



THE CULTURAL SANCTUARIES FOUNDATION

Protecting the Protectors



We have excellent news to share from Mexico. We could not be more excited - this will be our fifth Cultural Center with another five well under way.

Last week, we visited the construction of our new Cultural Center - the Casa de Cultura Mazahua - in the town of Crescencio Morales in Michoacan.

As you know from our previous newsletters, Crescencio sits in the buffer zone to the forests which are the winter home of Monarch butterflies after their epic 3,000 mile annual migration south. This year around 60 million butterflies arrived and it is not just one generation that completes the return journey: four generations die and are born en route, with the last being the ones to arrive in the pine and oyamel fir trees of Michoacan. They arrive not just in the same place each year but all at the same time. It truly is a wonder of nature.

People from all over Mexico and all over the world come to see the butterflies clustered together on the forest branches before they take to the air in a sea of orange when the sun warms their delicate wings. What many of those people don't know, though, is that a visit to the Monarchs is only one of many reasons to come to this area. Most leave without seeing all that it has to offer: beautiful hikes in pristine forest with wild orchids hanging from the trees, cascading waterfalls, horse-riding, bird-watching, deep traditional knowledge about local plants and their medicinal qualities, superb arts and crafts (the local textiles, embroidery and basketware are world class), traditional Mazahua dress, delicious traditional cuisine, a history of Mazahua culture and language and, perhaps most important of all, the warm welcome of a wonderful community.

As always at Cultural Sanctuaries, we work in double hotspots - where the culture and language are endangered and where the local biodiversity is under threat. The Mazahua culture and language have been fading for decades and the miracle of the Monarch migration is under threat, with logging and climate change diminishing the

butterflies' forest protection and pesticides destroying the milkweed on which they depend during their migration. In a few months' time, our new Casa de Cultura Mazahua will open its doors to help to protect and celebrate Mazahua culture and the butterflies. It will serve as a gathering place for the local Mazahua community and to welcome visitors from near and far to learn about and support Mazahua culture and language and conservation of the local forest.

We'll keep you posted but, for now, the construction is going well and is ahead of schedule, with our wonderful team of local architects and builders, plumbers and electricians doing a superb job. We are also creating a botanical and medicinal plant garden - in the shape of a Monarch butterfly no less - in the walled garden of the Center.

For now, we can not thank our team in Crescencio enough, in particular Cristian, Mario and Paola who have been with us from the beginning of this project three years ago and who will run the Casa de Cultura once it opens; our architects Teresa and Daniel for their hard work on the Casa itself; maestras Manuela and Hilda, the teachers that we hired a year ago to introduce Mazahua language lessons in Crescencio for the first time; our friends at ECOLIFE for introducing us to Crescencio in the first place and for their work on reducing logging and promoting health in the area; our friends at Fomento Cultural Banamex who have agreed to sponsor a number of artisans of Crescencio and help them to sell their crafts across Mexico and beyond; to the community who are so committed to protecting their culture and who we are proud now to call friends; and to our benefactors and funders without which this project would not have been possible.

**The Cultural Sanctuaries Team
February 2025**