

**Protecting, restoring, and rewilding the biodiversity of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands**



Photo: Bill Steen

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## Featured Photo

As temperatures warm and days get longer, the cool, shaded, and restored riparian areas of the Cajon Bonito River continue to hydrate the earth and the plants and animals that rely on this water way for survival.



Photo: Valerie Gordon/Cuenca



# TRANSITIONS

The time has come to announce some good news that I have been thinking about for quite some time.

Years ago, I founded Cuenca Los Ojos (Cuenca) to share with others our experiences. We had been stopping erosion on the hills and increasing the flow of water in the creeks with a series of check dams. My vision was to bring back water to an arid and denuded land. My feet had been walking the hills and I was focused downward on the ground, on the insect life, the regrowth of vegetation and on the signs of animals.

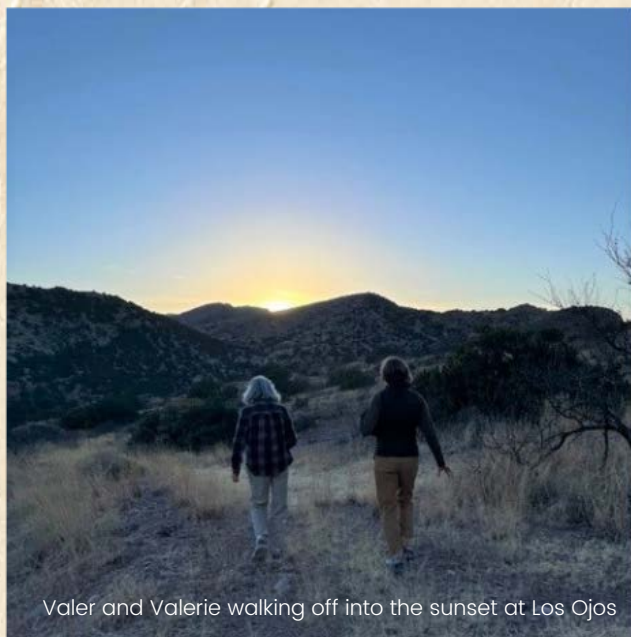
The time has come now to look up, to see what innovative ideas others are using to improve habitat, and to see what Cuenca can do to make a difference on a larger scale. With the recent work we have done to permanently protect our Sonoran preserve, secure an operating endowment, and formalize our U.S. and Mexico supporting organizations, I have decided that now is the right time for me to transition off of Cuenca's board and work in an advisory role.

While there are so many people I want to thank for their support, encouragement, and friendship over the years as I put this project together, I do want to acknowledge and thank my daughter, Valerie, who has consistently been an advocate of Cuenca Los Ojos and helping my dreams become a reality.

I am stepping down confident that the organization and the preserve's future is in great hands. We have an amazing and dedicated board and staff that I believe will take Cuenca beyond what I could have done. Words alone are insufficient to express my gratitude and thanks to the entire Cuenca Los Ojos family, but please know that each one of you has impacted me in ways I can never repay, and I am forever grateful. Please continue your work to heal and restore our planet...it is our only one.

I wish you all success going forward.

*Valer*



Valer and Valerie walking off into the sunset at Los Ojos

Photo: Elizabeth Valdovinos/Cuenca

Dear Mom,

On behalf of our family and your extended Cuenca family we want to thank you for your inspiration, dedication, and perseverance in launching Cuenca Los Ojos into what it has become. I echo your sentiments that we are poised for much success, and we all look forward to what the future holds. As you pass the baton, know that you have left your mark, and we are all ready to continue running the race. Also know that your legacy of water restoration on arid lands is secured and will be shared with generations to come.

Thank you for instilling in me the importance of caring for the earth. As most people you know will agree, your passion is infectious. I hope we can work as tirelessly as you have.

P.S. Now that you will have more time on your hands, maybe you could help the crew build some trincheras?

