

PALOMA PICTURES PRESENTS



A FILM BY KAY MILAM

Not Yet Rated  
82 minutes

Part science, part adventure, part love story, The Butterfly Trees captures the epic migration the eastern monarch butterflies and the eclectic mix of the people for whom these creatures have become a life-long obsession.



THE  
**BUTTERFLY TREES**

A MIGRATION LOVE STORY



## DESCRIPTION

**THE BUTTERFLY TREES** is a documentary feature film that captures the transcontinental journey of the eastern monarch butterflies on their epic migration from the forested shores of Southern Canada to the rare and ancient oyamel fir trees of Central Mexico.

Part science, part adventure, and part love story, the film is a captivating reflection on the profound mysteries of the natural world and the ties that irrevocably connect us all.

The story weaves together a wondrous tapestry of stunning visuals, passion for discovery, and the eclectic mix of the people for whom these butterflies have become a magnificent obsession.

Plants, trees, landforms, water, celestial bodies, weather, and even the seasons all become supporting characters that echo the planet's ancient rhythms and remind us of the larger and mysterious world of which we are a part.

Filled with allegory and poetic contemplations, **THE BUTTERFLY TREES** brings to the screen a universal story of life and the search for legacy and meaning by using the monarch migration as a poignant metaphor that embodies hope, transformation and connections that transcend borders.

The monarch butterfly is emblematic of our fragile and complex ecology. But the monarch is also a potent symbol for our individual life's journey, intergenerational connection, and the quest for finding our place in this world.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Back in 2005, I gathered together some friends at a local Mexican restaurant to talk about my hopes of someday making a documentary about the migration of the eastern monarch butterfly. When I finished my inspired ramblings, someone held up a butterfly decoration and auctioned it for a thousand dollars. And then someone else auctioned an umbrella for another thousand dollars. The gathering was never intended to be a fundraising event, but at the end of the night, the tortilla basket was with filled with donations, and thus began **THE BUTTERFLY TREES**.

I have now chased butterflies some 50,000 miles or more – making many migrations over the years and going through my own metamorphosis of sorts in the process. A seminal journey and life-changing endeavor entirely inspired by an insect that weighs less than half a gram and has the brain the size of a pinhead.

In filming over an eight-year period, we documented a timely story in the making, and inadvertently became first-hand witnesses to a phenomenon that is now potentially on the brink of disappearing.

As filmmakers, we are often given great gifts through the relationships we develop with our subjects – and with that, an even greater responsibility to share stories that have the potential to create awareness, inspire engagement, and encourage positive change.

My greatest hope is that **THE BUTTERFLY TREES** will inspire a renewed sense of awe, wonder, and appreciation for the natural world, and that it will ultimately remind viewers of our connection and interdependence with all life forms and our place in the natural order of things.

This film is the culmination of a great deal of love on the part of so many people, and a profound passion for one of our planet's most beloved and remarkable creatures.

– *Kay Milam*





## THE CAST



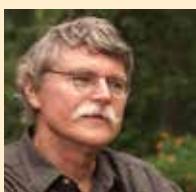
### **Lincoln P Brower, Distinguished Service Professor of Zoology, Emeritus at the University of Florida & Research Professor of Biology at Sweet Briar College.**

Lincoln's passion for monarchs began when he was a graduate student at Yale in the 1950s. Known for his work on monarch butterflies through six decades, he is considered one of, if not the world's foremost expert on monarch butterflies. His research interests included the overwintering and migration biology of the monarch butterfly, chemical defense, ecological chemistry, mimicry, scientific filmmaking, and the conservation of endangered biological phenomena and ecosystems.

Professor Brower authored and co-authored more than 200 scientific papers, eight films, and edited two books. He was a recipient of the Wilbur Cross Medal from Yale University, the Medal for Zoology from the Linnean Society of London, a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Animal Behavior Society, and the Henry Bates Award for the Biology and Conservation of Tropical Butterflies. In June, 2007, he received the Royal Entomological Society of London Marsh Award for "Lifetime contributions to Insect Conservation" and "Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Entomology", and in November 2008, he was especially honored to receive the Mexican Federal Government's award: Reconocimiento a la Conservacion de la Naturaleza.

