



REMM Fall 2011 Newsletter/Alamos, Sonora, Mexico

Catalyst

Virginia Wellington
Cabot Foundation Grant


Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino recently received a \$7,500 grant from the Virginia Wellington Cabot Foundation (<http://www.cabwel.com/index.htm>).

All applications to the foundation must be sponsored by family members. We thank Robert Cabot and his daughter Sara Arshad for sponsoring our grant request. We are especially grateful for their confidence in REMM's mission at a time



when providing funds for conservation work in Mexico is viewed by many as a risky enterprise. This grant from the Virginia Wellington Cabot Foundation sets an important example and will be a catalyst for encouraging others to join in helping with our conservation work.

Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino is one of the best kept secrets in Sonora. Too few people know about the patiently evolving work of Stephanie Meyer and Nature and Culture International (<http://www.natureandculture.org/>) to protect some of the best extant examples of tropical dry forest in the Western Hemisphere. Thanks to these ongoing efforts, REMM encompasses about 23,000 acres (9,000 hectares) of prime TDF along the upper watershed of the Río Cachujaqui, and a staff of almost a dozen people, all natives of the region, provide stewardship and a daily presence on the land. Clearly, getting the word out about REMM's work is the first order of business. A portion of the VWCF funds are being used to develop a web site and much-needed informational materials and to launch Amigos de Monte Mojino, a binational group of people who support our work.



Just the facts

What is REMM's mission?
The mission of Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino is to foster protection of the tropical dry forest and Río Cachujaqui watershed in southern Sonora, Mexico. To achieve our mission, we apply scientific research and the knowledge of local people to sustain this unique landscape in an ever-changing world.

Where is REMM?
Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino encompasses 23,000 acres (9,000 hectares) of contiguous properties containing high-quality tropical dry forest. **REMM** is in southern Sonora east-northeast of the city of Alamos. **REMM** lies within the 92,890-hectare Sierra de Alamos y Río Cachujaqui Federal Area for the Protection of Flora and Fauna. **REMM's** closest properties are about 11 miles (17 km) east of Alamos; the farthest, about 28 miles (45 km).

A Wilderness at the End of the Road

IUCN Grant Makes Key Land Acquisition Possible

In March, purchase was completed on an important property for Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino and its parent organization Nature and Culture International. It is a very rugged piece of land with no roads leading into the vast Sierra Madre beyond. So, in the context of the wider region, this new acquisition provides a corridor to tropical dry forest wilderness leading into the states of Chihuahua and Sinaloa. As a natural gateway, it could serve to inspire further TDF conservation in these adjacent states.

The land encompasses about 5 kilometers along the Río Cuchujaqui, 2,471 acres (1,000 hectares) of tropical dry forest and pine oak as well as several very important drainages that feed into the river. The property is known among people living in the area as Rancho San Pedro. The purchase was made possible with funding from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Pronatura Noroeste was instrumental in assisting with the grant and initial phase of land acquisition.

Work this summer on Rancho San Pedro included making living quarters on the property habitable for a resident family who will provide stewardship and establish presence on the land. “We have been blessed with abundant rain this summer,” REMM Project Administrator Stephanie Meyer said. “The rains have nurtured crops of beans and peanuts that provide a local, sustainable food source for the family.”



Bird Blitz

Bi-national Partners Conduct 1st Breeding Bird Census on REMM



It was hot, really hot. From June 27 to July 2, 2010, two dozen people scattered across the 23,000 acres of Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino to search for breeding birds in temperatures that hovered between 105F and 110F. Three base camps, with 8 to 9 surveyors each, were set up in very remote and rugged areas. Participants from the United States did not have to worry about getting lost because each team had local participants who grew up in the back country and who have been trained by Sonoran Joint Venture as bird guides. The Breeding Bird Survey was a landmark event – for establishing a baseline of breeding species in the TDF and pine oak habitats of southern Sonora and for the partnership among Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino/Nature and Culture International, Sonoran Joint Venture, Western Field Ornithologists, Sierra de Alamos-Río Cuchujaqui Area de

Protección de Flora y Fauna (APFF), and Pronatura Noroeste.

