pesar de que su rareza aumenta en Arizona.

El Estudio de Fauna Fronteriza ha documentado un total de 109 especies hasta ahora. Esta vida silvestre nos muestra, una y otra vez, cuán rica es la biodiversidad que tenemos en estas tierras fronterizas y cuánto tenemos para salvar, si seguimos protegiendo estos corredores críticos de vida silvestre contra la construcción de un muro fronterizo.

Leer más [Restaurando Conexiones vaya a la página skyislandalliance.org/21verano](https://www.skyislandalliance.org/21verano)





## Director's field notes

# Conservation groups work to protect Arizona waters

Rivers in Arizona hold special significance to desert dwellers. They enticed humans to settle here, and they remain directly connected to our health and recreation.

Ephemeral waters—rivers or streams that run occasionally—support riparian habitats and connect to larger rivers like the San Pedro River. But now, with a state water bill that has just become law, Arizona faces a loss of Clean Water Act protections that will affect 94% of all waterways in the state. This threatens many of our smaller water sources, including rivers, streams, wetlands, and washes, and puts them at risk of industrial dredging and dumping.

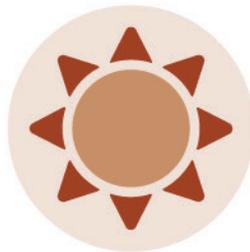
In addition to protecting the eight major rivers in Arizona, it's vital that we protect the unique waterways that contribute to clean water, thriving wildlife, and the health of our aquifers. We're partnering with other organizations to document the importance of small and ephemeral waterways and springs, and to advocate for their protection.

## A snapshot of Sky Island springs

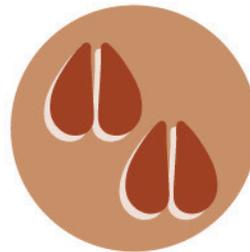
People are the beating heart of our Spring Seeker program. In the first three months of the year, we received 85 springs surveys from new and returning volunteers. Here's what we've found so far:



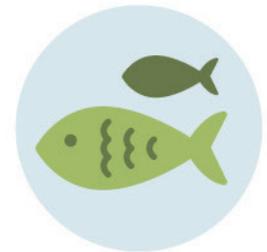
**66%** of springs had standing or flowing water.



Surprisingly, given the region's sustained drought, only **16%** were completely dry.



We found signs of livestock trampling and browsing at **nearly half** of the springs.



Fish were found at **4%** of surveyed springs.

Finding water at these springs during such a difficult drought year underscores the importance of protecting these wet spots so wildlife can get a drink!



## Leave your wild legacy

Sky Island Alliance aims to protect the Sky Islands so their beauty can be enjoyed by generations to come. But we need your help! Will you include Sky Island Alliance in your will? Contact Georgina at [georgina@skyislandalliance.org](mailto:georgina@skyislandalliance.org) or **520-624-7080** to learn how easy it is to leave your wild legacy.

## Find your outdoors

The Sky Islands offer many adventures for the intrepid volunteer. Join us and help shape the future of our incredible region by searching for springs, checking wildlife cameras, or documenting large cat tracks. Visit [skyislandalliance.org/volunteer](http://skyislandalliance.org/volunteer) and find your outdoors.



## About Sky Island Alliance

Sky Island Alliance is a regional conservation nonprofit dedicated to protecting and restoring the diversity of life and lands in the Sky Island region of the U.S. and Mexico. Sky Islands are forested mountain ranges primarily in Arizona and Sonora that rise out of arid grasslands and desert seas, and provide vibrant habitat for plants and wildlife.

Our office in Tucson is on the land of Tohono O'odham, Pascua Yaqui, and other Indigenous peoples. Our work throughout the Sky Island region on both sides of the border takes place on Indigenous land. Visit [www.skyislandalliance.org](http://www.skyislandalliance.org).



### Shop to help save wildlife

Grab your official Sky Island Alliance gear and help protect wildlife at:

[www.bonfire.com/store/sky-island-alliance](http://www.bonfire.com/store/sky-island-alliance)

### Follow us



[www.skyislandalliance.org](http://www.skyislandalliance.org)

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