In 2016, he received the E.O. Wilson Award for his work to preserve the monarch from the Center for Biological Diversity. He served as Presidents of the Society for the Study of Evolution, the International Society of Chemical Ecology and the Lepidopterists' Society. He collaborated with various groups to protect and restore overwintering forests of the monarch butterfly in Mexico. His conservation interests in the USA also included modern agriculture's severe impact on biodiversity.

Unfortunately Lincoln passed away at his Virginia home in 2018 just prior to the completion of the finished film, but he will always be remembered for doing more for the monarchs and their overwintering habitat in Mexico than perhaps any one human has to this point. Director Kay Milam issues the question and challenge asking, "who will now pick up the torch and lead the charge?"



### **Bill Calvert, Research Biologist Bill Calvert is a legend in the monarch world and often referred to as a "cowboy entomologist."**

From childhood he was obsessed with monarch butterflies and devoted his life to unraveling their magic and mysteries. Bill received a degree in philosophy from the University of Texas and then went off to serve in Uncle Sam's Army. After two years of soldiering, he decided he was a very poor soldier, and that he needed to do something practical. So he took up the study of butterflies. For his dissertation project he researched butterfly feet. More specifically, he

investigated the mechanism by which female butterflies located their host plants. After a varied career in many places and involving many insect types, he began a collaboration with Lincoln P. Brower, one of the world's experts on the monarch butterfly, which produced over thirty scientific papers on the monarch. For a time, Bill led eco-cultural tours to the monarch over-wintering areas in Mexico. Bill has now retired from leading tours and has found a new way of life as a lamp maker in Otter Creek, Maine. The general term for his lamps is "Steampunk", meaning that they are basically found objects construed and fastened together in odd, artistic ways.



#### **Carol Cullar, Director Rio Bravo Nature Center**

When Carol was only three she shinnied up a cottonwood tree to get on top of the chicken shed because she wanted to see what the world looked like from there. She wanted to know things, find the answer, solve the riddle, and find out why. Today she still feels that the greatest gift given to her by her parents was an insatiable sense of curiosity. She grew up on a small farm right on the Texas border up in the Panhandle. She played outdoors from dawn to dusk and only went inside when the weather was bad and recalls countless hours observing the red ant bed in the front yard. She wishes that every child could know the tranquility and impetus to imagination that an hour of watching a red ant colony can bring. And, too, that every child could experience that sense of wonder just waiting for them in a pond full of tadpoles or in the hatching of a chick, the emergence of a monarch butterfly from its chrysalis, or the interconnectedness of the seasons and the migrations of the birds and insects through the stark, but beautiful land of South Texas.

Carol taught high school art for 18 years, and also Earth Science for another two years. Although now retired, Carol continues her educational outreach to the children and youth near her home of Eagle Pass and is an active citizen scientist continuing to participate annually in the eastern monarch butterfly migration.



#### **Don Davis, Citizen Scientist**

Don has been involved in a wide range of conservation, scientific and educational projects beginning in 1967 with Dr. Fred Urquhart's "Insect Migration Studies" program. Don served on the Board of Michoacán Reforestation Fund prior to the founding of Monarch Butterfly Fund. Don has had a lifelong interest in natural history, while his education and career focused on child protection. He is a Life Member of Ontario Nature. Don's participation with others in workshops and meetings held in Canada, U.S.A. and Mexico culminated in the North American Monarch Conservation Plan (2008). Don also worked on the Canadian Monarch Butterfly Conservation Plan.

His travels related to monarch conservation have taken him all across North America. With recent retirement, Don remains dedicated to achieving the Monarch Butterfly Fund vision for monarchs in North America. He resides in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.



### **Sue Halpern, Writer**

Sue lives in the Green Mountains of Vermont where she writes books and articles, consorts with her husband, the writer and activist Bill McKibben and looks forward to visits from her daughter Sophie, plays with their remarkably enthusiastic dog, and introduces Middlebury College Students to digital audio storytelling. She is a Guggenheim Fellow and Rhodes Scholar, with a doctorate from Oxford, the author of a book that was made into an Emmy nominated film as well as six others that weren't.



