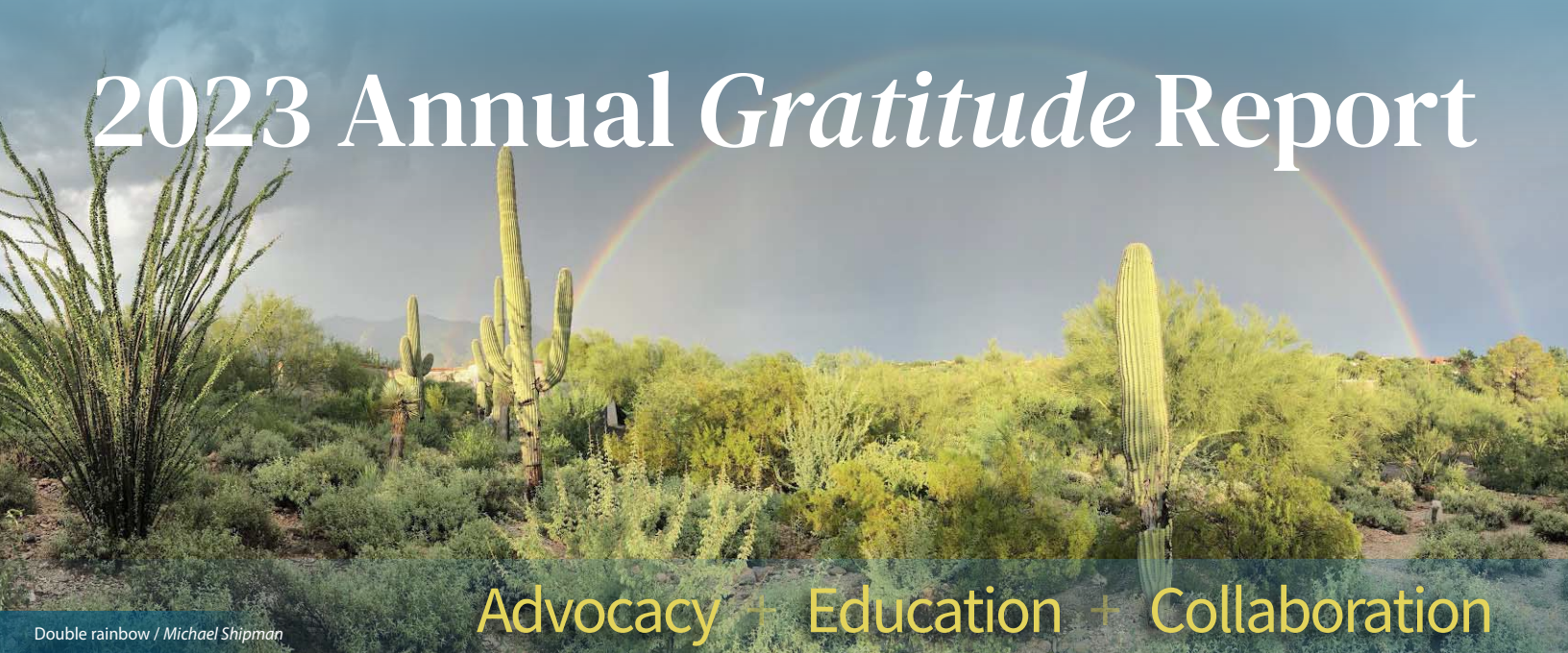


# 2023 Annual Gratitude Report



Double rainbow / Michael Shipman

## Advocacy + Education + Collaboration



The Coalition's mission is to protect the biodiversity of the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona through science-based advocacy, education, and collaboration.

We work 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.

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@SonoranDesertProtection

## Letter from the Board President

It's time to reflect on last year's activities and look forward to new adventures and accomplishments – time to THANK YOU ALL, our friends, colleagues, members and volunteers who make what we do possible in so many ways. We celebrated the life of our long-time volunteer and intern Josh Skattum early in the year, brought two Desert Wildlife Interns onboard for the fall semester, said goodbye to staff member Whelan, and said hello to our talented and artistic new Program and Communications Coordinator, Jonni Zeman, all while we continued to advocate for sensible policies and development practices.

