



Audubon | TEXAS

2022 Network Roundup

"Honoring 100 Years of
Conservation &
Envisioning the Future"



Audubon | TEXAS
**Celebrating
100 Years**





Mission of the National Audubon Society

To protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow. Audubon works throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation.

Audubon Texas

Audubon Texas is the state office of the National Audubon Society. We work to build a legacy of conservation success by mobilizing the strength of the Audubon network to connect people with nature and the power to protect it. A powerful combination of science, education, and policy expertise combine in efforts ranging from protection and restoration of local habitats to the implementation of policies that safeguard birds, other wildlife, and the resources that sustain us all.

Audubon Texas State Advisory Board

Current

Bruce Ballengee
David Buggs
Juliet Garcia
Ygnacio Garza
Stephen Gast
Jeanette Honermann
Patsy Inglet, Secretary
Margaret Keliher
Jay Lorch
Larry McKinney
Pete Moore, Chairman
Anne Parrish
Steve Smith
Mary Suhm
Kimberly Wells

Emeritus

George Bristol
David Litman
Andrew Sansom



Table of Contents

Motivation for the 2022 Roundup.....	3
Overview of the Program.....	5
Speaker Bios.....	7
Participant Engagement Boards	14
Programmatic Perspectives	15
100 Years of Coastal Conservation along the Texas Coast: The Past Can Inform the Future ..	15
Infrastructure: Policy Opportunities for Network Engagement	17
Bird Friendly Communities: Building Momentum for Bird-Safe Spaces.....	17
Private Lands Conservation: meeting Landowners Where They Are	19
Discussions: Defining the Audubon Texas Network	20
Overview	20
Connecting Conservation Programs to Communities through Audubon Centers	20
Engaging Local Chapters and Meeting Communities Where They Are	21
Connecting Across the Network through Community Science Opportunities	22
Community Science Tools	22
Community Science Databases	23
Events and Activities	23
What can we do better? Where do we need to improve?.....	24
Areas of Opportunity	24
Programs to Increase Engagement.....	25
Conclusions & Next Steps	25
Summary of Key Points	26
Audubon Texas Roundup Recommendations	27

Suggested Citation:

Audubon Texas (2023). Audubon Texas Roundup Summary Report of November 4, 2022 Meeting. National Audubon Society, Texas State Office. 28 pp.



Motivation for the 2022 Roundup

Birds tell us...The time to come together for birds in Texas is now. Today we know that the populations of more than half of bird species in North America are in decline and 3-billion birds have been lost since 1970. With more than 98 percent of North American migratory species having been historically observed in Texas, successful conservation actions in the Lone Star State can have benefits for birds across our hemisphere.

Our state is growing, with a population of 40 million Texans expected by the year 2050. With that growth in state population comes changes in land use and conversion of existing habitat to developed land. We already experience the effects of climate change through more severe hurricanes, sea level rise, droughts, extreme temperatures, and flood events to name a few. There is a growing sense of urgency.

In and amongst bird population declines, some species such as the Brown Pelican are showing dramatic increases, and species like Whooping Crane are showing potential signs of recovery. We see the benefits of years of coastal wetland habitat protection. These wins did not occur by accident, and they serve as examples of what is possible. Today's successes are the result of investment, science-based policy advocacy, and partnerships.

Our mission at the National Audubon Society is simple... to protect birds and the places they need today and tomorrow. To be successful will require collaboration and the commitment of people to support and participate in habitat conservation and restoration programs, to educate and motivate the next generation of conservationists, to use science to guide our thinking and engage and in community science initiatives, and to advocate for science-based policies that protect birds and sustain our human communities.

On November 4, 2022, nearly 100 people came together virtually and in person at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin to engage in a day of conversations about bird conservation, issues, programs, and network engagement. This document summarizes the conversations held that day and provides valuable information and recommendations for Audubon Texas, the network of local Audubon chapters in Texas, and other partners as we implement a new strategic plan and reengage the Audubon network in Texas.

We thank all of the partners and supporters that participated and who continue to make impactful contributions to bird conservation in Texas.