### **Elizabeth Howard, Founder and Director, Journey North**

Elizabeth Howard founded Journey North in 1994. Inspired by the early Internet-based projects in which school children tracked human expeditions (e.g. across the Arctic by dogsled or Africa by bicycle), she saw a clear and exciting parallel between these expeditions and the wildlife migrations that cross the globe with the seasons. She runs the Journey North website, which uses citizen scientists to track the movement of many migratory species and other seasonal phenomenon across North America. She now has twenty five plus years of monarch butterfly research, conservation, and outreach to her credit. Elizabeth has also been deeply engaged in the analysis of Journey North data, publishing several analyses on the movement patterns of monarchs. Her office sits on a hillside overlooking Lake Champlain and the Adirondack Mountains. Tracking birds and butterflies in real-time by sharing observations continues to amaze her.



### **Jose Luis Alvarez, CEO, La Cruz Habitat Protection Project**

Jose Luis Alvarez is one of those dedicated individuals who steps forward at a critical point with an understanding of a problem and an inventive approach to try and make a difference. After living abroad, Jose returned to Mexico and bought a ranch, which he named Hacienda La Cruz, near Santa Clara de Cobre, a small town known for its copper crafts. After raising cattle and sheep at Hacienda La Cruz for three years, Jose saw what was happening to the land around him. Jose understood the desperate need for re-establishing forests on the mountain slopes around the monarch over-wintering sites and also understood the financial needs of the subsistence farmers who owned the nearby lands.

He has spent over 20 years developing efficient methods of growing healthy tree seedlings that utilize readily available organic materials. Jose has worked with the communities in and around the monarch sanctuaries to demonstrate the environmental and economic value of planting trees on their depleted fields and eroded lands. By providing outstanding quality trees and giving valuable technical support, Jose has built a relationship of trust and respect among the community leaders and project participants.



### **Monika Maeckle, Writer, Blogger and Butterfly Evangelist**

Monika has a special passion for pollinators, native plants, conservation and the monarch butterfly migration. She is the founder and director of the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival in San Antonio and is a co-founder of the Rivard Report. She writes about pollinators, native plants, and the ecosystems that sustain them at her Texas Butterfly Ranch blog. People often ask: Where is the Texas Butterfly Ranch? She likes to say it's a state of mind more than a particular place.

Monika is a Master Gardener and also manages a weekend ranch for wildlife. Some years ago Monika learned that her property along a stretch of the Llano River lay right in the path of the annual Fall monarch migration, and the pecan trees there serve as roosting sites for thousands of migrating monarchs. What struck her most was that they had always been there, she just hadn't noticed. Now, she does and she educates, inspires and encourages numerous readers to do the same.



### **Maraleen Manos Jones, Environmentalist, Educator Author & Activist**

Maraleen brings a spiritual perspective to the world of butterflies. She is an environmentalist, educator, author and artist. Her first book, *Spirit of Butterflies* features the significance of butterflies in mythology, religion, superstition, literature and the arts. She is currently working on her next book entitled, *Adventures of a Butterfly Warrior*. She has been raising, tagging and releasing monarchs for forty years and was the first non-native woman to find the overwintering sites in Mexico in 1977 and has been returning ever since. Maraleen is a Master Gardener, and her butterfly gardens in Shokan, NY are open to the public a few times a year. She has worked to save monarchs in both the U.S. as well as in Mexico. Her newest campaign is entitled, "Saving the Planet One Garden at a Time".



### **Dr. Orley "Chip" Taylor Founder and Director of Monarch Watch; Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Kansas**

Chip's long passion for pollinators spans decades. He began his career studying sulphurs, the ubiquitous yellow butterflies that feed on legumes such as clovers and alfalfa. He was forced to leave that field of study after developing an allergy to them – apparently not an uncommon occurrence in science when one spends lots of time with a particular species. He then moved on to studies of the biology of neo-tropical African (killer) bees in South and Central America, a path he pursued for 22 years.

In 1992, Chip founded Monarch Watch, an outreach program focused on education, research and conservation relative to monarch butterflies. Since then, Monarch Watch has enlisted the help of thousands of volunteers to tag monarchs during the fall migration. This program has produced many new insights into the dynamics of the monarch migration. In 2005, Monarch Watch created the Monarch Waystation

program, recognizing that habitats for monarchs are declining at a rate of 6,000 acres a day in the United States. The goal of this program is to inspire the public, schools and others to create habitats for monarch butterflies and to assist Monarch Watch in educating the public about the decline in resources for monarchs, pollinators and all wildlife that share the same habitats.



