



Bird's Eye View

2011 ANNUAL REPORT

Photo: Black Skimmer (Alan D. Wilson)



Audubon TEXAS

Dear Friends,

I am thrilled to celebrate with you our achievements from the past year. Top among them was the grand opening of the **Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center at Cedar Hill in September. We hosted 3,500 visitors over the weekend and paid tribute to our many donors and partners. (See next page for story on other Audubon Center accomplishments.)**



A new partnership between Audubon and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department at Sheldon Lake State Park near Houston continues to gain momentum. We are in the early stages of a capital campaign to raise funds to **build a world-class Audubon Center at the park.** Once built, the Sheldon Lake State Park & Audubon Center will reach more than 10,000 school children a year. We'll work in concert with the Houston Audubon chapter and other key partners to make the center an essential community resource for both birds and people. Visit audubontexas.org for more information on this project-in-progress.

Our conservation collaboration with the Gorgas Science Foundation at the **Sabal Palm Audubon Sanctuary** in Brownsville continues to blossom. This special place featuring rare Sabal Palm forest and unique species has been reopened for more than a year, welcoming visitors to enjoy the Sanctuary's 500 acres.

Our **Coastal Stewardship Program** will soon welcome a new manager whose role will be to grow our coast-wide conservation work. The coastal manager will work to restore island rookeries, increase our volunteer workforce, garner new partnerships, and reach out to the public about our work with colonial waterbirds.

The year was not without its losses. Audubon coastal warden **Chester "Pops" Smith** passed away. Chester led volunteers to play one of the most important roles in the recovery of the formerly endangered Brown Pelican. After 26 years of conservation action at Sundown Island in Matagorda Bay, Chester's son-in-law, Tim Wilkinson, is continuing the family tradition by taking over the care of Sundown.

Thank you for your investment in Audubon! We appreciate and value your support. As we look ahead to 2012, I ask that you please visit or volunteer at one of our centers, join us on Facebook, and sign up for our e-newsletters to stay abreast of new happenings.

Yours in Conservation,

Bbenson@audubon.org



Audubon Centers and Education

- In September 2011, we celebrated the Grand Opening of the **Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center at Cedar Hill**. This 205-acre wild and special place provides critical habitat for rare plants and birds, and amazing scenic views from a fabulous trail system. The new 6,000 square-foot C.E. Doolin Visitor Center, which will be LEED certified, includes classroom laboratories for scientific study and investigation. An elevated nature-viewing room allows for quiet observation of the forest canopy while outdoor play spaces offer ideal settings for growing young connections to nature.
- Thanks to generous funders, the **Mitchell Lake Audubon Center** in San Antonio completed a uniquely designed pavilion. This new space increases our capacity for partner and community events and allows us to better serve more than 5,000 area school children each year.
- The National Audubon Society honored our own Michelle Eckman, Director of Education at the **Mitchell Lake Audubon Center**, with the Tamar Chotzen Educator of the Year Award. The award recognizes Michelle's outstanding commitment, professionalism and accomplishment in Audubon conservation education.
- The **Trinity River Audubon Center** in Dallas, now in its third year, serves nearly 50,000 guests a year. Through carefully crafted conservation education programs, we strengthen science literacy and lay the foundation for stewardship with more than 24,000 students each year, cultivating the next generation of Texas conservationists.
- Our center docents and other volunteers donated nearly 17,000 hours. That's the equivalent of more than 8 full-time staff members — a value to Audubon of more than \$470,000!



Protecting Texas' Natural Heritage

Important Bird Areas and the Prairie Bird Initiative

Audubon Texas is partnering with other Audubon state programs to strategically transform our focus on bird conservation across the Western Hemisphere. We are redefining our work in the critical habitats of the Central Flyway to create tangible conservation results on a broad scale, fostering partnerships through programs such as the Prairie Bird Initiative (PBI) and Important Bird Areas (IBA) program. These efforts will help us leverage our resources and focus on advancing conservation measures within a hemispheric framework.

- **Houston & North Texas** — In 2011, Audubon added 4 landowner cooperatives, 42,000 acres, and wrote wildlife management plans for 12 sites, including the 2,900-acre Sheldon Lake State Park & Environmental Learning Center.
- Audubon Texas partnered with The Nature Conservancy of Texas to identify the Yoakum Dunes property in Yoakum and Terry counties (near Lubbock) as a Global Important Bird Area. The Katy Prairie Conservancy site (in Austin & Colorado Counties) is also pending approval as an IBA. These two sites represent 24,599 acres of prioritized prairie habitat with Lesser Prairie Chicken and Attwater's Prairie Chicken as the main species of focus.
- **Central Texas** — Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge — a partnership with Travis Audubon Society — was designated as a Global IBA for Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. A similar effort to designate Northwest Bexar County as an IBA for Golden-cheeks is currently pending with the National Audubon technical committee.