Through it all, from mailing parties to community science, YOU continue to be the foundation of our work. Numerous volunteers adopt, maintain and monitor our wildlife cameras while others keep our adopted stretch of Oracle Road free of trash and watch for roadkill in specially organized work parties. This year has seen us expand our restoration efforts in partnership with our colleague Carianne Funicelli and her business, Strategic Habitat Enhancements (S.H.E.), removing invasive plants and revegetating the landscape on the Oracle Road wildlife crossings that connect our Catalina and Tortolita mountains.

Coalition staff and volunteers continue to support our Desert Fence Busters (DFB) partnership, removing unnecessary barbed wire fences, most recently in Avra Valley, the northern Altar Valley and the Tortolita Preserve. In the last three work seasons we have opened up over 7,700 acres of habitat on Tucson Water lands alone, removing and recycling over 36.5 miles and 41,000 pounds of obsolete fencing materials. During

*continued next page*



Cactus blooming / Kathy Krucker



# Letter from the Board President

*continued from cover*

our last work season, Coalition member Tucson Audubon expanded their “Project Death Pipes” and joined DFB to cap 275 vertical open-top pipes, saving the lives of an estimated 6,600 small birds, mammals and reptiles.

In addition, the Coalition supported Pima County’s acquisition of parcels that will improve and expand safe wildlife passage through a previously unprotected siphon of the CAP canal leading to the Bureau of Reclamation’s Tucson Mitigation Corridor. Coalition volunteers are monitoring wildlife cameras in that area too, while we continue to participate in the lawsuit against the “West” Avra Valley option of the proposed Interstate-11. Thanks to your efforts and ours, more people know about this project’s potential to destroy habitat on a landscape level, threatening wildlife movement between the Ironwood Forest National Monument and the already isolated Tucson Mountain Park and Saguaro National Park West.

Last but not least, to fulfill our commitments under the last Regional Transportation Authority Plan and Wildlife Linkages Working Group recommendations, we continue to be involved in planning a new wildlife bridge over SR 86 / Ajo Way, a project led by the Tohono O’odham Nation, and directing the funding priorities of RTA Next.

Together, we’ve accomplished a tremendous amount of valuable work this year, thanks to YOU! But the work is not done, and more is on the horizon. Together I know we'll make it happen!

*Christina McVie*

# 25 Years of Sonoran Desert Protection: *Looking Back and Continuing Forward*

*Thank You for Celebrating our Anniversary With Us!*

Snow on top of the Catalina Mountains / Middy Henke

For the past 25+ years, the Coalition has been a leader in Sonoran Desert protection, advocating and fighting for connected habitat and open spaces, healthy and prospering wildlife and a cleaner environment for all who live here. The Sonoran Desert is a unique and biodiverse ecosystem that deserves our attention and protection.

At the Coalition, we are so proud of our accomplishments over the past 25+ years. We are working to continue this momentum and have set more goals to achieve in the NEXT 25 years. Thank you for your continued support for our mission and goals. We couldn't do this without our community and YOU, our dedicated group of volunteers and supporters.

## **25 Years Looking Back: Key Accomplishments Since 1998**

- + Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan & Multi-Species Conservation Plan
- + The Sonoran Desert's first wildlife crossing bridge
- + Creating Ironwood Forest National Monument
- + Securing \$45 Million in wildlife linkage funding in the 2006 Regional Transportation Authority Plan, which funded numerous wildlife underpasses and the Oracle Road wildlife bridge, along with new bat habitat on new bridges and Sonoran-Desert specific research projects
- + Protecting over 200,000 acres of open space with local bond funding
- + Starting the first and longest lasting community science wildlife camera monitoring project in southern Arizona with 80 active cameras, 4 project areas and 80 camera volunteers
- + Representing 30,000 people and made up of 32 member groups

## **25 Years Looking Forward: Future Long-term Goals**

- + Construction of more wildlife crossings, including over Rattlesnake Pass, over I-10, and across SR-86
- + Ensuring the protection of Avra Valley and defeating the I-11 West Option
- + Designation of the Santa Cruz River as an Urban National Wildlife Refuge
- + Adoption of a new RTA plan that includes more funds for wildlife crossing infrastructure
- + Continuing to implement inclusive practices in our workplace and creating spaces for diverse perspectives
- + Continuing to strengthen connectivity and protect wildlife by working with the Desert Fence Busters
- + Expanding our Critter Cam for Kids curriculum for broader audiences and opportunities
- + Continuing the longest lasting community-led wildlife camera monitoring program in southern Arizona



Volunteers and CSDP staff at a Habitat Restoration Day in Fall 2023



Newly planted ironwood tree / Jonni Zeman

Watch this project unfold on our YouTube Channel!