*Valerie*



Cuenca Los Ojos

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREETING

*“Green is the prime color of the world,  
and that from which its loveliness arises.”*

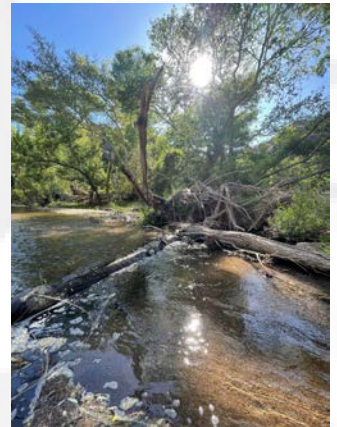
- Pedro Calderon de la Barca



Spring happens to be my favorite time of the year. We all shake off winter’s hibernation and look ahead to new growth, new life, and new possibilities. With Valer’s decision to pass the reins of this organization to a board and staff who share her passion for watershed restoration and this place we call Cuenca, we embrace the opportunity to carry the torch of arid land restoration as we adapt and evolve to meet the environmental challenges of our time.



Through our partnerships, outreach, and on the ground work, Cuenca remains committed to the principles of holistic landscape scale conservation of restoring watersheds, protecting wildlife habitat, and increasing the biodiversity of our planet.



I would ask that all of you join me in extending a huge thank you to Valer for dropping the proverbial pebble in the pond, or in our case, placing the first rock in a trinchera. The ripple effect of that act will be felt for ages to come.



In Cadence,

Jeremiah H. Leibowitz  
Executive Director



Photos: Valerie Gordon/Cuenca





Photos: Omar Caballero/Cuenca

## MOTUS WILDLIFE TRACKING SYSTEM

Between January 5-9, 2023, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (BCR) hosted a workshop at Rancho El Uno in Janos, Chihuahua, Mexico to install and band and tag several grassland bird species. The installation of this tracking station serves to build out the Motus network in Mexico, which has critical grassland bird habitat. Next year, Cuenca aims to work with BCR to install another Motus wildlife tracking station on its Sonoran preserve. The result of these efforts will improve our knowledge of grassland bird migration.

Thank you to BCR and all involved including Autonomous University of Chihuahua, Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon, Juarez University of the State of Durango, University of Guadalajara, Pronatura Noreste A.C., Pronatura Noroeste A.C., MUNAT Women and Nature (NGO from El Salvador).

## NATIONAL BISON ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

January 17-21, 2023, Cuenca's conservation director, José Manuel Pérez Cantú, attended the National Bison Association conference in Denver, Colorado where producers from different parts of the world assemble for the Association's winter conference to celebrate the heritage of American bison, provide educational and policy updates, and create a sustainable future for the bison industry. Cuenca's work with bison at Rancho El Uno are part of a long-term strategy to grow conservation herds throughout Mexico and use them as a tool to restore grassland ecosystems throughout Northern Mexico. Through our work with the National Bison Association and the Trilateral Commission, Cuenca continues to elevate the importance of this species' role in rewilding landscapes.







Staff in front of Museo Ruta de Plata



El Uno presentation under the palapa



Cuenca presentation



Sea of Cortez Sunrise



Cabion demo

Photos: Elizabeth Valdovinos/Cuenca

## RANCHO CACACHILAS TOUR

Staff from Cuenca Los Ojos recently reunited with our friends from Rancho Cacachilas in Baja California Sur, Mexico, February 21-25, 2023. It was a great opportunity to strengthen our collaboration as we discussed land and water conservation priorities, techniques, and challenges. It also served as an introduction for Cuenca in the field of ecotourism as we evaluate opportunities for Sonora and Chihuahua. Thank you again amigos for this unique and unforgettable experience, it was truly inspiring!

For more information about Rancho Cacachilas and to experience a guest ranch adventure vacation, please visit their website: [www.ranchocacachilas.com](http://www.ranchocacachilas.com) and follow @ranchocacachilas on Instagram!







Photos: Omar Caballero/Cuenca

## ETHNOBOTANY HERBALIST WORKSHOP

From March 1-3, 2023, as part of our strategic plan to create opportunities and bring awareness to Cuenca’s work within our local community, we hosted an herbalist workshop in collaboration with DouglPrieta Works, Agua Prieta, Sonora. The herbalist workshop was led by certified herbalist Sara Maria Orzechowska. Using native plants, attendees learned how to harvest, prepare, and preserve plants, how to apply them safely and effectively, as well as how to ferment, and use natural products with medicinal properties. Sixteen women attended including those from DouglPrieta Works, students from the University of Chapingo, and other residents. We look forward to working with local partners to support future community-based, conservation outreach.

