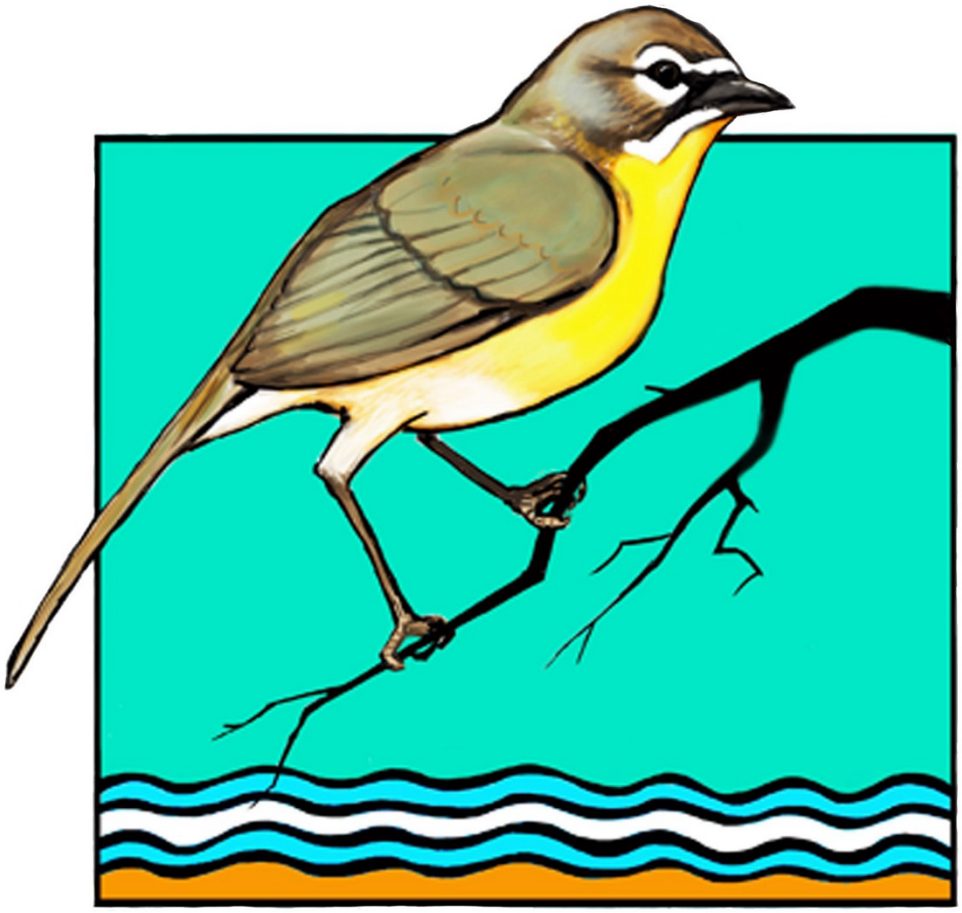


TUBAC NATURE CENTER

Annual Report 2026

The Tubac Nature Center board welcomes all interested to read our 2026 annual report. This report details our key achievements, financial performance, strategic initiatives, and outlook for the year ahead, advancing our mission. We hope you find it informative. We thank our members and volunteers for their support.



Organizational Overview

Since it was formed in 2019, the Tubac Nature Center – a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization – has advanced from a concept to a working volunteer organization and an asset to our community. We have worked steadfastly to further our mission. During 2026, we continued to make progress in conservation of the Santa Cruz River and floodplain land in Tubac. We started work on a 3-year, $76,000 grant to control invasive plants and educate the public about the threat they pose. Also, we took the initial steps in the restoration of the wetland in the Tubac Borrow Pit by diverting stormwater flow into the wetland. The 2026 Tubac Hawk Watch was a big success, setting new records for migrating hawks counted. The Tubac Hawk Watch Festival was again well-attended and included the participation of ten local conservation non-profits. We continued to sponsor numerous bird and nature walks and engage local children to learn about and appreciate our wonderful river and local environment. We conceived a project to paint a mural in Ron Morriss Park by local students; and launched a Great Backyard Bird Count event to make birding more inclusive for those with limited mobility. We redesigned our web site which now includes background and up-to-date information about the Nature Center and its activities. And that's not all! 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