Volunteers and staff carrying potted trees to the wildlife crossing bridge



Penstemons and Globemallows planted at the crossings

## Thank you for helping us launch our new Habitat Restoration Days project!

In August 2023, we launched our new program to help restore and revegetate wildlife habitat on the Oracle Road wildlife bridge and underpass. With the help of a dedicated group of volunteers, we removed invasive plant species such as buffelgrass and planted native cacti and shrubs and spread seed mixes. Occurring once a month for 12 months, these work days have been an opportunity for public education and outreach, teaching about restoration in the Sonoran Desert and the importance of these wildlife crossing structures for our local wildlife. The first phase of this project will continue until August 2024.

This project is funded by the Santa Cruz National Heritage Area. Please visit our YouTube Channel to learn more and for future project updates.

## Fall 2023 Desert Wildlife Interns Make an Impact!

Our Desert Wildlife Internship Program offers part-time paid internships to high school, college students, and early-career professionals. Interns manage wildlife camera data and contribute to projects protecting Sonoran Desert wildlife and open-space. Our interns Andrew Grusenmeyer and Jeremiah Powers worked with us during the fall 2023 semester. Andrew led CSDP's Snapshot USA project, contributing to a nationwide wildlife camera trap survey, while Jeremiah helped us implement our monthly Habitat Restoration Day events for the Oracle Road wildlife crossing structures.

We are grateful to provide this opportunity to our community and to the Deupree Family Foundation for funding our 2022 and 2023 internships. Each intern costs approximately \$4,000 to support. If you want to help sponsor an intern, please go to [sonorandesert.org/donate](https://sonorandesert.org/donate) and designate your donation to the *Josh Skattum Desert Wildlife Internship* program.



Andrew



Jeremiah

# Oracle Road Wildlife Gates are Finally Finished and Operating!



## The Collaborative Solution for Wildlife and Residents at Big Wash

In April 2023, after years of planning and construction, the Town of Oro Valley hosted a ribbon cutting to celebrate a new wildlife gate at Big Wash Overlook Place. This project succeeded in its goal to preserve scenic views, address the wildlife fencing gaps, and safeguard wildlife along Oracle Road near the wildlife underpass.

“This has been quite an effort on the part of groups with a wide variety of needs. Biologists, government agencies, and wildlife connectivity advocates were at odds with Oro Valley residents’ concerns about scenic views at the start of this project, with no solution seemingly possible. But collaboration won the day, with groups working literally for years to find a solution that works for both wildlife and residents. Today is a celebration of that effort,” said Co-Executive Director Carolyn Campbell.



Wildlife gates near Big Wash



Co-Executive Director Carolyn Campbell at the wildlife gate ribbon cutting

## Another Successful Year for the Desert Fence Busters

Since 2021, the Desert Fence Busters have been committed to protecting wildlife and increasing connectivity within the Sonoran Desert by removing dangerous barbed wire fencing on public lands. In 2023, the team further honed their strategies for prioritizing fence removals and worked with landowners in the Tucson area to

identify and remove obsolete fences with the help of volunteers. Their top priority was to remove “double fences” and areas with a high-density of obsolete fences. Thanks to their hard work, fencing was successfully removed from the City of Tucson (Tucson Water) and the National Park Service. In 2023, the Fence Busters removed 11.5 miles of fence, contributing to the total of 36.5 miles of fence removed since 2021. Thank you to all the partners, community members and volunteers who make this work possible!




