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**SONORAN JOINT VENTURE**  
BINATIONAL BIRD CONSERVATION

## NEWS RELEASE

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## **New Natural Protected Area in Northern Mexico a haven for regional wildlife**

*Sonoran family commits to voluntary land conservation for regional wildlife*

**TUCSON, ARIZONA** – A privately owned ranch in northern Sonora, located just 30 miles south of the international border, has been voluntarily set aside for wildlife conservation. In March 2011 the Mexican National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) announced the designation of “Rancho El Aribabi” as a Natural Protected Area, under the category of Voluntary Land Conservation. The designation protects 10,000 acres of private property located in Municipality of Imuris, Sonora for ecosystem and biodiversity conservation, environmental education, and ecotourism.

After a long process initiated and led by landowner Carlos Robles Elias, and supported by scientists and conservation groups from Mexico and the United States, CONANP has certified that “Rancho El Aribabi” hosts a wide array of protected species of plants and animals and their habitats whose protection mitigates climate change effects in the region. Additionally, it is a unique place for environmental education. Under this designation, the Robles family commits to conserve Rancho El Aribabi in its current state; carry out conservation policies, guidelines and actions established in the Ranch’s management plan; allow CONANP personnel to conduct supervision and monitoring activities; continue to inventory local flora and fauna; and, develop an environmental education plan. El Aribabi remains privately owned by the Robles family, who will continue manage the ranch to maintain the excellent conservation status of the property. The designation does not include any financial incentives, further demonstrating the strong conservation commitment of the family, who have progressively reduced cattle grazing on the ranch over the last decade.

“Our family is proud to provide a preserve for the region’s plants and animals in perpetuity,” says Carlos Robles Elias, owner of Rancho El Aribabi. “For my family it means sharing our lives with all the wildlife that surrounds us. It is very satisfactory and it teaches us, and society in general, to share the world. Whether we realize it or not, we all have a commitment to protect the natural world, since we rely on nature to eat and live.”

Every year, El Aribabi hosts numerous tourists, workshops, training sessions, and research projects partnering with groups like the University of Sonora, the Sonoran Joint Venture (SJV) and Sky Island Alliance (SIA).

“The excellent habitat, combined with a landowner with a strong conservation ethic, made the Ranch a natural fit for our work,” says SJV Coordinator Robert Mesta. “Finding a rancher in northern Mexico like Carlos Robles, who so strongly supports conservation, is unique. We knew we needed to encourage and support his efforts.”

“Designating Rancho El Aribabi as a protected area gives the Robles family the recognition they deserve for their hard work in bringing attention to the incredible diversity of their land, as well as their efforts to protect and improve the area for wildlife in the region,” says Mesta. “Rancho El Aribabi will continue to provide excellent habitat for birds and other wildlife for years to come.”

“Sky Island Alliance commends ranch owner Carlos Robles and his family for their work and commitment to wildlife conservation,” says SIA Executive Director, Melanie Emerson. “His successes expand beyond international borders, and his land ethic reaches people from all walks of life, making him a model for community-based conservation in the region.” SIA has documented jaguars, ocelots and many other common and protected species, and has provided training for over one hundred volunteers and students from Mexico and the U.S. on the ranch.

El Aribabi remains privately owned by the Robles family, who will continue manage the ranch to maintain the excellent conservation status of the property. They will follow the CONANP-approved management guidelines and plan.

#### **About protected species in the area:**

The ranch provides desert, river, grassland, and mountain habitats for a variety of animals such as Jaguar, Ocelot, Thick-billed Kingbird, Green kingfisher, Rose-throated Becard, Sinaloa Wren, Black-capped Gnatcatcher, Montezuma Quail, Five-striped Sparrow, Streak-backed Oriole, Common Black Hawk, Golden Eagle, Gray Hawk, Desert tortoise and Gila monster.

#### **About Sky Island Alliance’s work at El Aribabi:**

Sky Island Alliance (SIA) partners with Mexican ranchers in northern Sonora to protect critical wildlife migration corridors that link important habitat areas between Mexico and the United States, like that of jaguars and ocelots. In 2006 SIA signed a conservation agreement with El Aribabi, defining wildlife monitoring, habitat restoration and environmental education activities. SIA recently collected images of a mother ocelot and its kitten traveling together along a remote canyon in El Aribabi. These remarkable photographs are the first documentation of breeding ocelots in the region, and are part of the continued verifiable record of rare felines living in the border region. To date, SIA has collected nearly 60 photographs of at least six ocelots and ten photos of two jaguars.

#### **About the Sonoran Joint Venture’s work at El Aribabi:**

In 2004 the Sonoran Joint Venture (SJV) began working at Rancho El Aribabi to study winter bird populations in riparian habitat on the ranch. Since their initial bird surveys seven years ago, the SJV has supported the efforts of the Robles family, who owns and manages the ranch, by providing funds for

riparian habitat protection, hosting training workshops and meetings, and spreading the word about the work of the Robles family to protect the ranch.

**About the Sky Island region:**

The Sky Island region of southwest United States and northwest Mexico is comprised of mountain “islands” separated by desert and grassland valleys. This biologically diverse region is a unique blend of temperate and tropical biological zones and species. The Sky Islands are home to four species of wild cats – jaguar, puma, bobcat, and ocelot.

**El Aribabi** is a privately-owned conservation, education and recreation ranch in northern Mexico. For more information visit [elaribabi.org](http://elaribabi.org)

**Sky Island Alliance** is a grassroots organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the rich natural heritage of native species and habitats in the Sky Island region of the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. Sky Island Alliance works with volunteers, scientists, land owners, public officials, and government agencies to establish protected areas, restore healthy landscapes, and promote public appreciation of the region's unique biological diversity. For additional information about Sky Island Alliance, its programs, and how to join please visit [www.skyislandalliance.org](http://www.skyislandalliance.org).

**The Sonoran Joint Venture’s** mission is the conservation of the unique birds and habitats of the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. Learn more by visiting [www.sonoranjv.org](http://www.sonoranjv.org)

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Two different jaguars have been photographed in 2010 and 2011 by Sky Island Alliance in partnership with Rancho El Aribabi in Sonora, Mexico. The presence of wide-ranging carnivores like black bears, ocelots, bobcats, mountain lions and jaguars is indicator of healthy ecosystems and wild prey populations.



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