



BIG BEND CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

July 18, 2024

Big Bend Conservation Alliance and Rio Grande Joint Venture Partner to Host Dr. Koyana Nakaya Flotte as a 2024 American Bird Conservancy Conservation and Justice Fellow

Dr. Koyana Nakaya Flotte has been named the 2024 Big Bend Bird Conservation and Culture Fellow, as part of American Bird Conservancy's Conservation and Justice Fellowship program. Throughout the next year, Dr. Flotte will work with the Big Bend Conservation Alliance, American Bird Conservancy, and Rio Grande Joint Venture to center Indigenous voices, stories, and language in the long-term objective of conceptualizing and co-creating avian sanctuaries in culturally significant sites within the Chihuahuan Desert.

During the fellowship, Flotte will be working at Tapalcomes, in present day Redford, Texas. Tapalcomes is an ancient migration pathway, meaning the "place of the conch" in the Concho language as shell fragments and fossils have been found in the area throughout time. Flotte's work will be the first conservation project on this land, which is now owned by People of La Junta for Preservation—a Native-led and newly formed nonprofit organization based in Presidio, Texas.

The initial phase of this ongoing initiative will focus on monitoring birds, storytelling, and community engagement. Through interviews, expert consultations, and site visits, Flotte aims to gather diverse perspectives and local knowledge about birds and the ecosystems where they live—with the goal to bridge the gap between local ecology and the natural history of the Big Bend region, amplifying Indigenous voices, stories, and languages.

American Bird Conservancy's Conservation and Justice Fellowship program provides opportunities to examine and expand how we care for both birds and people. These paid, part-time fellowships allow individuals with a wide range of backgrounds and expertise to work closely with staff and partners on understanding how bird conservation efforts can support local communities, ensure the consideration of varied perspectives, and engage more people. Over the course of a year, each Fellow works on a specific project related to ethical and inclusive approaches to bird conservation in the Americas.

Dr. Koyana Nakaya Flotte is an anthropologist, cultural bearer, and communal steward from the Native American border communities of La Junta in present-day Presidio, Texas-Ojinaga, Chihuahua, Mexico. Koyana holds a PhD in Sociocultural Anthropology from Harvard University based on research in the United States, Mexico, and Central America that followed the migratory journey and lives of hundreds of Central American refugees. Koyana is a member of the Lipan Apache Tribe of Texas and serves as a consultant for the Big Bend Conservation Alliance as an Indigenous Programs Curator.