

May 6, 2025

Greetings Team at Flying Ryan Hawks,

This letter is in support of Jonathan Shapiro's application for the Adventure Grant. Jonathan's goal is a trip to the Kalahari region of southern Africa to learn within the oldest animal tracking knowledge lineage on earth, while this lineage still exists. More broadly, Jonathan aims to use this trip of a lifetime as a keystone learning experience through which he hopes to connect his students more deeply with the natural world and the human endeavor. Further, since knowledge transmission depends on direct lineage, Jonathan intends to use his experience as a *mentee* in the Kalahari to deepen his role as a *mentor* in his own educational programs. He has an outstanding track record for generating ideas and following them through, which I will detail below.

I have known Jonathan for around ten years. I was his professor at Sterling College for several natural science courses, including Natural History of the North Woods, Geology, and Field Botany of Flowering Plants. When Jonathan came to Sterling, he was already fifteen years into his adult career. Due in part to his existing life experience, he was incredibly driven in his approach to learning about natural history and ecology to the extent that he had already determined he would start his own school upon graduation. He can be audacious, but he also delivers, every time. His drive, in combination with his inherent intelligence and impressive capacity for both information retention and synthesis, made him a very successful student and a stand-out at Sterling. He was certainly one of our best.

Even while still a student Jonathan was working with organizations such as White Pine to continue to improve his naturalist skills, especially in mammalogy and field-based natural history. After working a few seasons for White Pine he soon started his own program, Fox Paw, through which he could design and implement programs of his own design. His success brought other opportunities, such as returning to Sterling College to teach mammalogy and other natural history-related topics there.

Perhaps even more impressive than his career trajectory is the level at which Jonathan has remained committed to continued professional development. He is a known entity amongst the Cyber Tracking community that began in the 1990's in the Kalahari and has since spread to become a worldwide community. Jonathan has achieved the highest level of certification possible for the eastern United States and is currently pursuing the same level of certification for the western United States. His commitment to long trips, remote locations, and most importantly to the mentorship of others and the lineage this mentorship preserves is outstanding.

In short, Jonathan is generative, intelligent, motivated, and has exceptional follow-through. He is very focused on his role as an educator and mentor, and dedicated to the preservation of the lineages he carries. His naturalist pilgrimage to the Kalahari brings all of these attributes of Jonathan together wonderfully. He will certainly go, he will certainly learn much, and the rest of the world will certainly benefit from what he has to

offer when he returns. Most importantly, you can be sure with Jonathan that *he will offer it*.

Thank you for your consideration and please be in touch with further questions.

Sincerely,
David S. Gilligan
Field Ecology and Conservation Faculty and Chair
Prescott College
David.gilligan@prescott.edu
(802) 696 8210 (phone calls only)