

TUBAC NATURE CENTER

Annual Report 2025

It is with sincere gratitude to our membership, friends and volunteers that the Tubac Nature Center board has decided to produce our first-ever annual report. This annual report details our key achievements, financial performance, strategic initiatives, and outlook for the year ahead, reflecting our steadfast commitment to stakeholders and our mission.

The mission of the Tubac Nature Center is to provide education, appreciation and conservation of the natural environment with a focus on the Upper Santa Cruz River Valley.



Organizational Overview

The Tubac Nature Center concept grew out of a group of people who got together to bird watch once a week along the Anza trail in Tubac, then afterward go to the Tubac Deli to recap and have coffee. These folks, especially Jim Karp, Michael Dunn and Sheri Sass (Friends of the Santa Cruz River), in 2019 decided to form the Tubac Nature Center – a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization – and had dreams of a future nature preserve. Fast forward six years, and we are making real progress toward conservation of the Santa Cruz River floodplain land in Tubac including receiving \$120,000 in grant monies for conservation projects; are engaged in a larger effort to form a Santa Cruz River National Wildlife Refuge; have created an annual spring Hawk Watch and festival that attracts thousands of visitors each year and is unique in the country for the special hawk species that migrate through Tubac; sponsor numerous bird and nature walks each month; have engaged hundreds of local children to learn and appreciate our wonderful river and local environment; and our Nature Center is open in the Tubac Community Center. Our board currently sits eight directors, though we recently voted to increase that to eleven. If you feel you have skills to enhance our mission, please do not hesitate to let us know of your interest. And please read on to learn more about our efforts and plans for the future.

Tubac Nature Center Board

Michael Dunn, President

Seth Ausubel, Vice President

Wayne Iwen, Treasurer

Helen Hadley Porter, Secretary

Jim Hood, Director

Bridget McDonough, Director

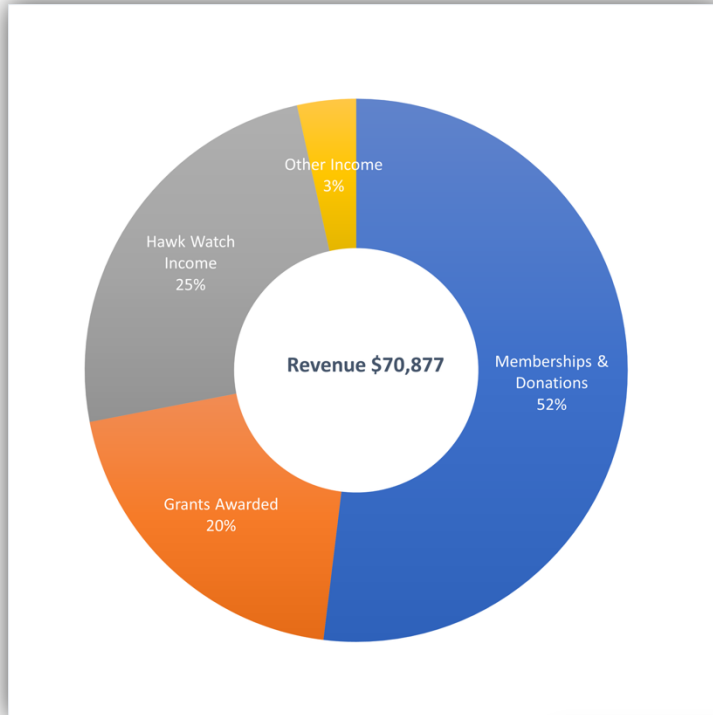
Chris Miller, Director

Dale Sweetnam, Director

Financial Highlights

TNC's financial condition is good. For the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025, Tubac Nature Center received 52% of our income from our generous members and donors. Funds