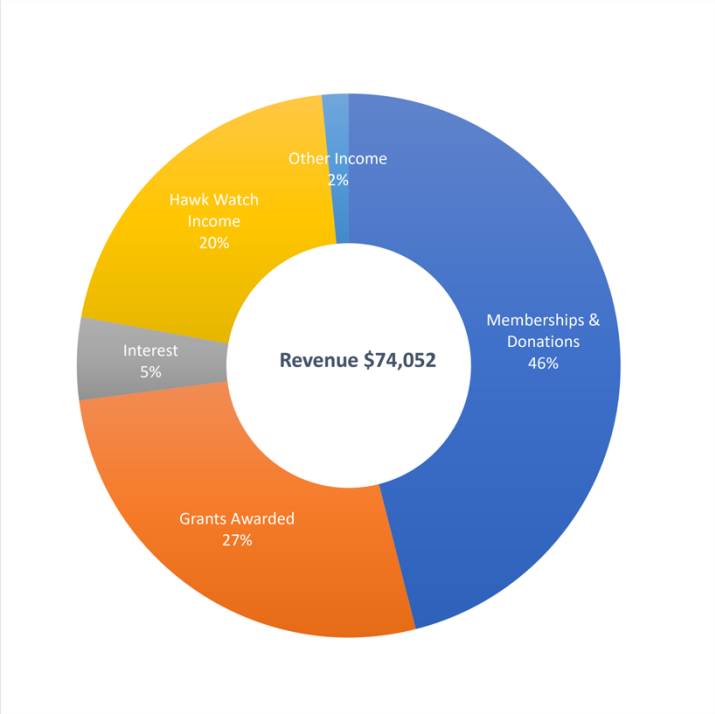
Bridget McDonough, Director

Chris Miller, Director

Dale Sweetnam, Director

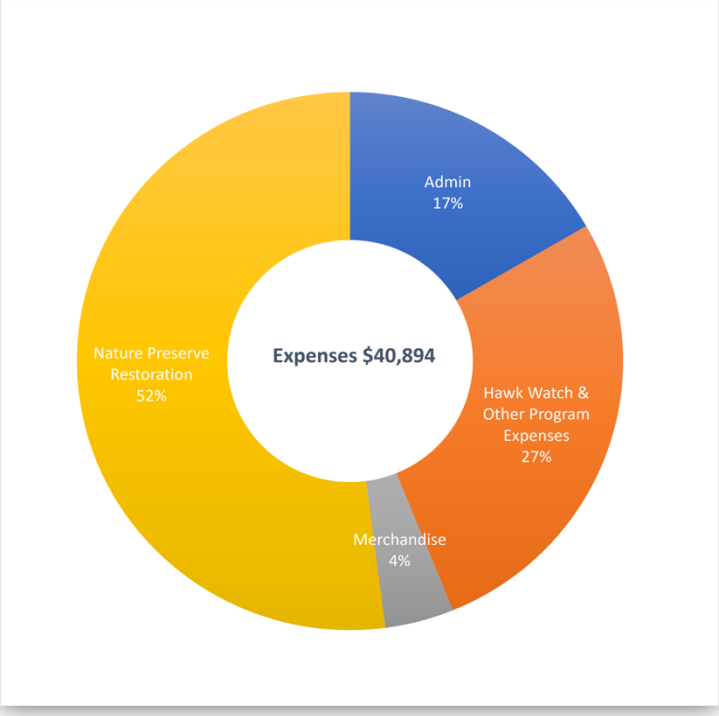
Financial Highlights

The Tubac Nature Center's financial position remains strong. We have a healthy balance sheet, with nearly $174,000 of cash at year end. These funds will be needed in the coming years, especially to help support our river conservation work including providing matching funds for future grants to restore river habitats.