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Bird Blitz...

Developing a baseline of breeding birds is an important first step for the partners who all share an interest in conservation of this special area, in charting the effects of climate change on vegetation and breeding birds, and in making decisions about long-term resource management.

Here are some highlights from the expedition: Conducted 59 area search plots with double sampling. Took vegetation measurements at 118 points. Wrote up more than 25 nest record cards. Conducted several nightjar surveys. Notable discoveries were made of nesting Grayish Saltator, Elegant Euphonia, and Laughing Falcon.

We would like to thank the following people and organizations for organizing and participating in REMM's first Breeding Bird Census: René Alvarez,

Thomas Archdeacon, John Arnett, Carol Beardmore, Tim Burr, Felix Garcia Caballero, Amalio Lopez Cruz, Chris Dodge, Bob Evans, Dawn Fletcher, Ramón Gastelum Enriquez, Alejandro Saucedo Fuentes, Marco Antonio Gonzalez-Bernal, Mario Ibarra, Dave Krueper, Carl Lundblad, David MacKay, Jennifer MacKay, Gabriel Figueroa Martínez, Stephanie Meyer, Claudia Moreno, Nathan Pieplow, Darío Hurtado Saucedo, Bob Schallman, Richard Webster, Suzanne Winckler, Cathy Wise, Rafael Angel Arenas Wong. Web sites for partners:

Sonoran Joint Venture <http://www.sonoranjv.org/>

WFO <http://www.westernfieldornithologists.org/>

Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas <http://www.conanp.gob.mx/>



Research Report

Studying an Endangered Palm

Leonel López-Toledo, Christa Horn, and Bryan Endress from the Applied Plant Ecology Division of the Institute for Conservation Research-San Diego Zoo Global, and Stephanie Meyer, Project Administrator for Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino, have been investigating the distribution, recruitment, and uses of an endangered native palm on REMM properties. Here is an update on their research:

The native palm tree *Brahea aculeata* grows only in a very small region of Mexico – in the corner where the states of Sonora, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Durango meet. Within the Sierra de Alamos Río Cuchujaqui Federal Protected Area in southern Sonora, *B. aculeata*, commonly known as *palmilla*, is an important forest resource, especially for its fan-shaped fronds. Besides subsistence use for thatching roofs, coastal hotels and restaurants are increasing... *Continued on page 4*

Endangered Palm...



their demand for *palmilla* fronds, which is putting a strain on local populations. In addition, browsing of the palm fronds by cattle has a significant impact on the species. Due to this situation, *B. aculeata* is in a precarious conservation scenario: it is currently listed as endangered, suffering from habitat loss and overexploitation.

At the Applied Plant Ecology Division of the Institute for Conservation Research-San Diego Zoo Global, we are partnering with Nature and Culture International/Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino on field studies to determine the palm's ecological niche: what it needs for survival and its role in the ecosystem. Given the expected changes in climate, especially the reduction/oscillation in rainfall, we are evaluating whether future hypothetical scenarios may have effects on the future distribution of *B. aculeata*. We are conducting interviews with landowners and ranchers who know the land and its history. Our work involves initiating experiments to determine the effects of leaf harvesting and cattle grazing on palm population dynamics. Also, through camera traps, we are studying seed dispersal to determine what wild fauna are dependent on this species. We are also evaluating various methods of palm propagation and transplantation to facilitate effective restoration work in the future. With all these studies we hope to contribute to the conservation and sustainable management of this beautiful and important palm species. See <http://sandiegozoo.academia.edu/LeonelLopezToledo/Papers> to read "Distribution and Population Patterns of the threatened palm *Brahea aculeata* in a tropical dry forest in Sonora Mexico."