## MARTINIE COLLEGE WORKSHOP



Photos: Oscar Bujanda/Cuenca; Omar Caballero/Cuenca

In March 2023, Cuenca and Martinie College held an exchange workshop at Rancho San Bernardino. The workshop promoted environmental awareness in northern Sonora, Mexico, and southern Arizona through discussions with high school students from Agua Prieta about the regional socio-environmental challenges and opportunities. Topics discussed included understanding nature’s “wealth” at the local, regional, and state level, the extinction and reintroduction of the Mexican gray wolf, the reintroduction of the beaver to the Cajón Bonito, the importance of large predators such as the puma and the jaguar, and small bugs that are responsible for pollination.



# MIGRATORY BIRD JOINT VENTURE D.C. FLY-IN

With the mission of conserving birds and their habitats throughout North America, the Association of Joint Venture Management Boards held its annual Washington D.C. Fly-in from March 13-16, 2023, to educate law makers and their staffs about the important conservation work carried out by the Joint Ventures and the need to ensure their funding remained strong through the next appropriation cycle. Cuenca board member, Valerie Gordon, and executive director, Jeremiah H. Leibowitz, represented the Sonoran Joint Venture (SJV) to highlight their great work with its partners throughout Arizona, California, and Mexico. Cuenca was able to reconnect with old partners and develop new relationships to advance bird and habitat conservation in the borderlands.



Photo: Provided by Senator Kelly's office



Photo: Provided by Director Williams' office

# NEW ROADS SCHOOL VISIT

The week of April 10th, 2023, Valer Clark and Rodrigo Sierra Corona met with the New Roads School in Los Angeles, CA. From little ones to parents, the two tag-teamed to share the importance of conservation of wild spaces.



Photos: New Roads School



# AGAVE SUMMIT

In partnership with Bat Conservation International, Borderlands Restoration Network, and Colectivo Sonora Silvestre, Cuenca hosted an Agave Summit from March 22-24, 2023, to discuss growth opportunities for the propagation and reintroduction of agave palmeri throughout Cuenca's preserve. As key habitat for the Mexican long-tongued bat and the Lesser long-nosed bat, we look forward to greater partner collaborations to benefit bats and agaves in northern Mexico.



Photos: Elizabeth Valdovinos/Cuenca; Graphic: Bat Conservation International; Background photo: Bill Steen



# EarthX 2023 EXPO

As part of the 2023 Earth Day celebration, Cuenca's founder, Valer Clark, and executive director, Jeremiah H. Leibowitz were invited to present at the EarthX 2023 Latin America Conference in Dallas, TX to share Cuenca's restoration story. This venue afforded Cuenca a chance to convey a message of hope, positivity, and inspiration as we all work together to tackle environmental challenges across the globe.



Photos: EarthX

## LA RED DE LAS ISLAS DEL CIELO

In April 19-21, 2023, Cuenca hosted a work and planning session of La Red de las Islas del Cielo consisting of: Cuenca Los Ojos, Sky Island Alliance, Profauna A.C., Naturalia A.C., Watershed Management Group, Wildlands Network, Northern Jaguar Project, and Borderlands Restoration Network, with the support of Alfredo Avila from Ki formation y desarrollo humano. The goal of La Red is to develop relationships and work together to restore and protect ecosystems and wildlife corridors in this region.



Photos: Joaquin Murrietta/Borderlands Restoration Network; Omar Caballero/Cuenca



# BORDER BIOBLITZ



On April 22, Cuenca Los Ojos and Sky Island Alliance participated in the Border BioBlitz, an annual community science effort to record as many species as possible along the U.S.-Mexico border. Naturalists met at San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge north and south of the border. Data collected helps to document the region's biological richness and species impacted by the border wall. The event helps reinforce the importance of cross-border cooperation in addressing the various environmental and conservation issues facing this region.



Drone photos: Gerardo Lagarda/Cuenca  
Background photo: Omar Caballero/Cuenca



Photo: Sky Island Alliance

# RUTA DEL JEFE

From April 19-27, 2023, Sarah Swallow, Dani Diaz, Karla Robles, and Adam Gaubert visited Cuenca's Rancho Nuevo to inspect repairs, verify routes, and continue planning for Ruta del Jefe at Cuenca in March 2024. Mark your calendars and stay tuned!