Our generous members donated around $35,000 for the year, and the Nature Center was reimbursed another $20,000 from various grants, including the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management and the Santa Cruz Valley Heritage Alliance. The Hawk Watch provided another $25,000 of revenue.

As last year, the majority of our expenses were to preserve and enhance wetlands and other habitats in the Santa Cruz River floodplain in Tubac.



Revenue and expenses reported here are based on the fiscal year July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026.

Tubac Hawk Watch

The Tubac Hawk Watch is the Nature Center's premiere event. 2026 marked the 14th year of the Hawk Watch, which started in 2013 when Peter Collins began systematically counting raptors migrating north through Tubac in the spring. In 2024, HawkWatch International (HWI) joined us, expanding the watch from the month of March, to encompass 75 days from February 15 to April 30, and began providing official hawk counters. In 2026 over 4000 raptors of 20 species were counted, including a new record high count of 592 Common Black Hawks. Tubac is the only hawk watch in North America that records substantial numbers of these remarkable birds, and a large proportion of their North American population migrates through Tubac. In addition, the 2026 Hawk Watch Festival included the participation of over ten local non-profit conservation organizations, kids activities, a live raptor show, optics vendors, and more. The hawk watch and festival attracted over 3000 visitors over the course of the season, with several hundred a day during mid-March.



Common Black Hawk harassed by Common Raven, part of the exciting spectacle at the Tubac Hawk Watch.



Are you curious for more information about the Tubac Hawk Watch and the festival? Go to our web site at https://tubacnaturecenter.org/hawkwatch And come join us in spring 2027! The Hawk Watch Festival will be March 12-16.



HWI hawk counters Melissa Marshall and Nate Cooley, with Tubac Hawk Watch founder Peter Collins (center).

Special thanks to our dedicated and sharp-eyed 2026 hawk counters, Melissa Marshall and Nate Cooley; to Peter Collins, the founder of the Hawk Watch, for his commitment to counting the hawks as well as celebrating them; and to our volunteers and sponsors.

Membership, Outreach and Events

The Nature Center continues to support a host of events and activities. We currently have 247 members, about the same as last year. Our annual membership cost is $50, but 40% of our members give more, for which we are grateful. Our weekly email newsletter reaches over 1500 people throughout the country. The Nature Center at the Tubac Community Center is open Wednesdays and Saturdays.

To Contact the Tubac Nature Center:

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

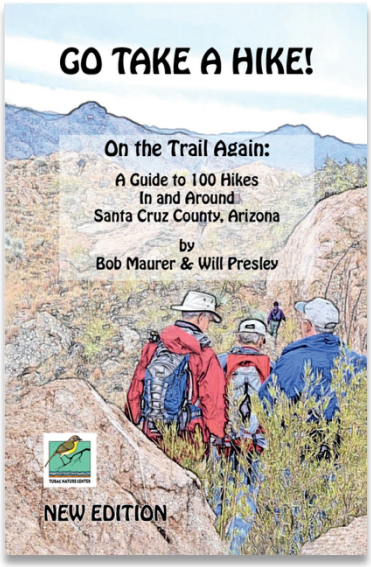
On Facebook & Instagram **Tubac Nature Center** Tubac Nature Center

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

This year the Tubac Nature Center created a new and improved web site, with lots of up-to-date information on our events and activities. There is a great section on the Tubac Hawk Watch and on our conservation efforts for the Santa Cruz River. You can also find out about our other activities, and how you can get involved. We have also increased our presence on Facebook and Instagram. Please follow us! We need more help with the web site and social media, so if you have talent and interest in our mission, please let us know if you can help.