Birding Ruta Sierra Mar

Save 2011 Dates for Christmas Bird Counts

Last year, more than 70 birders participated in one of the three Audubon Christmas Bird Counts in southern Sonora, ranging from the Sea of Cortez plays to the pine oaks in the foothills of the Sierra Madre. Some gung-ho birders participated in all three. The Navopatia CBC is held along the exquisite Agiabampo Estuary, the Alamos CBC takes place in the forests and arroyos surrounding the charming colonial town of Alamos, and the Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino CBC, the newcomer of the CBC trio, is way out yonder in the rugged, remote foothills of the Sierra Madre. The REMM count was a logistical challenge (some might say nightmare!) because of the rugged roads and terrain. But we managed to pull it off and we're ready to return and, with better tactical planning, surpass our first-year 144 species total. Participating in the REMM count is a great way to see up close the conservation work taking place on Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino and to meet the wonderful REMM staff. 2011 dates and contact information:

- **Navopatia CBC, December 23, 2011** / Contact Adam Hannuksela of the Alamos Wildlands Alliance, ahannuk@gmail.com
<http://alamoswildlands.wordpress.com/navopatia-field-station/>
- **REMM CBC, December 27, 2011** / Contact Suzanne Winckler, suzanne.winckler@gmail.com, or David MacKay, dave_and_jen@solipaso.com
- **Alamos CBC, December 29, 2011** / Contact David MacKay, info@solipaso.com.

Read David MacKay's very entertaining post on the first Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino Christmas Bird Count <http://www.solipaso.com/the-first-rancho-monte-mojino-christmas-bird-count-january-5th-2011>. His posts for the Navopatia and Alamos CBCs are also on the Solipaso website. Matt Brooks, of Tucson Audubon Society, also wrote up his experiences of the REMM count (<http://tucsonaudubon.blogspot.com/2011/01/sonora-christmas-bird-counts.html>)



Welcome Aboard

Two People Join REMM Ranks



Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino is looking forward to working with **Silvia Usuriaga**, who has recently become a Program Coordinator for Nature and Culture International's projects in Latin America. She combines a deep respect for indigenous cultures with experience in implementing global conservation strategies at the local level. Born in Iquitos, Peru, a major city on the upper Amazon, Silvia is a former international business manager whose personal experience led her to devote her talents to the conservation of ecosystems and ancestral cultures. Silvia served as staff director for NCI's conservation programs in the Peruvian Amazon for the last 3 years, during which time over 4 million acres were placed in protected status in 3 national reserves. She worked closely with Peruvian local, state, and national governments and more than 40 indigenous and farming communities, donors, and the private sector to develop and manage an integrated

program to protect the Amazon rainforest.

In March, **Jennifer MacKay** joined REMM as Coordinator of Outreach and Fundraising. She and her husband David MacKay operate Solipaso (<http://www.solipaso.com/>), which specializes in small-group birding and cultural tours throughout Mexico, and El Pedregal Nature and Retreat Center (<http://www.elpedregalmexico.com/>), a beautiful lodge nestled in the tropical dry forest on the edge of Alamos. Jennifer and David have lived in Alamos for more than 18 years where they have raised their two daughters, Salina and Elly. Jennifer was born in California and raised overseas in Italy, Australia, Brazil, and France. A Language Studies major at UCSC and a seasoned traveler, Jennifer found her way into catering and event planning and eventually became a trip leader for Backroads Bicycle Tours. Jennifer is very involved in the Alamos community and sits on several boards that help to promote tourism, conservation, and improving the lives of the people in Alamos. Jennifer brings a world of experience and a fountain of energy to her work for Rancho Ecológico Monte Mojino.



Just the facts

What's the history of REMM in a nutshell?

In 2004, **Nature and Culture International** (<http://www.natureandculture.org/>) began providing the support that has allowed long-standing Alamos biologist Stephanie Meyer to begin purchasing ranches within the federal protected area. Meyer has also developed a local staff who serve as land stewards and carry out basic management of the lands. The most recent land purchase (see page 2) was funded by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Starting in 2011, REMM has begun to expand fund-raising efforts to build **Amigos de Monte Mojino**, a core group of individual project donors, and to solicit more U.S. and Mexico foundations for support.