Sincerely,

Lisa Gonzalez

Vice President & Executive Director, Audubon Texas, National Audubon Society



Overview of the Program



2022 Audubon Texas Roundup

Theme: Honoring 100 Years of Conservation & Envisioning the Future

Friday November 4, 2022, 9:00AM – 12:00 PM (VIRTUAL) 2:00 PM (IN-PERSON)

[Website & Registration](#)

Conference Program - Morning (Virtual & In-Person)

9:00-9:20 am

Welcome, Introductions, State Office Recap

Lisa Gonzalez, Vice President & Executive Director, Audubon Texas

Nicole Netherton, Executive Director, Travis Audubon Society

9:20 – 9:50 am

A conversation with Carter Smith, Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

The Impact of the Audubon Network on Conservation in Texas and a look to the Future

9:50 – 10:20 am

100 Years of Coastal Conservation along the Texas Coast: How the Past can Inform the Future

- *Moderator: Alexis Baldera, Audubon Texas Coastal Program Manager*
- *Tim Wilkinson, Audubon Texas Coastal Warden, Matagorda Bay (Chester Island) Warden*
- *Tony Williams, Senior Director of Planning, Coastal Resources at Texas General Land Office*

10:20 – 10:50 am

Infrastructure: Policy Opportunities for Network Engagement

- *Moderator: Scott Moorhead, Audubon Texas Policy Director*
- *David Buggs, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*
- *Hugh Daigle, PhD, Associate Professor of Petroleum and Geosystems Engineering, University of Texas at Austin*

10:50 - 11:00 am – Break & Networking

11:00 – 11:30 am

Bird Friendly Communities: Building Momentum for Bird-Safe Urban Spaces

- *Moderator: Dallas Kelley, Audubon Texas Public Affairs Director*
- *Richard Heilbrun, Conservation Outreach Program Leader, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*
- *Kelsey Biles, PhD, Conservation Director, Houston Audubon*
- *Greg Whittaker, Chair, Galveston County Audubon Group; Animal Husbandry Manager, Moody Gardens*

11:30 – 12:00 pm

Private Lands Conservation: Meeting Landowners Where They Are

- *Moderator: Romey Swanson, Audubon Texas Conservation Strategy Director*
- *Robert Perez, Coordinator, Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture, American Bird Conservancy*

12:00 -12:05 pm

Morning Wrap-up

Lisa Gonzalez, Vice President & Executive Director, Audubon Texas



2022 Audubon Texas Roundup

Theme: Honoring 100 Years of Conservation & Envisioning the Future

Friday November 4, 2022, 9:00AM – 12:00 PM (VIRTUAL) 2:00 PM (IN-PERSON)

Conference Program - Afternoon (In-Person Only)

12:05 – 12:50 pm

Lunch and Networking

12:50 – 1:50 pm

Working Group Conversations

Engaging Local Chapters and Meeting Communities Where They Are

Facilitated by Dallas Kelley, Audubon Texas Public Affairs Director & Chloe Crumley, Audubon Texas Engagement Manager

Connecting Conservation Programs to Communities through Audubon Centers

Facilitated by Sara Beesley, Mitchell Lake Audubon Center Director and Shelly White, Trinity River Audubon Center Director

Connecting Across the Network through Community Science Opportunities

Facilitated by Yvette Stewart, Audubon Texas Community Outreach Coordinator and Alexis Baldera, Audubon Texas Coastal Program Manager

1:50 – 2:00 pm

Wrap Up & Closing Remarks

Lisa Gonzalez, Vice President & Executive Director, Audubon Texas

2:00 pm

Adjourn



Speaker Bios

Plenary: A Conversation with Carter Smith



Lisa Gonzales, Vice President and Executive Director of Audubon Texas

Lisa Gonzalez serves as Vice President and Executive Director of Audubon Texas, where she develops statewide strategy and leads a dedicated team of professionals working to advance on-the-ground conservation, science, policy, and education initiatives to protect birds and the places they need across the Lone Star State. Lisa joined the National Audubon Society in July 2021, after a nearly 20-year career with the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC) serving in programmatic and executive leadership roles. She applies ecological data analytics, equitable community engagement, and sustainability best practice to advance conservation outcomes in alignment with issues such as climate change, nature-based infrastructure, green building, water management, and renewable energy. Lisa has led numerous initiatives including the Quiet Invasion invasive species field guide series, invasive species risk assessments, State of Galveston Bay reports, and the Galveston Bay Report Card. She holds a bachelor's in marine Fisheries from Texas A&M University at Galveston, and a Masters in Environmental Management from the University of Houston Clear Lake. Lisa resides in Houston, and she serves on the Harris County Community Flood Resilience Task Force, the Board of Directors of the Bayou Preservation Association, and the Advisory Council for Texas Sea Grant.