The Nature Center provides weekly activities that are growing in popularity. **All of our activities are free.** The weekly bird walks, led by outstanding birder Rob Rutledge and his exceptional co-leaders, attracted over 850 people this year. The weekly hikes attracted over 230 people. The trails are all local and many of the hikes are based on a book published by the Tubac Nature Center, *"Go Take A Hike"*. A newly revised edition is now available, written by Will Presley and Bob Maurer, completely updated and including additional hikes and illustrations. It is available for purchase at the Tubac Nature Center and all of our events.



We have various family walks and nature walks throughout the year, usually once a month. Our goal is to introduce more people to the joys of the nature around us along the Santa Cruz River in Tubac. These walks are leisurely, informative, and provide everyone with an easy way to get to know the nature around us. And they are fun!

We conduct a semi-annual (winter and spring) bird count along the river between the Tubac Golf Resort and Palo Parado Road. We have been doing this for over six years and our data covers an area that is outside of the Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Results are on our web site. Birders of all skill levels are welcome to join. Contact us.

Mural at Ron Morriss Park Completed!

A new mural adorns the restroom building at Ron Morriss Park in Tubac. The project was conceived by the Tubac Nature Center and Rio Rico High School arts teacher Miguel Grijalva, and sponsored by the office of the Santa Cruz County School Superintendent as a summer camp activity. The materials were provided by RAISE, Young Audiences Arts for Learning.

The mural was painted by three of Mr. Grijalva's talented students, Emely Ramirez, Georgina Uriarte Plata, and Micaias Grijalva. It evokes the natural beauty of the Santa Cruz River, depicting the river environment and wildlife including a Bobcat, Great Horned Owl, Common Black Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk. A hummingbird that was attracted to the red flowers in the mural as they were being painted was also added! The doors to the restrooms themselves sport a male American Kestrel for the men's room and a female kestrel for the woman's room. The representation of the hawks ties-in to the Tubac Hawk Watch, held in the park.

Please come by and take a look!

Special thanks to the Santa Cruz County Parks Department for their assistance with the project.

February 2026 marked the Nature Center's first participation in the **Great Backyard Bird Count**, an international event sponsored by National Audubon and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology . This "birding for everybody" event offered a morning of conviviality in a relaxed setting at the feeders maintained by the Nature Center at the Tubac Community Center, a location accessible to all. Nature Center naturalists were on hand to offer identification help and point out behavioral traits of the birds seen. The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual one day "big sit" with participants from around the world listing all species seen. The data is recorded into eBird, Cornell's citizen science data base of birds, furthering a better understanding of avian trends across the globe.



The Morriss Park mural, and artists.

Our monthly speaker series was very popular this year. Check our web site for upcoming presentations. Thanks to Bob Meinke for organizing the presentations and for his

presentations, including a fascinating talk on his travels to the Arctic Circle in Finland and Norway.

We had close to 1000 visitors to our booth at the Tubac Festival of the Arts in February, where we had information about the river, the birds, and the Tubac Hawk Watch. We made a concerted effort this year to expand our outreach via other festivals. We attended four other festivals through the year and had a total of over 450 visitors to our booth.

We believe that our outreach increases public interest and knowledge about the Santa Cruz Valley's unique environment. Help us expand our outreach by volunteering. All you need is the desire to help our cause and have fun doing it. Join us.