For more information and to see more spectacular photos of their bike survey please follow: [@sarajswallow](#) [@karlatroble](#)  
[@perdidoenbici](#) [@andarrescom](#) [@rutadeljefe](#) on Instagram, and visit [The Radavist](#).



Photos: Sarah Swallow and Adam Gaubert





# 2023 FIRE SEASON

We are in the midst of our 2023 wildfire season with already 5 fires throughout portions of the preserve. We continue to observe that most fires are manmade. Usually, we respond to fires that were started from vehicles on Highway 2 and have the potential to be catastrophic fires both in the U.S. and Mexico if not addressed. Thankfully, we have developed strong partners with the civil protection brigade of Agua Prieta as well as trained our own crew on how to fight wildland fires and improve our response times. While we acknowledge and use fire as a restoration tool, we also realize that certain fires could destroy critical habitat both on our preserve and for our neighbors, thus, we remain vigilant during these dry times.



Photos: Omar Caballero/Cuenca



# SAVE THE DATE!

## Join Cuenca Los Ojos in Celebrating a Desert Treasure: A Thank You to Valer Clark

Saturday, September 16, 2023

5 – 8 pm

Tohono Chul Botanical Gardens

7366 N Paseo Del Norte

Tucson, AZ 85704

More details to follow

## ARIZONA GIVES DAY

Cuenca was happy to have participated in Arizona Gives Day which takes place on April 4th every year. The online giving campaign helps people find, learn about, and donate to local causes. Because of your generosity, we exceeded our \$500 goal! Thank you! We hope to participate next year.

If you missed it, don't worry! Donations are accepted year-round on [www.AZGives.org/cuencalosojos](http://www.AZGives.org/cuencalosojos)





## CONGRATULATIONS, RODRIGO!



Photo: Borderlands Restoration Network

Cuenca would like to extend a warm, southern Arizona welcome to Dr. Rodrigo Sierra Corona as the next executive director of Borderlands Restoration Network. A longtime friend of Cuenca, Rodrigo is a conservation scientist with over 20 years of experience throughout Mexico and the western United States. His strong combination of scientific credentials, on-the-ground conservation and restoration experience, solid management experience, and a true appreciation of the borderlands make him a welcome addition to borderlands conservation community. We look forward to strengthening Cuenca's relationship with him and Borderlands Restoration Network.

## OSCAR BUJANDA TRIBUTE

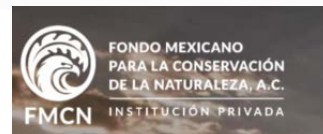


Photos: Karen Suarez/Cuenca

After four impactful years, Oscar E. López Bujanda is leaving Cuenca for some new opportunities. Originally from Hermosillo, Sonora, he earned a bachelor's degree in Ecology from Sonora State University and a master's degree from the University of Sonora. His work focused on the study of bird populations present in arid zones and his knowledge was invaluable to advancing Cuenca's conservation mission. Always humble, curious, and diligent, Oscar could often be seen with binoculars observing birds and other wildlife in the landscape he loved and helped conserve. His work on Cuenca's Fideicomiso project ensured the long-term protection of Cuenca's Sonoran Preserve. As an amateur photographer, skilled GIS technician, and ultimately a jack of all trades, his institutional knowledge and skill set will be missed, along with his kind heart and smile. Thank you, Oscar, and best wishes to you on your next adventure!



# OUR PARTNERS



EJK Foundation



We invite you to visit our partners' websites. Logos are hyperlinked.



# SUPPORT THE BORDERLANDS

“Look closely at nature. Every species is a masterpiece, exquisitely adapted to the particular environment in which it has survived. Who are we to destroy or even diminish biodiversity?”

- E.O. Wilson



Photo: Valerie Gordon/Cuenca

Support Cuenca Los Ojos and help further our mission to protect, restore, and rewild the biodiversity of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands by donating at the link below:

[DONATE](#)

## PHOTO CONTRIBUTIONS

Borderlands Restoration Network, EarthX, Adam Gaubert, Valerie Gordon, Omar Caballero Hernández, Gerardo Lagarda, David Leventhal, Joaquin Murrietta, New Roads School, Sky Island Alliance, Bill Steen, Karen Suarez, Sarah Swallow, Elizabeth Valdovinos

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