

Friends of the Desert

Issue 53 Summer 2017

A Strong Voice for the People and Wildlife of the Sonoran Desert

Photo: Bill Lesch

The Oracle Road Wildlife Crossings: A Year in Review

Animals safely crossing the road, the start of roadkill surveys, & desert tortoise monitoring

Just over a year after the Oracle Road wildlife bridge and underpass were completed, we have data that begins to showcase the success of this award-winning project. Last year, the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) began a four-year monitoring project to document the wildlife using the crossings. This includes surveillance cameras on the crossings, roadkill surveys, and monitoring the movements of nearby desert tortoises. Today,



Left: A beautiful day to be passing through Oro Valley for these two mule deer. Caught on the LLOYD camera monitored by Karen & Alan Dahl and David Davis. Right: This jackrabbit in Oro Valley is going places. Photographed by the KENNEDY camera monitored by Karen & Alan Dahl and David Davis.



they have documented more than 1,700 animals using the crossings, including deer, javelina with young, coyotes, bobcats, cottontail rabbits, jackrabbits, and one desert tortoise. Nearly 890 mule deer have used the bridge to safely cross the highway. Just a mile south of the wildlife bridge is the wildlife underpass, where 23 deer, 353 javelina, 198 coyotes, and 54 bobcats have crossed the highway to date. Both crossings are needed to accommodate different species. Deer flock to the bridge while only a few dozen have used the underpass. Conversely, only 10 javelina and 5 bobcats have used the bridge thus far, making the underpass a preferred route for them. Coyotes use both relatively equally.

Over 1,700 animals have used the crossings, including deer, javelina, coyotes, bobcats, rabbits, and one desert tortoise.

AGFD completed the first roadkill survey in May and documented a roadkill “hotspot” developing between mileposts 82 and 84, where wildlife funnel-fencing still needs to be installed on the west side. AGFD found 529 mortalities and 9 live animals in the right-of-way of the road, including coyotes, Gila monster, barn owl, and kit fox. Most of the mortalities were found where fencing is still incomplete, south of the underpass. CSDP is working closely with the RTA and Rancho Vistoso homeowners to help close those gaps.

In addition, AGFD has outfitted 16 desert tortoises with tracking devices, and four more will be added during the monsoons. Over 4,000 GPS points have been collected on the movements of these tortoises, on both sides of the road, but none have crossed the highway yet.

For the last five years, CSDP Desert Monitors have photographed over 49 species in the area, including white-nose coati, mountain lion, deer, badger, and Gila monsters, and more. We’re already seeing greater diversity and abundance of animals west of Oracle Road.

Photos, videos and facts about the Oracle Road wildlife crossings and the wildlife monitoring results can be found at www.sonoranwildlifecorridors.org.

Where are your wildlife?

We need your eyes, too. Safely report your wildlife sightings on Oracle Road (alive or dead), and in the surrounding Rancho Vistoso neighborhoods, bike paths, and trails. Share what you see at <http://www.inaturalist.org/projects/csdp-safe-passages>



Carolyn's Corner

Happy Summer, Everyone!

RAIN! RAIN! RAIN! What else is there to talk about right now? I've noticed that the rain we've been receiving during the past weeks has put everyone — including the Sonoran Desert — in a better mood!

Before the rains arrived this summer, we had a busy spring at Coalition HQ. **I am continually inspired by Coalition supporters, donors, and volunteers that keep this Coalition working.** I have been able to talk with new audiences from throughout our country and other countries as well about this important work. While I love being home, I also am honored to share our amazing accomplishments with others.

In May, I had the opportunity to present information on our wildlife linkage work at the International Conference on Ecology and Transportation. This conference, held every two years, showcases the latest wildlife crossing research and construction projects around the world. Colleague Kathleen Kennedy and I attended this year's event in downtown Salt Lake City. Kathleen took a full-day field trip to some new wildlife crossings outside of Jackson, Wyoming. **We were both inspired not only by the variety of work that is being done but also how our work has inspired others to keep working toward wildlife connectivity.** Work continues, despite challenges with funding and often indifference or hostility from elected officials.

Talking about our work — in this case our unique voter-approved funding for wildlife crossings — truly energizes me. It reminds me that our work is important, it is valuable, and it is cutting-edge! Our community should be proud of its leadership.

Sharing our successes with others reminds me that this work is due to your support.

I had a similarly rewarding experience in San Diego in early June, when I was part of a panel presentation at the International Conference on Urban Wildlife. Pima County's Environmental Planning Manager Sherry Ruther and I joined five others from Boulder, Chicago, Los Angeles, Raleigh, and San Diego to talk about successful urban wildlife initiatives in our communities. We presented the success of the process and implementation of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, the core of our work here at the Coalition. I was again reminded of what community partnerships can achieve, from our small group of environmentalists that sprouted a vision for endangered species and habitat protection in 1998 to heralding a nationally-acclaimed county growth plan based on just such values. **The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan is being emulated by other communities facing similar challenges with loss of habitat and planning for protecting their special species.**

All in all, while I would rather be here in the desert working to protect the place I cherish, having an opportunity to share our successes with others brings renewed energy, and reminds me that this work is due to the support from all of you.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Coalition Staff

Carolyn Campbell *Director*

Kathleen Kennedy *Associate Director*

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We have a new mailing address:
738 N. 5th Ave., Suite 212
Tucson AZ 85705

The Coalition works to create a community where: ecosystem health is protected; nature and healthy wild animal populations are valued; and residents, visitors, and future generations can all drink clean water, breathe clean air, and find wild places to roam.