Conservation of the Santa Cruz River

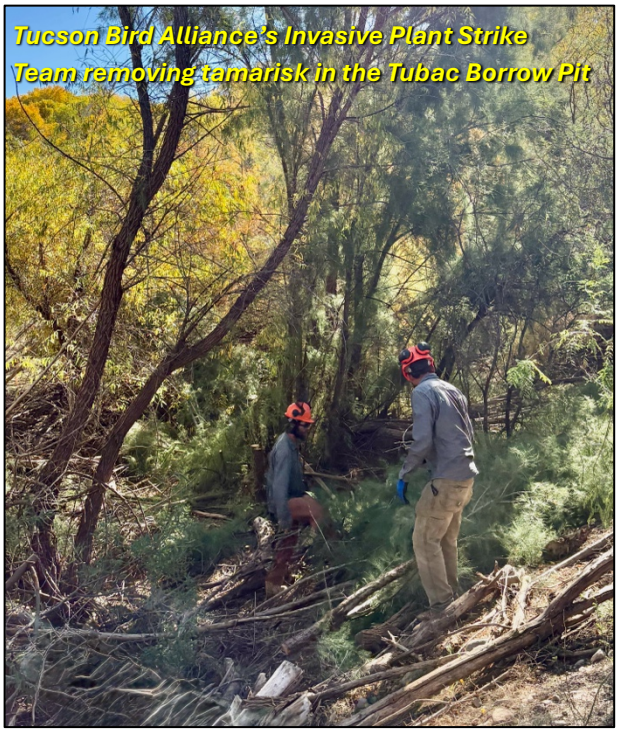
In 2026 the Tubac Nature Center continued to make progress on conservation of the Santa Cruz River and the lands in its floodplain in Tubac. We continue to work under the framework of our 2023 Tubac Nature Preserve Conceptual Master Plan, which provides a blueprint for enhancing ecological and passive recreational values for our cherished river. The Nature Center has received grants worth $120,000 for our conservation efforts, and we have also dedicated substantial funding from your generous donations to support the efforts. Our top priority is the restoration of the wetland and associated habitats in the Tubac Borrow Pit. Background information, as well as up-to date status of our projects can be found in the conservation section of our web site at https://tubacnaturecenter.org/our-conservation-projects


The Tubac Borrow Pit wetland

To keep the public informed and build support for our conservation efforts, Tubac Nature Center Vice President Seth Ausubel briefed the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors on our work at its monthly public meeting in January. In addition, with the Tucson Bird Alliance, we briefed the Santa Cruz Valley Citizens Council on our conservation plans, and gave a detailed public presentation on our efforts as one of the Nature Center's monthly speaker series at the Tubac Community Center. We will continue to keep the community informed as we progress.

Progress on Conservation in 2026

Control of Invasive Trees and Grasses in the Santa Cruz River Floodplain in Tubac – In fall 2025, we began work on a $76,000 grant from the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management (DFFM) Invasive Plant Grant (IPG) Program. The grant is funding three years of invasive plant control and education. We are partnering with the Tucson Bird Alliance. The project is targeting tamarisk (salt cedar), 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. As of September 2026, approximately two-thirds of an acre of woody invasives (mostly tamarisk) has been removed from the Borrow Pit, and grasses have been treated within a ten-acre area including the Borrow Pit and surrounding floodplain. The grant is also supporting monthly volunteer work events run by the Tucson Bird Alliance, to remove invasive Johnson grass and buffel-grass around the Borrow Pit. Over 50 dedicated volunteers have participated in the work events thus far. If you're interested in volunteering, see https://tubacnaturecenter.org/habitat-restoration-event


Tucson Bird Alliance's Invasive Plant Strike Team removing tamarisk in the Tubac Borrow Pit

In addition, our web site now includes a page discussing invasive plants in the Santa Cruz River floodplain in Tubac. See https://tubacnaturecenter.org/invasive-plants

Monitoring Groundwater Levels and Effluent Discharge to the Tubac Borrow Pit – Understanding the hydrology of the Borrow Pit is critical for designing the habitat restoration project. The groundwater level in the Borrow Pit, and how it changes seasonally, will help determine the characteristics of the wetland and associated


Flow meter installed on the effluent discharge pipe


Johnson well in the Borrow Pit

vegetation that can be sustained. Treated sewage effluent is discharged to the Borrow Pit from the nearby Baca Float Wastewater Treatment Plant in seasonally varying amounts. This is likely a key factor influencing groundwater levels. Conversely, as part of the restoration project, there may be opportunity to retain the discharged water at the surface to support the wetland. The Nature Center entered into a $5000 contract with the Tucson Bird Alliance to install a Johnson well to allow measurement of groundwater levels, and a flow meter on the effluent discharge pipe. Monthly data collection began in winter 2026 and will continue for at least 12 months.

