

# Conservation Along the Border

by Susan D. Jewell

**F**lying, running, hopping, and swimming—back and forth daily or annually, they pay no heed to that imaginary line we know as the U.S.-Mexican border. That describes many species of birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, and an insect (the monarch butterfly) that migrate across this border, and countless more with geographic ranges that straddle it. All of these species face the usual hazards we hear so much about: development, pollution, overharvesting, disease, and nonnative invaders to name a few. But the ones that cross the border also face different conservation laws and different cultures. In the pages that follow, you'll see how some of these species are faring and how their best chances for survival will be from a contingent of caring humans on both sides of the border.

Conservation was a part of both federal governments long before “endangered species” became household words. The Convention for the Protection of Migratory Birds and Game Mammals was established between Mexico and the United States in 1936. In 1975, the Mexico-U.S. Joint Committee on Wildlife and Plant Conservation was formed to facilitate cooperation. This was consolidated with a committee that included Canada into one Memorandum of Understanding in 1996 that established the Canada/Mexico/United States Trilateral Committee for Ecosystem and Wildlife Conservation and Management (see “One Continent for All” in *Bulletin* Vol. XXIV No. 5). The Trilateral, as we call it, has brought biologists and land managers of the three North American

countries together to ease the sometimes complicated task of working across political boundaries, particularly between Mexico and the U.S. With Canada, communication and travel across the border have minimal complications, since we share a common language and an unfortified border.

The Trilateral meets once a year to report on progress of conservation activities and to bring new issues to the table. During the rest of the year, the real work continues. Some of the accomplishments that have occurred through the Trilateral have helped species that were critically imperiled in our southwestern border region, such as the black-footed ferret and the California condor. Our biologists are working with Mexican and American partners now to recover the light-footed clapper rail, the Quino checkerspot butterfly, the ocelot, and many other species. We hope to report good news with these species in the coming years.

Of critical importance in working across the border is the role of the State conservation agencies. The California Department of Fish and Game, Arizona Game and Fish Department, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department represent the States that hug the Mexican border. These agencies maintain close working relationships with the Mexican border states: Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas. Frequently, they work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service toward recovery of species that are on our priority list, such as the Sonoran prong-

horn, and sometimes we depend on them to lead recovery efforts for local species at risk. For example, the Arizona Game and Fish Department is planning to reintroduce the Tarahumara frog into Arizona from stock collected in Mexico. Although this frog was extirpated from the U.S., it is not on the federal endangered species list and is not a recovery priority for the Service. Here the State biologists are playing an important role in restoring native fauna.

Although homeland security remains a national priority, federal and state agencies on both sides of the border, as well as private landowners, volunteers, Tribes, and organizations, will continue to find ways to work together within the given limits.

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