Photos courtesy Tortolita Alliance



## 2023 Wildlife Camera Statistics

- + 56 cameras in the field
- + 3 wildlife camera project areas
- + Over 3.5 million in total wildlife camera photos
- + Over 70 species photographed



Mule Deer buck



Bobcat



Javelina

## Volunteer-driven Wildlife Camera Program Continues to Make a Difference

This year our wildlife camera monitoring program really solidified. Our fleet of wildlife cameras expanded, with a closer focus on the Tucson-Tortolita Mountains Wildlife Linkage and proposed I-11 corridor. Our interns, along with volunteer extraordinaire, Virgil Swadley, kept our databases of wildlife photos in tip-top shape, setting the stage for more growth for the program in 2024. To date we have gathered well over three and half million wildlife photos of more than 70 species, including mountain lion, opossum, badger, kit fox, bobcat, spotted skunks, and more. We continue to use the data, and the momentum of community interest, to move the protection of Sonoran Desert open space and wildlife corridors forward!



Roadrunner

# Volunteers Powered Our Programs in 2023



Advocacy + Education + Collaboration

Volunteers get oriented at one of our Habitat Restoration Days at the Oracle Road wildlife crossings.



Desert Fence Busters

## Volunteer Hours for our Programs:

- + Desert Advocates **588**
- + Desert Fence Busters **1,582**
- + Desert Identifiers **313**
- + Desert Mailers **23**
- + Desert Monitors **363**
- + Desert Roadies **42**
- + Desert Wildlife Crossing Crew **460**

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- + Total volunteer hours **3,371**
- + Total number of volunteers **166**
- + Events attended **14**



Hand-rolled barbed wire fencing removed for wildlife.

## Get Involved!

Interested in donating, volunteering, or using your voice to advocate for a Sonoran Desert?

Head over to [www.sonorandesert.org](http://www.sonorandesert.org) and learn more!



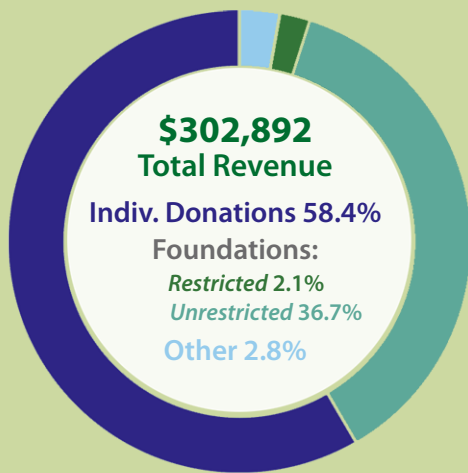
# Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection

Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest + Arizona Master Naturalist Association + 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 + Great Old Broads for Wilderness – Tucson + Native Seeds / SEARCH + Protect Land and Neighborhoods + Safford Peak Watershed Education Team + Save the Scenic Santa Ritas + Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter + Sierra Club – Nopales Group + Sky Island Alliance + Southwestern Biological Institute + Tortolita Alliance + Tortolita Homeowners Association + Tucson Audubon Society + Tucson Herpetological Society + Tucson Mountains Association + Wildlands Network



Bobcat / David Pederson

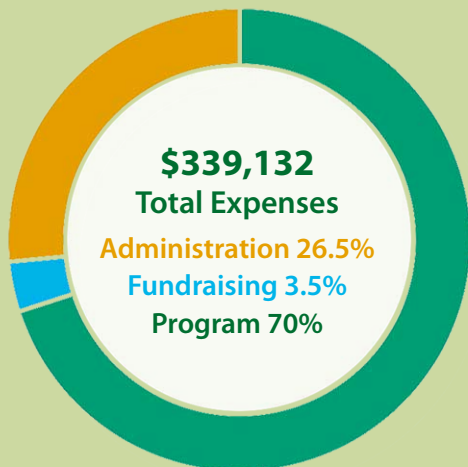
## Advocacy + Education + Collaboration



### Thank you. Gifts of all sizes make an impact in supporting a protected and connected Sonoran Desert!

*We gratefully acknowledge these foundation and grant funders who supported our vision in 2023:*

Community Foundation for Southern Arizona + Greater Green Valley Community Foundation + Jewish Community Foundation of Southern Arizona + MET, Inc. + Steven Leuthold Family Foundation + Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area + The Alben F. Bates and Clara G. Bates Foundation + The William I. Snyder and Patricia F. Snyder Foundation + Wilburforce Foundation



*We are also grateful to these local businesses which provided services in 2023:*

Julie St John, Message Design + Moia Group, Inc. + Strategic Habitat Enhancements + Small Wheel Films / Leslie Epperson, Videographer + Westpress + Yeah Right! Screen Printing and Design