

President's Letter: Winter, 2018

How much wilderness do we need to save all the species on Earth? There is growing evidence that the diversity of life on Earth depends on the whole Earth. For example, UA Prof.

Michael Rosenzweig has pointed out that the number of species on a continent or oceanic island is roughly proportional to its area. It seems that the larger the area available to living species, the more there will be, without limit. To get every last species on Earth, we would need the whole Earth. Recently, renowned biologist Ed Wilson proposed that by saving half the Earth as wilderness we might be able to save 85% percent of the Earth's species. Half the Earth sounds tremendously idealistic, and even impossible, although Prof. Wilson says it is not. But even then, 15% of species would be lost. But can't wild species and people share the same place? It doesn't all have to be wilderness, right?

Many of us living in the Tucson Mountains believe we can share this wonderful place, but of course to do it, we have to respect the animals and plants that we live among. There are simple rules to follow. First, keep it natural. Let the native wild plants grow where they have always grown. Don't replace them with something else, especially excessive areas of pavement and parking. Second, restore. Have parts of your property been damaged by previous uses? Sometimes construction damages the surrounding area, or sometimes, previous owners have parked their vehicles anywhere, or built stables and corrals that are no longer in use. Some of these are problems that I am gradually fixing at my place. The idea is to break up compacted soil, and plant local species from seed or cuttings. Not only does it help nature, but it is beautiful too. We hear a lot about planting drought tolerant plants, but the best drought tolerant plants are the ones that have long lived here, the local native plants. They are easy to grow if you protect them from rabbits and rodents when they are very small, and give them a little bit of water to help them get started. The third rule for living with nature is to let it live. But we don't like wild animals in the house. Rattlesnakes on the carpet are especially scary, and woodrats inside are damaging, dangerous, and icky. Wild animals inside is not just bad for you, but for them too. So keep them outside. Block all the little places where they can get in, and get yourself well-fitting screen doors so you can have some breeze without letting animals in. You don't have to kill them. The fourth rule is to educate others. Tell your neighbors about your efforts and show them what you have achieved.

In fostering life around our homes, we contribute to life in the Tucson Mountains as a whole. Most of us live in the foothills, the rolling country not well represented in preserved areas. The foothills contribute greatly to the habitat diversity in the Tucson Mountains. You can think of the Tucson Mountains as an ecological unit consisting of the steep main spine of the mountains, the foothills areas, the washes and the Santa Cruz River. Some species range over these various parts, moving with the seasons, gaining something from each place at each time. Others move as the climate changes, dispersing their offspring to new places as others become less suitable to live or grow. The diversity of habitats is vital, and greatly contributes to the diversity of life. Indeed, the reason why larger areas have more species has a lot to do with the increase in the variety of habitats as area increases. If we want to keep the Tucson Mountains biologically diverse, we need to share this space by respecting the other species that live here, and especially making sure that the foothills areas, where many of us live, remain good habitat.

The idea of respecting other life, wherever it is, and sharing habitat with it, is the basis of Prof. Rosenzweig's concept, "reconciliation ecology," which holds that human exploitation of the Earth can go hand in hand with

providing for other species if we make the effort. It is unlikely that humans will ever preserve enough wilderness to sustain the Earth's diverse life in wilderness areas alone, but we can support diverse life everywhere by how we use the Earth, through environmentally friendly agricultural practices, through landscaping, by respecting other life wherever it is found, and by giving thought to how to provide for it. Scientific understanding of the peril to life on Earth magnifies the importance of wilderness areas while at the same time emphasizing that wilderness areas alone will never be enough. We must continue the fight against the attempts of the Trump administration to shrink our wilderness, but at the same time there are many other things that we can and need to do. These include supporting local conservation efforts, as well as fostering life on our own properties where we have full control.

Peter Chesson

Further reading:

Rosenzweig, M. L. 2003. Win-Win Ecology. Oxford University Press, New York.

The Careful Foot: <http://www.eebweb.arizona.edu/faculty/mlro/foot.html>

Wilson, E. O. 2016. Half-Earth. W.W. Norton, New York.

The Half Earth Project: <http://www.half-earthproject.org/book/>

Habitat Competition

We have a winner for the 2017 habitat competition. Carolyn Leigh and Ron Perry have a 9.3 acre property on the corner of Speedway and Camino De Oeste. Apart from buildings on the property, they have kept it completely natural. Thus, it continues to function as wildlife habitat, and provides a critical wildlife corridor between protected areas, namely the Tucson Mountain Park and Feliz Paseos Park. It also feeds into the Camino De Oeste Wash, which continues to provide a corridor all the way to the Santa Cruz River. The Leigh-Perry property wins in two categories: best preserved natural habitat, and best provision for wildlife corridors.

