

Oak forests managed for charcoal are little understood. They are not pristine, but neither are they intensively managed. Moreover, it is unclear how being managed for charcoal affects their phenology and ability to regenerate from seeds. With the support from a grant from the International Oak Society, we've been able to improve our understanding of how diverse oak forests are in Guanajuato highlands and what wildlife they can host. The grant allowed us to train a small local team of parataxonomists curious about oaks and their landscape to monitor oak phenology for 2 years. We designed the whole monitoring process together, asking ourselves what it is that we wanted to know (and why) and collectively deciding our methodological approach. We started with oaks, but it didn't take long before we were all very curious about the animals inhabiting the oak forests! So, we set up camera traps.

The project has generated novel questions that we want to pursue through what has become a strong and meaningful collaboration between UNAM scientists, a family of charcoal producers, young adults interested in connecting with nature, and a local artist. We're developing a small booklet that features the oaks we found in the two years of monitoring and the things that you can do with oaks and acorns beyond making charcoal and using them as firewood.

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