### Catalina Trail, Mexican-born naturalist and social worker

She was born on a ranch in the mountains near El Salto, in the Mexican state of Michoacán. As a child she loved to observe nature and read books about science. When she was 11 she moved with her family to the state capital, Morelia, and by age 17 she was living and working in Mexico City. She loves adventure, exploring Mexico, Canada, the United States and Central America.

She is noted for discovering, along with her then-husband Kenneth C. Brugger, the location of the overwintering sites of the monarch butterfly, which has been described as "the entomological discovery of the 20th century." In 1973, Catalina and Ken came across a notice in a Mexico City newspaper written by Fred and Norah Urquhart, the Canadian entomologists who had been studying the migration patterns of monarch butterflies since 1937 that sought volunteers to help search for monarchs. Brugger and Trail loaded up the Winnebago and began to search the mountains west of Mexico City. Following clues that pointed toward Michoacán, they hiked the mountains by day and spent the nights in the motor home.

Finally, on January 2, 1975, they summited Cerro Pelón where the trees and even the ground were covered with millions of resting butterflies. Catalina was 25 at the time. On January 9, they called the Urquharts to report their find. The discovery was reported in *National Geographic* magazine in August 1976. The *National Geographic* cover featured a picture of Catalina covered in butterflies.

Their search for the butterflies is dramatized in the IMAX film *Flight of the Butterflies*. Catalina returned to the roosting site in February 2012 as the guest of the filmmakers. She worked as a case manager for a nonprofit organization in Austin, Texas until her retirement. She now tends her garden and occasionally appears at events promoting the conservation of monarchs and other pollinating insects.





## THE PRODUCTION TEAM

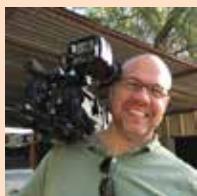


### Kay Milam: Director/Producer

Kay's life and career seamlessly blends her love for film, photography, animals, nature, art, culture, history, travel and music. With more than 25 years of experience, Kay is well-versed in all phases of production and is very much a "hands-on" producer. She is a non-fiction production specialist with a passion for complex large-scale location shoots as well as filming that requires small documentary crews.

Kay has been an integral part of the museum production community for over 20 years, and has worked as a freelance producer/production manager for documentaries, television programs, commercials and non-fiction films filmed on location across the country and around the world. Her client list includes numerous national museums as well as notable Fortune 500 companies and non-profits. The projects she has worked on have received top awards in several national and international festivals.

When she is not chasing butterflies, Kay enjoys traveling, cooking, the performing arts and spending as much time as possible in the natural world. *The Butterfly Trees* is Kay's directorial debut. She has also worked on productions for The National Aquarium, the California Science Center, Flint Hills Discovery Center, the World of Coca-Cola, Talbot Productions and Oceana, the National Constitution Center, the Lewis & Clark Visitor Center, the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Library, the Louisville Slugger Museum, the Kentucky Show, the Indiana State Museum, the Kentucky Derby Museum, the College Football Hall of Fame, the Falls of the Ohio Visitor's Center, the Corning Museum of Glass, and Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center to name a few.



### Jeff Saunders: Director of Photography, US & Northern Mexico

Jeff is an EMMY-nominated and Cine Golden Eagle-winning cinematographer with a career spanning more than 25 years. Jeff is renowned internationally for his exceptional eye and ability to tell a story with powerful and compelling visuals. He has shot numerous high-profile documentaries and non-fiction segments including programs for the Discovery Channel, National Geographic, PBS, NOVA, WGBH-Boston, The Animal Planet, HBO, Showtime, NBC Olympics, NFL Films, Frontline, NASA, and the History Channel.





### **Carlos Diaz Muñoz: Director of Photography, Mexico**

Carlos began his career in the film industry at six years of age as an actor. His professional education behind the camera started at age 20, working as an assistant cameraman with internationally-recognized cinematographers including his father. Carlos is the current President for the AMC, Mexican Cinematographer Society and has been a board member since 2004. Carlos specializes in narrative feature films, aerial cinematography, and documentaries, and has worked on more than 2,000 productions throughout his career.



### **David Crites: Editor and Engineer**

David is an accomplished musician, studio engineer, and video editor who specializes in the creation of visual effects and computer animation. He is a master at creating and manipulating images, and is highly regarded for his intuitive skills with software and hardware. David believes in constantly pushing the boundaries of technology to realize the utmost in creative expression.