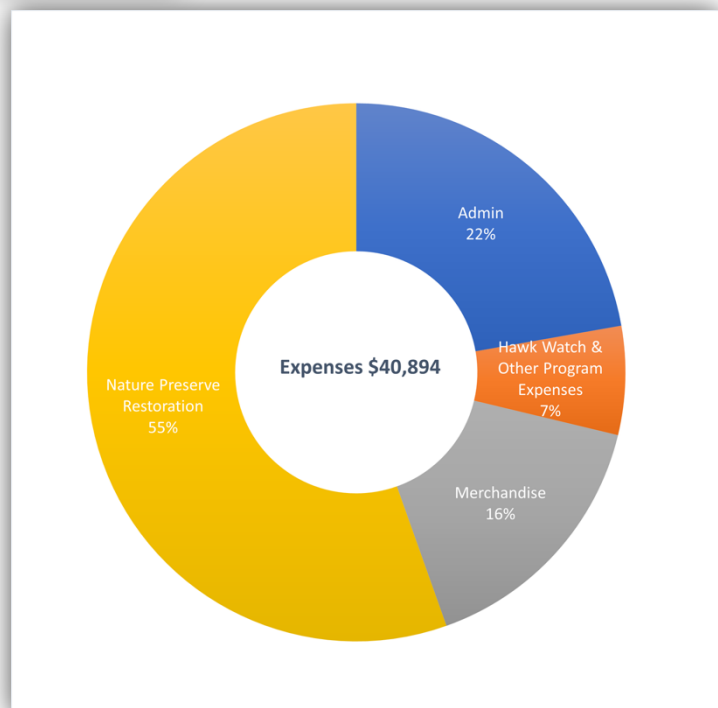
earned from our Hawk Watch event and grants received primarily from the Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area comprise the majority of the rest of our revenue.



This year, the majority of our expenses were to preserve and enhance wetlands and other habitats in the Santa Cruz River floodplain in Tubac, and we have obtained ongoing grants to continue this important work. We hold approximately \$149,000 to support future work to further our mission.

The board voted to change TNC's fiscal year to July 1 through June

30 starting July 2025. This will allow us to plan for the upcoming year during the summer, thus better forecasting the budget for the full busy season from fall to spring.



Tubac Hawk Watch

The Tubac Hawk Watch began in 2012 with hawk watcher extraordinaire Peter Collins' discovery that Common Black Hawks migrate through Tubac each year in March on the way to their breeding grounds, mostly in northern Arizona. The birds often stop overnight to roost in the big cottonwoods along the Santa Cruz River. The Common Black Hawk is a special bird in the United States, with only about 250 breeding pairs, all restricted to the extreme southwest.

Word got out within the hawkwatching community, and people from all over the country started showing up to watch the migration spectacle. TNC in turn, started organizing groups and organizations to share in the splendor, and lo and behold, the Tubac Hawk Watch has grown into a month-long festival, this year bringing 3200 visitors to Ron Morriss Park and the town of Tubac.



Common Black Hawk flying through the cottonwood "snow"

During peak migration week in mid-March, festivities included Kid's Day spearheaded by Jan and Rick Espe and their volunteer team. They entertained and educated 50 children from surrounding communities. A great draw was having live raptors, brought to the Tubac Community Center by Hawkwatch International. TNC is partnering with HWI, which has added the Tubac Hawk Watch to its network of hawk watch sites



Tubac Hawk Watch founder Peter Collins

(hawkwatch.org/migration-network/tubac-hawkwatch/). HWI provided professional hawk counters for an astounding two and a half months during the course of the hawk migration period. Kowa, Zeiss, Vortex, Swarovski and Hawke optics dealers have all come to display their wares over the past several years, providing the public an opportunity to

field test their instruments. A huge thank you to Jeff Bouton and the Kowa folks for their major sponsorship of the Hawk Watch Festival, and to the other optics companies for their generous contributions. Tucson Bird Alliance has also been a great participant, bringing their booth to Ron Morriss Park, and teaching the importance of planting native plants. They also led daily birding trips on the Anza Trail during the big week, and sold neat stuff brought from their gift shop.

Non-profit Day suffered this year from bad weather. Nevertheless, several local organizations came to engage the public in their many important conservation efforts. We will hope for good weather next year!

The TNC booth is staffed by 100% volunteers who set up and host this event. They field questions, count heads, sell merchandise and, along with the hawks overhead, are the bread and butter of this event.

The board also thanks Carolyn Fowler and Dick York, who have chaired the Hawk Watch Festival committee for several years. They will be stepping down, and we are in need of a new host of enthusiastic volunteers to chair this event. Anyone want to help?

Membership, Outreach and Events

As of this writing TNC has 250 members. Annual dues are \$50, and we are pleased that many members choose to donate more.

Our weekly email newsletter reaches over 1400 people throughout the country. TNC is gaining followers on social media. On our Facebook and Instagram pages, you can get

To Contact the Tubac Nature Center:

Our web site tubacnaturecenter.org
Email us tubac.nature.center.2019@gmail.com

On Facebook [**Tubac Nature Center**](#)
& Instagram [Tubac Nature Center](#)

Visit the Nature Center:
Room B2
Tubac Community Center
50 Bridge Rd.
Tubac, Arizona 85646
(see our web site for hours)

Tubac Nature Center
P.O. Box 5123
Tubac, AZ 85646
(520) 812-6654

timely information on meetings, cool photos and interesting nature observations, and information on environmental issues. Please follow us and share the posts that interest you.