Coastal Stewardship Program

Last year's drought was devastating to birds of the Texas coast, which hit our islands on the mid- and south-coast areas particularly hard. 75% of colonial waterbird species on Green Island (Lower Laguna Madre) and 90% of species on Sundown Island (Matagorda Bay) saw a decline in breeding pairs in 2011. The impact was less severe on the upper coast at about 18%. While some fluctuation in these annual numbers is normal, the drought made these variations higher than normal.

The year was not without its successes. Coast-wide, we saw increases in populations of Royal Tern (48%), Black Skimmer (12%), and Brown Pelican (6%). Although significantly impacted by the drought, Green Island saw a 24% increase in Roseate Spoonbill populations. At North Deer Island in Galveston Bay, we recorded population increases for Reddish Egret (13%), Brown Pelican (81%), and Tri-colored Heron (94%).

Director of conservation Iliana Peña is leading us to advance our science and coastal stewardship work. As our wardens continue to manage breeding bird colonies and protect against human disturbance, Iliana has developed new conservation and outreach partnerships to grow the program and improve the plight of our colonial water bird colonies and the habitat on which they rely.

Photos: Lesser Prairie Chicken (Rob Hampson); Golden-cheeked Warbler (Steve Maslowski/USFWS); Black-capped Vireo (Michael Male); Snowy Egret (Greg Dimijian); Reddish Egret, Brown Pelican, Roseate Spoonbill (Alan D. Wilson/naturespicsonline.com)



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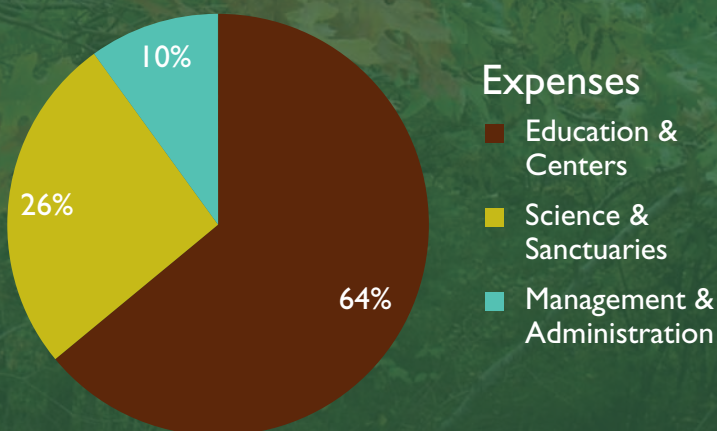
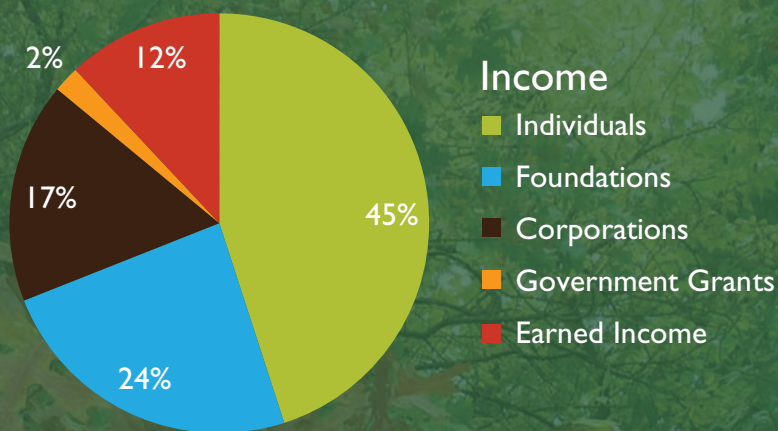
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Financial Summary

Audubon Texas is deeply grateful to all of the individuals, foundations, and corporations whose generous contributions have supported our work to conserve and restore natural ecosystems and bring environmental education programs to thousands of school children.

As indicated below, we are proud to report that 90% of every dollar contributed to Audubon Texas goes directly to conservation and education programs in our state.



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Trinity River Audubon Center

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Audubon Texas is the state program of the National Audubon Society, dedicated for 100 years to protecting birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. With chapters and partners we protect and manage colonial waterbird populations in every major bay system on the Texas Gulf Coast, identify and conserve the most important sites for birds statewide, and are working to reach 50,000 students annually through conservation education and stewardship action at three urban Audubon Centers.