His audio and post-production work spans over 35 years and includes many nationally- and internationally-recognized, award-winning productions; among them The American Museum of Natural History, The National Aquarium, California Science Center, Monterey Bay Aquarium, the Capitol Visitor's Center, Monticello, the National Constitution Center, Gettysburg, The World of Coca-Cola and The Clinton Presidential Library.



### **Gil Talmi: Composer**

Gil is a world-renowned EMMY-nominated composer, producer and recording artist with a passion for socially conscious media projects. Blending traditional orchestral background with tasteful electronics and eclectic world music sensibilities, Gil has created a signature sound that can be heard in many award-winning productions worldwide. Some of Gil's most recent work includes the *IMAX Backyard Wilderness* (nominated for best original score at the 2018 Giant Screen Cinema Awards), *Chavela, Straight/Curve, Desert Migration, Remittance*, and *The Memory of Fish*. Gil's score for *Chavela* was nominated for Best Original Composition – Feature Film Score by the Music & Sound Awards. Gil has also scored the Peabody Award-winning documentaries *Between The Folds* (PBS Independent Lens), *Who Killed Chea Vichea?* (PBS) and *New Year Baby* (PBS Independent Lens) – winner of the Amnesty International "Movies That Matter" Award. Gil was nominated for a National News and Documentary EMMY Award for his work on CBS Evening News and recently won Best Documentary for his score for *Tales Of The Waria* (PBS).



### **Alanna Nash: Writer/Story Consultant**

Alanna is a recipient of the Country Music Association Media Achievement Award and the Charlie Lamb Award for Excellence in Country Music Journalism. A feature writer for *Entertainment Weekly*, *USA Weekend*, and *The New York Times*, Nash is a longtime chronicler of popular culture. She is the author of seven books, including *The Colonel: The Extraordinary Story of Colonel Tom Parker and Elvis Presley* (winner of the Belmont Award); and *Golden Girl: The Story of Jessica Savitch*, which was the basis for the feature film *Up Close and Personal*, *Dolly: The Biography*; and *Elvis Baby Let's Play House*. Named one of the "Heavy 100 of Country Music" by *Esquire* magazine, Nash holds a master's degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. She earned the 2004 CMA Media Achievement Award and the 2004 Belmont Book Award and was the Society of Professional Journalists' National Member of the Year in 1994.



### **Cathy Wilde: Writer/Story Consultant**

After graduating from the School of Journalism at Indiana University, Cathy promptly put her degree to good use by going to work in advertising. Through her 35-year career as a copywriter and creative director, Cathy has won national awards in all media, with some of her print work housed in The Smithsonian's permanent collection.

As a small farmer, beekeeper, and nature-lover, Cathy has a lifelong appreciation for the "circle of life" and the major role that pollinators of all stripes (and spots, patches, and patterns) play in it.



### **Eleanor Bingham Miller: Executive Producer**

Eleanor Bingham Miller is a documentary film producer with more than 40 years' experience in non-fiction entertainment and served as a Producer for the recently released *Boston* the first feature-length documentary film about the Boston Marathon. In the 1970's, Miller worked for the legendary documentary collective TTV. Subsequently she worked as an independent producer for PBS and as Public Affairs programmer for Louisville, Kentucky's CBS TV affiliate, WHAS-TV. She has mentored, produced or executive produced over twenty feature films, PSAs, short-form and full-length documentaries with the likes of Ned Beatty and Muhammad Ali. She assisted with Clara Bingham and Robert Kennedy Jr.'s *The Last Mountain*, a feature-length documentary exposé of mountain top removal coal mining in West Virginia. *The Last Mountain* was presented in competition at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.





### **Robin Burke: Consultant**

Robin is a film producer/director with 30+ years of inspiring independent projects related to food, music and social justice issues. Robin produced the feature documentary *Music Makes A City* for Owsley Brown; the film was the winner of the Gramophone Award in 2012. She also directed *Living Lightly*, a poetic tome to the earth, which screened at several international film festivals. Robin is also a certified mediator and restorative justice facilitator.