We have been working with the Tubac Chamber of Commerce and local non-profits whose missions are other than environment to enhance their appreciation of the importance of ecotourism to Tubac. The Chamber has put together a lovely video promoting Tubac with lots of local birders watching the sky.

TNC offers many other opportunities for you to experience and learn about nature. Our Nature Center, located in the Tubac Community Center, is staffed by our volunteers and includes nature displays, artifacts, and books.

Attendance for the Tuesday morning bird walks continued to be strong, attracting 830 people this season under the leadership of one great birder, Rob Rutledge. Thanks also to Rob's group of volunteer co-leaders. Bird walks (and all of TNC's nature walks) are free for members and visitors alike. Donations are welcome. These are easy walks, usually along the river, that promote better birding, nature understanding, and camaraderie. The walks are especially popular on the cool, crisp mornings of winter and early spring.

Carolyn Fowler's hikes are fun and well attended (330 persons this season), and a bit more challenging. The destinations are all local and are sourced mainly from a book published by TNC, "*Go Take a Hike*", by Bob Mauer. This book is available for sale at the Nature Center and many of our events.

TNC holds family nature walks and plant and river workshops during the year as well. We can also lead personal tours for people or groups who would like to learn about the local Santa Cruz environs.

We also conduct semi-annual bird counts along the Santa Cruz River from Tubac to Tumacacori in the spring and fall. Several teams survey the area. We now have six years of data on bird abundance. But you don't have to be an expert to participate. Contact us if you are interested!

Programs Chair Bob Meinke put together a delightful speaker series with six presenters bringing their knowledge and expertise from a vast array of topics. Especially well received were Brett Blum from Santa Rita Experimental Range, Ed Madej's talk on



seasonal wildflower super blooms in the desert, and Meinke himself speaking about his world travels. The speaker series is presented at the Tubac Community Center from October through April, with a hawk-related topic corresponding with the Hawk Watch Festival. The talks are free of charge. Donations are welcome.

The first weekend in December, the Tumacacori Mission Cultural Festival invited TNC to staff a booth on their festival grounds. Jan Espe put together a hands-on multidimensional station for festival-goers of all ages to learn and embrace nature.

The Tubac Festival of the Arts, an annual village-wide street festival in February, brought over 600 visitors to TNC's booth. We displayed nature-related visuals, and sold merchandise – t-shirts, hats, stickers... But most importantly we reached many folks with our message of the extraordinary beauty and importance of Tubac's natural environment.

To find out more about our scheduled events go to: tubacnaturecenter.org/monthly-program

Our success is only as great as our volunteers, and though there is mention of many volunteers helping along the way, there is always need for more. No PhD needed, just a desire to help a good cause and have fun doing it. Reach out.

Conservation of the Santa Cruz River

The importance of the Santa Cruz River to the citizens of Santa Cruz County and greater Southeast Arizona has made its conservation a high priority for TNC and many other organizations. There has been much recent progress in River conservation, both in Tubac and for the watershed throughout Santa Cruz and Pima Counties. TNC has been active in these efforts and is bringing a focus to the lands along the river in Tubac. Hopefully, one day soon, this land will be permanently preserved. This developing story is summarized in the following sections. It is important to note that this summary addresses only a few of the many important conservation efforts for the Santa Cruz River being conducted by a variety of organizations.

Santa Cruz River Urban National Wildlife Refuge

The establishment of an Urban National Wildlife Refuge for the lands near the Santa Cruz River in Santa Cruz and Pima Counties would preserve many miles of river and thousands of acres of land. The Santa Cruz River Coalition, led by the Sonoran Institute and the Wilderness Society, is working with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to support the establishment of the Santa Cruz River Urban National Wildlife Refuge. TNC enthusiastically endorses this effort and, along with many other organizations, is an active member of the Coalition. If the U.S. FWS establishes the Refuge, it will be able to purchase land and enter into cooperative agreements with landowners to form the Refuge. Participation by landowners is entirely voluntary. There is no "taking". To his credit, the

landowner for over 140 acres of land along the River in Tubac wants to preserve the land and supports the establishment of the Wildlife Refuge. TNC stands ready to assist the landowner and the Coalition in any way it can to bring this important proposal to fruition, or, in its absence, to otherwise preserve and restore the River.