Carter Smith, Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Carter Smith serves as the executive director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), a position he has held since January 2008. A native of central Texas, Smith developed his passion for wildlife and the outdoors at a young age while roaming his family's farm and ranch land interests in Gonzales, Williamson, and Edwards Counties. He has a wildlife management degree from Texas Tech and a master's degree in conservation biology from Yale University. He began his professional career in 1992 as a management intern at TPWD, assisting in the Private Lands and Public Hunting programs. As a biologist, he has worked on a variety of research projects ranging from studying moose in the boreal forests of Saskatchewan to mule deer and pronghorn antelope in far west Texas to waterfowl in the Laguna Madre of Texas and Tamaulipas, Mexico. Prior to his selection as TPWD executive director, Smith was with The Nature Conservancy of Texas, serving as state director. At Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, he is responsible for overseeing an agency of 3,100 professionals in 13 different divisions, including Coastal Fisheries, Communications, Executive Office, Financial Resources, Human Resources, Information Technology, Infrastructure, Inland Fisheries, Law Enforcement, Legal, State Parks, Support Resources and Wildlife.



Panel - 100 Years of Coastal Conservation on the Texas Coast and Informing the Future



Tony Williams, *Senior Director of Planning, Coastal Resources at Texas General Land Office*

Marine biologist with the Texas General Land Office (GLO) where his primary responsibilities include management of state-owned submerged land and coastal planning efforts. Major efforts include the Coastal Texas Protection and Restoration Feasibility Study with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), the Texas Coastal Resiliency Master Plan, working with USACE on other studies and regulatory issues, and derelict structure removal and disaster response. Previous positions with the GLO include Director of Planning, Director of Coastal Resources - Field Operations and biologist in both the Upper and Lower Coast Field Offices. Before coming to the GLO he worked in USACE Galveston District Regulatory and at the National Marine Fisheries Service where he worked on seagrass ecology research.



Tim Wilkinson, *Audubon Texas Coastal Warden, Matagorda Bay (Chester Island) Warden*

Tim first learned about Audubon and a rookery island in Matagorda Bay 36 years ago from his father-in-law Chester Smith. That's when he began his second career as a Coastal Warden. Over time, Tim and his wife Peggy began helping Chester more and regularly volunteered on Sundown Island. He quickly learned that this small island on the central coastline of Texas really was a "big deal" in the world of Colonial Waterbirds. When Chester passed at age 90, Peggy and Tim took on the role of Audubon Warden, and "now have the privilege to witness the annual miracle of more than 40,000 birds taking over the island for 6 months." It's Tim's goal to help to keep Chester Island a safe environment for Chester's birds.



Moderated by: Alexis Baldera, *Audubon Texas Coastal Program Manager*

Alexis Baldera is Audubon Texas's Coastal Program Manager. In this role, she manages a team of coastal wardens and Audubon's portfolio of islands. The coastal program spans the Texas coast from Galveston Bay to the Lower Laguna Madre and includes 177 coastal bird islands. Alexis has a Bachelor of Science degree in marine and freshwater biology from the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree in Coastal Environmental Management from Duke University.



Panel - Infrastructure: Policy Opportunities for Network Engagement



David Buggs, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Mr. Buggs is the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), an agency of the state of Texas. He earned his MBA from Baylor University in Waco, Texas and a B.S. in Marketing from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. His role is developing and managing the execution of TPWD's Diversity and Inclusion strategy. David is an accomplished cultural compliance and management professional with years of experience in the area of relationship building, leadership development, mentoring, training and executive coaching. David also provides insight on behavior management, cultural understanding, multigenerational management, and ethical and government compliance.



Hugh Daigle, PhD, Associate Professor of Petroleum and Geosystems Engineering, University of Texas at Austin

Dr. Hugh Daigle is an Associate Professor at The University of Texas at Austin within the Hildebrand Department of Petroleum and Geosystems Engineering. He is the director of the undergraduate minor in Sustainable Energy. Dr. Daigle's research focuses on characterizing physical and transport properties of rocks using a combination of laboratory experiments and numerical simulation. His research currently focuses on methane hydrate accumulation in marine sediments, and understanding multiphase flow during production from hydrate reservoirs; applications of nanoparticles and nanotechnology in various aspects of oil and gas; transport processes and geohazards in shallow marine sediments.



Moderated by: Scott Moorhead, Audubon Policy Director

Scott Moorhead is the Director of Policy for Audubon Texas, where he focuses on energy-water nexus issues, land use planning, and thinks about how we can best protect Texas and Texans for the next generations. Previously, he served as the COO of the Ben Barnes Group, an Austin- and DC-based consulting firm, focused on civil works projects, energy, water supply, and brownfield reclamation projects. A native of Houston and an honors graduate from the University of Texas at Austin's Plan II Program, he also holds a Master's in Energy and Earth Resources from the Jackson School of Geosciences at UT-Austin. He enjoys working outdoors, carpentry, Texas waterways, and being with his family. He currently serves as the President of the Board of the Texas Land Conservancy, a state-based land trust.