The habitat competition for 2018 is open. Think about it, just by entering the competition, you promote environmental conservation. Why? Because it makes the statement that you value the natural values of your property and encourages others to do the same. You can find the details for entry on our website, but it is not difficult to enter. Just tell us a little about your property, and send us some photos. You do not have to have a large or spectacular property. Any property on which the natural qualities have been preserved or restored is a valuable property from the point of view of the competition.

The habitat competition for kids is open too. Encourage your kids to enter. There is no better way to promote environmental protection than to have young people involved. It can be a great activity for children, as it promotes independent learning and builds their confidence. There are many different ways in which children can participate as detailed on our website.

Ballot Initiative on Hunting of Predators

TMA is endorsing a ballot initiative proposed by Arizonans for Wildlife to prohibit trophy hunting and trapping of five wildcat species in Arizona: mountain lions, bobcats, jaguars, lynx and ocelots. There are many humanitarian and environmental reasons for banning these activities. For example, maintaining natural foodwebs in our ecosystems. The initiative would not interfere with managing wildlife for conservation, protecting people and stock. You can learn the full details at <https://azforwildlife.com/>. The site describes how you can be involved in helping this proposal get on the ballot for November 2018. This is another way in which you can help make a difference in our local environment.

Newly Elected Board Officers for 2018

Our board officers are as follows: Peter Chesson, President; Paul Eckerstrom, Vice President; Denise Baldwin, Recording Secretary and Debbie Hicks, Treasurer. A big thank you to these members for once again volunteering their valuable time to help further the important and ongoing mission of the Tucson Mountains Association.

Membership Renewal Reminder

It's easy to forget that another year has lapsed and a new one has begun. How does this happen? For those whose memberships have lapsed, please send in your annual renewal dues of \$30. You can do that directly at our web site, <http://www.tucsonmountainsassoc.org/membership.html>. Or you can mail a check to Tucson Mountains Association, PO Box 86117, Tucson AZ 85754, being sure to include your address, telephone and any email address for your family. For those who have already renewed for 2018, thanks so much. We rely on the annual dues to run the organization and advocate for our beloved Tucson Mountains areas. If you know friends or neighbors who are not members, please can encourage them to join. The larger our neighborhood organization is, the more impact our advocacy efforts can have. We'll be doing a spring membership renewal drive, so you may be hearing from us.

El Moraga Property

As many of our long-time members may recall, we were given a parcel of property on the corner of El Moraga and Sweetwater Drives in the 1950s, with the possible plan to build a clubhouse for the organization. But those plans never came to fruition and the property remains undeveloped. After numerous efforts to sell it, we have learned that it is a challenging property to build on. One sale fell through around 2003, another in about 2010, and a third just recently in late 2017, due to the engineering required to develop a building pad. Over the years we have even considered donating the parcel to an appropriate nonprofit. It costs our organization approximately \$1,400 per year for property taxes and liability insurance. In 2017, we hired Nicole Brule-Fisher, an experienced realtor who has sold other raw land in the Tucson Mountains area and who is a former TMA Board member. She is hopeful we might be able to sell it this year. But we have all acknowledged that we will have to accept a much lower price for the property than the \$90,000.00 our membership once hoped could be achieved. At this point our Board has reduced the asking price to \$50,000.00. If you are a TMA member, we would like to hear from you if you have any suggestions for marketing this property, or know of any organization who might have good use for it. And we may soon have to ask for a vote of the membership on an amount to accept for the parcel.

Buffelgrass Removal: More Compelling Than Ever

Our community is not apparently winning yet, in our efforts to remove this severe threat to our saguaros and other Sonoran Desert plants. What was once Beat Back Buffelgrass Day has necessarily become Beat Back Buffelgrass Month. It begins at our beloved A Mountain on January 27, 2018, with a kickoff you can read about here: <http://www.desertmuseum.org/buffelgrass/bbbdsitelist.php>

You can read more about the threat from Buffelgrass here: <http://www.desertmuseum.org/buffelgrass/bbbdsitelist.php> and here: <https://tucsoncleanandbeautiful.org/buffelgrass-education-removal/>

Santa Cruz River Cleanup February 3

A new Arizona non-profit, Natural Restorations, is hosting a Santa Cruz River Cleanup, Saturday, February 3 from 8am-12pm between Camino del Cerro and Sunset Road. Volunteers will be removing trash from along the riverbank. For more information and to sign up as a volunteer, head to the event website: <http://www.naturalrestorations.org/new-events-1>.