Coalition Member Groups

Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest

Arizona Native Plant Society

Bat Conservation International

Cascabel Conservation Association

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Environmental Ethics

Defenders of Wildlife

Desert Watch

Environmental Law Society

Friends of Cabeza Prieta

Friends of Ironwood Forest

Friends of Madera Canyon

Friends of Saguaro National Park

Friends of Tortolita

Gates Pass Area Neighborhood Association

Genius Loci Foundation

Native Seeds / SEARCH

Protect Land and Neighborhoods

Safford Peak Watershed Education Team

Save the Scenic Santa Ritas

Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter

Sierra Club – Rincon Group

Sky Island Alliance

Society for Ecological Restoration

Southwestern Biological Institute

Tortolita Homeowners Association

Tucson Audubon Society

Tucson Herpetological Society

Tucson Mountains Association

Wildlands Network

Website: www.sonorandesert.org

facebook.com/sonorandesertprotection

Office: 520.388.9925



Left: Wouldn't want to be caught between these two mule deer, west of the wildlife bridge in Oro Valley. Photographed on the LLOYD camera monitored by Karen & Alan Dahl and David Davis. Middle: These two coyotes aren't going it alone in Oro Valley. Photographed by the STITZER camera — we are currently looking for volunteers to monitor this camera. Contact Sarah Whelan at Sarah.Whelan@sonorandesert.org for more information. Right: Students from Manzanita Elementary School install a new wildlife camera as a part of an educational partnership with the Coalition.

2017 Wildlife Monitoring Camera Expansion in 5 Parts

Thank you for supporting the continued growth of our wildlife camera program!

Part 1. Out in the Field

The heat is building along with monsoon clouds and so are our efforts for our wildlife monitoring camera expansion. At the start of 2016 we had 26 cameras in the field and we decided to place an additional 20 cameras in 2017 for a total of 46. With 14 out of the 20 new cameras now out in the field, we're gearing up to finish this expansion with an additional 6 cameras being placed in the northern end of the Tucson Mountains and the Tortolita Fan. As the saying goes, if you can't take the heat, stay out of the desert! Good news is... we can take it!

Part 2. Engaging Young Minds

We've also recruited some new help from our friends with the Manzanita Elementary Robotics Club. Interested in exploring the use of technology for use in pulling data from the field, data management, species identification, and how this data can be used for public planning purposes, the Robotics Club asked to aid in our work while learning the ins and outs themselves. Led by two enthusiastic teachers, Charlotte Ackerman and Jennifer DeBenedetti, the Manzanita Robotics Club funded and helped place two cameras in our Oro Valley study. Continuing forward as we pull data from these cameras, students of the club will work to help sort, identify, and analyze the data. We're excited to engage young minds about the importance of open spaces and understanding the ecosystems that surround us.

Part 3. Back in the Office

More cameras out in the field means more data coming into the office. We're seeing hundreds more photos and our Desert Identifiers are hard at work identifying species and managing the data for analysis. With the volume increasing, we've been fine-tuning our process, allowing for more volunteers to join us in the office and a more streamlined approach to staying on top of it all.

Part 4. Camera Sponsors

Did you know you can sponsor a wildlife camera? Big thank you to everyone who has sponsored a camera: Scott Roy, Elinor Marcek, Elsa Swyers, and Barbara Kelly.

It's an exciting time as we prepare to send out the first data batch to these camera sponsors! Camera sponsors get exclusive photos and information about our study and the camera they sponsor, along with naming rights to the camera itself. Want to be in the loop too? Consider sponsoring a camera today! More information about sponsorship levels can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2t4BRzO>

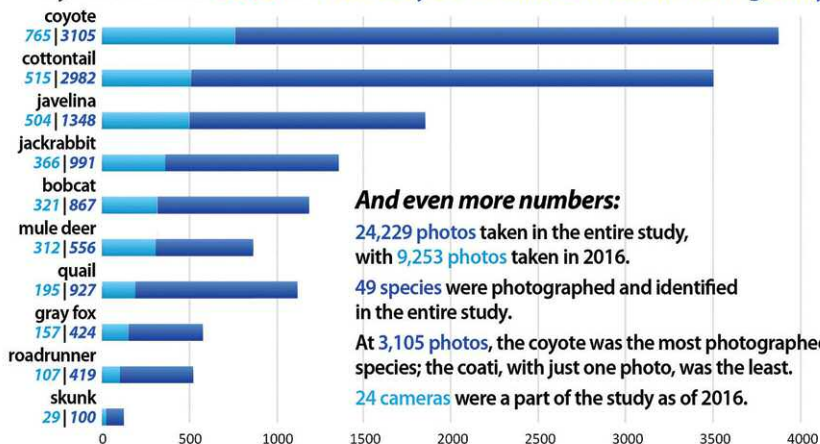
Part 5. Data Analysis and Sharing

Behind the scenes, we've been upgrading our data analysis system so we can more effectively share our data with project partners such as Arizona Game and Fish Department, Saguaro National Park, and you! In the coming year, keep your eye out for more regular data updates from our cameras. We want you to know how these cameras and the photos they capture are having an impact on local conservation.