### **Courtney Novak: Production & Design**

Born and raised in Trenton, New Jersey, Courtney is a freelance associate producer, production manager, photojournalist, and photographic artist. She received her MA in Media, Communications and Visual Arts from Pace University in New York, and began her career as a Forensic Photographer for the New Jersey State Police. Since then, she has worked for National Geographic TV and, most recently as associate producer for Lifestyle International, with film work in Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Togo, Algeria, Russia, and Singapore. Courtney loves to travel, explore countries and cultures, and capture what she sees.



### **Annie Langan: Graphic Design & Production Support**

Annie is a multimedia photographer, graphic designer, and web designer. Her photography work has been included within national and international exhibitions as well as several art collections, including the private collection of Sir Elton John and the Museum of Art at Rhode Island School of Design. Her work has been exhibited in galleries such as Soho Photo Gallery in NYC and Gallery 2 and Project Space in Chicago, Illinois. She has taught Photography at Rhode Island School of Design as well as video courses at the Experimental Television Center. Annie is currently teaching Photography, Multimedia, Video and Professional Seminar courses at the Kentucky School of Art & Design.



### **Theresa DiMenno: Still Photographer**

At the heart of her photographic passion, Theresa is a master of creating imagery in the spirit of playfulness, intimacy and connection. As a child, she stargazed from the rear dash of her dad's Chrysler, then began chasing sunsets once she first learned to drive. Most days, Theresa can be found immersed in the wild natural world with camera in hand, photographing Texas wildflowers, migrating monarchs, or the golden light illuminating the mesas and mountains of the desert southwest.

As a self-taught freelance photographer and lover of music, Theresa has documented the Texas music scene for several decades shooting for various artists, record companies, SXSW, Texas Monthly and Rolling Stone. Recently she has also worked with Texas Highways Magazine and Texas Parks and Wildlife. Her current, ongoing exhibition, "Delicate Balance: Metamorphosis of the Monarch Butterfly", premiered at the Cockerel Butterfly Center at the Museum of Natural Science then traveled to northern New Mexico's La Mesa Gallery in Los Alamos.



## PARTIAL CREDITS

Directed, produced and written by: Kay Milam

Executive Producer: Eleanor Bingham Miller

Editor: David Crites

Original music: Gil Talmi

Narrator: Will Oldham

Director of Photography, Canada: Robert Armstrong

Director of Photography, U.S. and Northern Mexico: Jeff Saunders

Director of Photography, Mexico: Carlos Diaz Munos

Story Consultants: Alanna Nash, John Styron, Cathy Wilde

Consultant: Robin Burke

Production and design: Annie Langan and Courtney Novak

Still photography: Theresa DiMenno, Geoff Maxwell,  
Steve Pike and Sarah Remington Murphy

Fiscal sponsorship provided by: Louisville Visual Art  
and The Louisville Film Society

## FILM SPECS

The Butterfly Trees was filmed off and on between the years of 2005-2007 and 2013-2017 using a variety of cameras from initially the Panasonic Varicam, to the Sony FS7 and also the Red Dragon.

Shooting Format: 1080-4k

Exhibition Format: DCP, BluRay

Picture: Color

Aspect Ratio: 1.77 (16x9 video)

Length: 82 minutes

Forms: Documentary, Feature

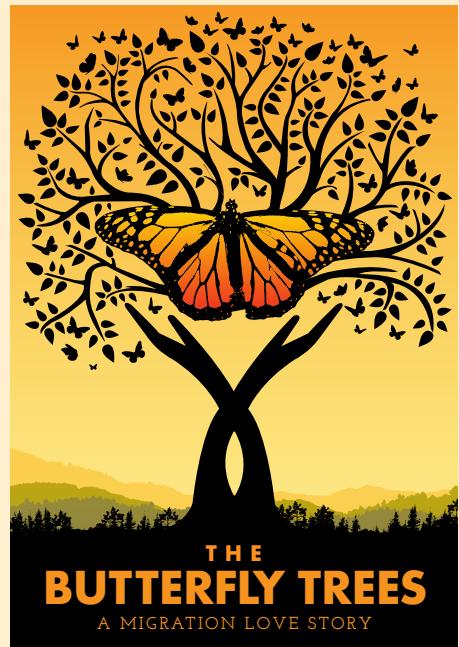
Genres: Independent, Environment, Nature, Conservation

## CONTACT

For all screenings, distribution, press, speaking engagements, questions and other inquiries regarding *The Butterfly Trees*, please contact:

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