TNC Projects Supporting River Conservation

TNC is guiding efforts to preserve and restore the Santa Cruz River and its associated habitats in

Tubac through several detailed planning projects, and control of invasive plants. These efforts aim to

For Further Information:

Santa Cruz River Coalition	santacruzriver.org
Tucson Bird Alliance	tucsonbirds.org
Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area	santacruzheritage.org
Tubac Nature Preserve Conceptual Plan	tubacnaturecenter.org/preserve-plan-full
Borrow Pit Wetland Restoration Plan	tubacnaturecenter.org/wetland-restoration-plan
Memorandum of Understanding	tubacnaturecenter.org/mou-with-baca-float-land

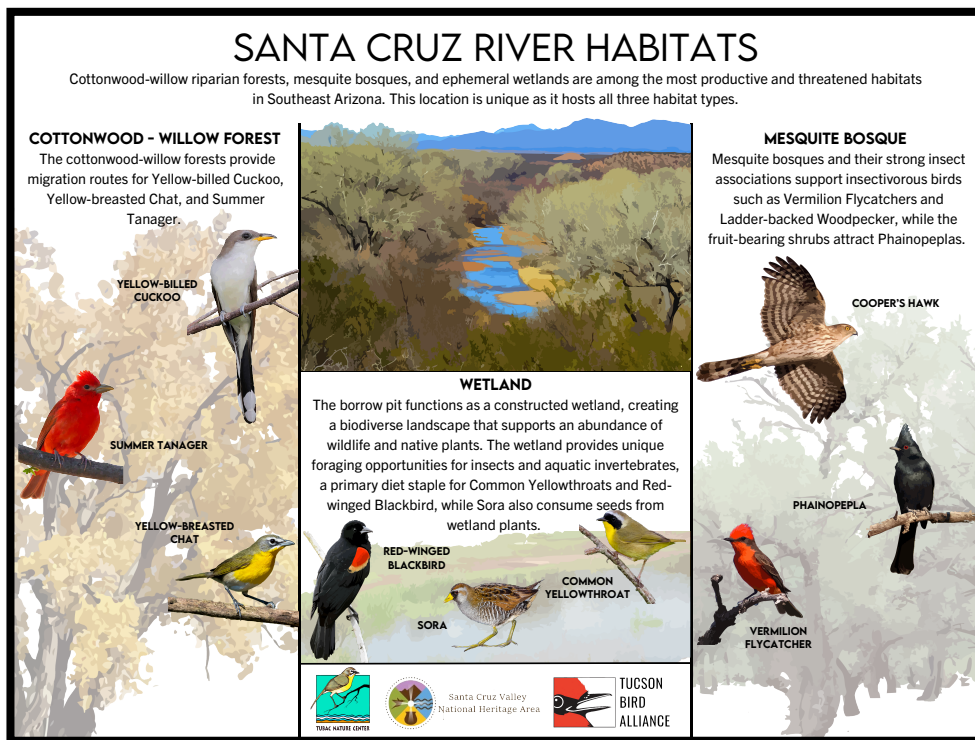
enhance ecological and passive recreational values for our cherished River, and will support the establishment of the Tubac lands as part of the Urban National Wildlife Refuge. We are working with the landowner and engaging the local community in our efforts, to help assure the projects can be implemented. TNC has received grants worth more than \$42,000 thus far, with another \$78,000 on the way. TNC has contracted with the Tucson Bird Alliance to conduct these grant projects.

Tubac Nature Preserve Conceptual Master Plan – In 2023, TNC, supported by the National Park Service and a steering committee of experts and stakeholders, released a report that serves as a blueprint for the conservation of the River lands in Tubac. This plan (the “Conceptual Plan”) is guiding TNC’s efforts, and should guide all future efforts for the land. A community workshop involving over 100 participants was held in February 2023 to gain community input that was used to prepare the final Conceptual Plan.

Tubac Borrow Pit Wetland Restoration Plan – The Tubac Borrow Pit was excavated in the early 2000s to provide fill to develop the adjacent Barrio De Tubac community. The excavation reached groundwater, which resulted in the development of a wetland and associated riparian¹ habitat that supported many birds and wildlife. The habitat has since degraded due to multiple factors including declining groundwater levels and the establishment of non-native invasive plants such as tamarisk (salt cedar). Wetlands are

¹ Riparian means “associated with or situated along the banks of a river”.

rare and of exceptional ecological significance in Southeast Arizona, so restoration is a top priority. In 2023, TNC received a grant from the Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area (SCVNHA) to develop a restoration plan for the wetlands in the Tubac Borrow Pit. As part of this grant, the Tucson Bird Alliance removed almost two acres of tamarisk in the Borrow Pit. Tamarisk uses great amounts of water and causes increased salt levels in soils,



inhibiting native plant growth. Also as part of this grant, we installed an interpretive sign near the Borrow Pit that explains the ecological significance of the wetland ecosystem. The total value of the grant was \$18,000 of which half was matching funds from TNC. The plan was completed in November 2024.