Market Circle Stormwater Harvesting – The Tubac Borrow Pit Wetland Restoration Plan report, completed in 2024, recommends several restoration project components to increase the amount of water the borrow pit receives from rainfall runoff. One of these is to divert stormwater runoff from the Market Circle neighborhood of the Barrio de Tubac, west of the Borrow Pit. In June 2026 Tucson Bird Alliance constructed a "rolling dip"[1] to channel stormwater runoff from the existing drainage channel into the pit. The project cost approximately $6000. With this year's good monsoon, the dip was observed flowing several times. As many as 700,000 gallons of water annually will be diverted to the Borrow Pit, replenishing the wetland and recharging groundwater.


The rolling dip after a monsoon rainfall.


Nest box installed on a hackberry tree along the Anza Trail in Tubac

Nest Boxes/CARES – The Nature Center is assisting HawkWatch International with its Cavity Adopting Raptor Ecology Studies (CARES) program. The purpose of the study is to monitor populations of cavity nesting raptors (primarily American Kestrels and Western Screech-Owls) over time in a variety of ever-changing landscapes, as well as expanses of relatively static wild land. There are over 1000 next boxes installed in various location in western North

[1] A **rolling dip** is a gentle, smooth depression, often with a reverse-grade, built into unpaved roads, trails or paths, to shed stormwater runoff while preventing it from building damaging velocity.

America. The Nature Center assisted HWI to install six nest boxes along the Anza Trail in Tubac. Monitoring of the boxes for nesting activity began in the spring, and will continue during nesting season (February-April) over the next several years. If you're interested in volunteering for this effort, let us know!

Next Steps

The Nature Center will keep working with the local landowner and the community to implement our restoration plans for the river and its floodplain. The two remaining years of the DFFM Invasive Plant Grant are expected to be sufficient for effective control of tamarisk in the Borrow Pit. We intend to continue to advance elements of the Borrow Pit restoration, including development of a detailed wetland restoration engineering design based on the groundwater level and effluent flow monitoring data. We also intend to pursue additional stormwater management improvements to increase the amount of water entering the Borrow Pit. The wetland restoration project is expected to cost around $500,000 to implement over a five-year period, so we are seeking additional grants and donations to support the effort. We will continue to work with the Santa Cruz River Coalition to preserve the river corridor as a wildlife refuge.

We Need Your Help

The Tubac Nature Center faces two main challenges if we are to further our river conservation efforts and sustain our host of events and activities: Funding and capacity.

First, we need to build the capacity of our Board of Directors. We have identified several skill areas that would be of particular help to the Nature Center:

- Land management, stewardship and conservation
- Fundraising
- Social media

We know that there are many talented individuals in the local community, and we hope that you will step forward to join us. Most important is that you are motivated to help!

Second, we will require substantial funding to implement river restoration projects. For example, the Borrow Pit wetland restoration is expected to cost around $500,000 over five years. Grants will help, but are likely to be limited and most require matching funds. You can now donate to our general fund or our conservation fund. Please visit our web site for more information: https://tubacnaturecenter.org/donations

Outlook for 2027

We are excited about our progress and optimistic about our future. Our objectives for the coming year include:

- Raise funds and obtain grants to support projects to restore the Borrow Pit and other Santa Cruz River habitats in Tubac.

- Build community support for our conservation efforts through continued outreach and involvement.
- Strengthen our board by adding directors with appropriate skills and enthusiasm.
- Build our membership through increased outreach, especially an increased social media presence.
- Support the Santa Cruz River Coalition's efforts and work with Santa Cruz County on environmental initiatives.

Acknowledgements

As we move forward, the Board of Directors wishes to acknowledge that our work would not be possible without the support of our members, volunteers, and donors. Thank you! We are grateful for the support of the local landowner to advance our conservation work, as well as to Santa Cruz County for its support of river conservation. We also wish to thank our partners including the Tucson Bird Alliance and HawkWatch International.



Rainbow over the Santa Cruz River in winter