Want to monitor a wildlife camera?

We need two new "Desert Monitors" for our LIZARD and STITZER cameras in our Oracle Road wildlife crossings study area. Contact Sarah Whelan at Sarah.Whelan@sonorandesert.org or (520) 388-9925 for more information.

By the Numbers: 2016 and Entire 5-year Wildlife Camera Monitoring Study



And even more numbers:
 24,229 photos taken in the entire study, with 9,253 photos taken in 2016.
 49 species were photographed and identified in the entire study.
 At 3,105 photos, the coyote was the most photographed species; the coati, with just one photo, was the least.
 24 cameras were a part of the study as of 2016.



Volunteer/Donor Spotlight: Craig Civalier

Biodiversity became important to me in my college days. My hope then was to have the opportunity to actively do something about its preservation/conservation. Once the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) funding was approved by the voters of Pima County in 2006, I was given that opportunity. I am proud that I was part of the regional team that secured approval and funding for the wildlife overpass and underpass on Oracle Road from the RTA and ADOT.

Continuing in that spirit, I became a member of the Coalition and am active in the wildlife camera project for the overpass. The best reward has been knowing what we fought so hard to achieve is working wonderfully. Its success is something we can all point to in helping the region frame what is possible in the future. Please join us, we can do great things together.

Thank you Craig for all your hard work as a wildlife camera volunteer and your incredible support as a monthly donor!

Impact Briefs

Your support is having an impact! Thank you for supporting our advocacy for a protected and connected Sonoran Desert and using your voice to make a difference!

Interstate 11

We submitted detailed comments on the proposed alternative routes for Interstate 11 on May 31, 2017 and we know many of you did too. Thank you for attending the public meetings and submitting your public comments about this important issue. We will continue to oppose any route alternatives in Avra Valley and promote improvements to the existing Interstate 10 corridor to accommodate any increased traffic volumes. Want to read our full comment letter? Head to: <http://bit.ly/2sR9eBS>

Supporting Our National Monuments

Our comments in support of Ironwood Forest National Monument, and all national monuments, were submitted to Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke on July 10, 2017. The Coalition was one of the community leaders that led the push for the designation of Ironwood Forest National Monument in 2000 and we continue to support its full protection moving forward. Thank you for submitting your comments in support of our national monuments. To read our full comment letter (and perhaps learn a bit of history about Ironwood Forest), head to: <http://bit.ly/2vdf4OS>

Lazy K Bar Ranch

The Coalition negotiated strongly with the developers of the controversial Lazy K Bar Ranch in Marana this past winter and spring (and for years beforehand). We know many people were opposed to this development and were deeply disappointed when it was approved by the Marana Town Council on May 17, 2017. However, we did succeed in advocating for the inclusion of an Open Space Covenant and the protection of an important wildlife linkage on the property. To learn more and read our recommendation letter, head to: <http://bit.ly/2u9NhSm>

Engagement Opportunities:

Interested in Volunteering for the Coalition? Check out these open volunteer positions!

Desert Monitors

We're looking for volunteers interested in monitoring wildlife cameras in the Tucson Mountains! In the next three months we plan to place an additional 6 cameras in the northern region of the Tucson Mountains into the Tortolita Fan. Volunteers will have the opportunity to learn about the project, be involved in initial placement, and conduct long term monitoring. Camera monitors in this area are asked to check cameras quarterly.

We currently have two cameras in Oro Valley in need of a team to monitor them! As part of the

post-build wildlife crossings study, both cameras are in close proximity and accessible by a short half-mile hike. Already established in the field, volunteers will be asked to check cameras bi-monthly.

Desert Identifiers

Ever wonder what is done with wildlife camera photos pulled from the field? When you join our team of Desert Identifiers you'll learn the ins and outs of our data management methods, learn to identify animals in our region, all while playing a pivotal role to open space conservation efforts in Pima County.

Desert Archivists

We've been hard at work for nearly 20 years now and in that time we've accumulated the history of those efforts in file cabinets that line our office. As we look to the next 20 years, we want to capture the history and story of the Coalition and the lands we advocate to save.

To do this we're looking for dedicated volunteers to lend their time archiving our records into digital formats. This project will be worked on at our offices located in the Historic Y near downtown Tucson, training will be provided, and moderate computer skills are a plus.

For more information on any of these engagement opportunities, please contact Sarah Whelan at 520.388.9925 or Sarah.Whelan@sonorandesert.org.