Restoration Plan for the Riparian Forest and Grasslands – The 2023 Conceptual Plan identified the cottonwood-willow riparian forest and grasslands as the two other priority Santa Cruz River habitats for restoration. Of particular concern is that riverbank erosion and declining groundwater levels, as well as grazing, are inhibiting the growth of saplings into trees. Over time, as older trees die, this could cause the loss of the forest. In 2024, TNC received another grant from SCVNHA to develop a restoration plan for these two habitats. The plan is in preparation. The grant is also supporting up to 12 monthly volunteer work events run by the Tucson Bird Alliance, to remove invasive Johnson grass and buffel-grass around the Tubac Borrow Pit. Thus far over 50 dedicated volunteers have participated in the work events. The total value of the grant is approximately \$24,000, of which \$14,000 is matching funds provided by TNC and Tucson Bird Alliance.

Control of Invasive Trees and Grasses in the Santa Cruz River Floodplain in Tubac – The Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management (DFFM) recently announced awards for its 2025 Invasive Plant Grant Program. TNC was pleased to receive an award of \$65,000 to continue our invasive plant control efforts for the next three years. We are again partnering with the Tucson Bird Alliance. The project will target additional tamarisk, as well

as African sumac, Johnson grass and buffel-grass, for removal and control. This continued work is essential to the ultimate success of the wetland restoration project for the Tubac Borrow Pit, as well as for the health of the broader ecosystem. The grant will include approximately \$13,500 of matching funds from TNC and Tucson Bird Alliance, for a total value of approximately \$78,500. We are now working to finalize the grant agreement with DFFM, and expect work to begin in fall 2025.

Next Steps

TNC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with landowner Baca Float Land Development, Ltd. that provides terms of reference for designing and implementing the Borrow Pit wetland restoration project. It also addresses continued control of invasive plants, so that they do not continue to proliferate. We are extremely grateful for the landowner's support. We will also contract with the Tucson Bird Alliance for \$5000 to conduct monitoring in the Borrow Pit to better understand its hydrology². The wetland restoration project is expected to cost around \$500,000 to implement over a five-year period, so TNC is seeking additional grants and donations to support the effort. We will continue to work with the Santa Cruz River Coalition and to engage the local community in our River conservation efforts.

TNC Wildlife Sanctuary

In 2022, TNC purchased 17 acres of land from the Tubac Golf Resort for \$5000, generously donated by Jim Hood. The land is along Bridge Road between the Tubac Community Center on the north and the intersection of Bridge Road and Calle Iglesia on the south. The land includes a mesquite bosque that is an ideal haven for many animals. Recently, the board decided to maintain the land as a wildlife sanctuary and to install signage, to ensure it remains undisturbed.

² Hydrology is defined as “the branch of science concerned with the properties of the earth's water, and especially its movement in relation to land”.

Loop Trail

TNC worked with the Anza Trail Coalition and the Tubac Golf Resort to make a new trail on the golf course conservation easement land north of the Tubac bridge. The Loop Trail connects the TGR Trail with the Anza Trail. It can be accessed just south of the gate at the northeast corner of the Tubac Community Center (coordinates [31.618489, -111.041985](#)). It is an easy hike in the shade among the big trees in the cottonwood forest, with great birding opportunities. Join one of TNC's birding or nature walks which often use the new trail. Or get out there and enjoy it on your own!



Outlook for 2026

Looking ahead, we are optimistic about our future. Strategic priorities for the coming year include:

- Make progress on conservation of priority habitats including raising funds and obtaining grants for project implementation, and seeking community input.
- Support the Santa Cruz River Coalition's efforts and work with Santa Cruz County on environmental initiatives.
- Strengthen our board by adding directors with appropriate skills and enthusiasm.
- Build our membership through increased outreach, especially an increased social media presence.
- Seek volunteers and partners to ensure the Tubac Hawk Watch Festival is better than ever.
- Review our financial and administrative procedures and implement targeted enhancements.

Acknowledgements

A heartfelt thank you to our donors and volunteers. We extend our deepest gratitude to each and every one of you. Your generous support has made a remarkable impact this year, helping us continue our mission and further our vision. Whether through a financial contribution, your time, or your resources, your commitment has helped advance our programs and shape the future we are working towards.

Your belief in our cause fuels our determination to make lasting change, and we are incredibly fortunate to have you as part of our community.

As we look ahead, we are inspired by the possibilities that your continued support will bring. Thank you for being a crucial part of this journey and for helping us make a difference—together.

With gratitude,
Tubac Nature Center Board of Directors