Panel - Bird Friendly Communities: Building Momentum for Bird-Safe Spaces



Richard Heilbrun, *Conservation Outreach Program Leader, TPWD*

Richard Heilbrun is the Wildlife Diversity Program Director for Texas Parks & Wildlife Department where he has worked for 20 years. He holds a bachelor's and master's from Texas A&M University in wildlife ecology. He is proud to have worked with landowners, urban residents, volunteers, conservation organizations, and the general public to advance stewardship of Texas's natural resources. He has worked throughout the state on projects that conserve wildlife, manage habitat, and help people connect with natural resources on a deeply personal level. He has worked with endangered songbirds, raptors, quail, deer, dove, cave invertebrates, and bobcats. His work with TPWD over the past 11 years connected Texans with the outdoors, improved wildlife habitat throughout our urban areas, and managed the state's most sensitive wildlife populations.



Kelsey Biles, PhD, *Conservation Director, Houston Audubon*

Kelsey is an avian ecologist with a passion for conservation and public outreach. In her previous years of conservation research, she has led research teams and mentored undergraduate students in deepening their hands-on experience of bird conservation. She frequently gives lectures to birding organizations, interviews with news and blog outlets. Her dissertation research was on wintering ecology, migration patterns and pairing behavior of American Kestrels. Kelsey is a native Texan. She received her Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Texas in Arlington and Master of Science in Biology with a concentration in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from Baylor University. Her PhD in Biology is from the University of North Texas, where she studied American Kestrel conservation.



Greg Whittaker, *Chair, Galveston County Audubon Group; Animal Husbandry Manager, Moody Gardens*

Greg grew up on the family farm in upstate New York, inheriting a stewardship for nature and a lifelong appreciation for the wonders of water. Texas A&M University brought him to Galveston in 1985. His professional animal care career began in 1988 at Sea Arama-Marine World and later as Moody Gardens' Rainforest supervisor in 1993. In 1999, he took the opportunity to work overseas in Japan, China and the Philippines. In 2002 he re-established his Island roots as Moody Gardens' General Curator. Since 2003, Greg has partnered with Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council in many nature tourism and birdwatching activities and events. He served on the GINTC board from 2016-2022 and is the current chair for the Galveston County Audubon Group. He is in his second year as board president for Houston Audubon, and was part of the collaborative team that achieved Bird City Texas certification for Galveston.



Panel - Private Lands Conservation: meeting Landowners Where They Are



Robert Perez, Coordinator, Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture, American Bird Conservancy

Robert Perez is an accomplished resource professional with over 29 years of experience addressing the profession's most daunting challenges through team building and leadership. He received both his bachelor's and Master's degrees from Texas State University in Wildlife Biology. He currently works for the American Bird Conservancy as the Oaks & Parries Joint Venture Coordinator where he manages the Grassland Restoration incentive Program (GRIP) and collaborates with staff, management board, and partners to develop additional programs and advance policies to address regional bird conservation objectives identified through OPJV partner planning activities and guided by international, national and state wildlife conservation plans. Prior to this, Robert worked for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for over 24 years.



Romey Swanson, Audubon Texas Conservation Strategy Director

Romey Swanson is the Director of Conservation Strategy for Audubon Texas where he works with state, national, and international partners to identify and advance important conservation strategies for the benefit of birds, landscapes, and the communities that depend on them. Romey is a Certified Wildlife Biologist and immediate Past President of the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society. He is active within the Texas land trust community and was appointed to the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Council by Governor Abbott during 2021. He received a master's degree from Texas State University studying Wildlife Ecology. Romey lives in Austin and enjoys spending time with his family hunting, camping, and photographing wildlife.

Discussion - Connecting Across the Network through Community Science



Co-Facilitated by: Alexis Baldera, Audubon Texas Coastal Program Manager Yvette Stewart, Audubon Texas Community Outreach Coordinator

Yvette's priority projects are Bird City Texas, an urban conservation certification program in partnership with TPWD, and the Audubon Conservation Leaders Program, a high school conservation program in partnership with the Young Women's Preparatory Network. Yvette has a degree in Wildlife and Conservation Biology from the University of Rhode Island and recently attained her Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Texas. Yvette is also a former AmeriCorps Service member, having served two years in the Ocean State Environmental Education Collaboration crew stationed at the Norman Bird Sanctuary. Yvette is a passionate birder who has helped with bird banding projects in Saipan, North Carolina, and Texas. A lover of all creatures, from tiny spiders to soaring eagles, Yvette is most happy when she's prompting people to learn and grow in the great outdoors.



Discussion - Engaging Local Chapters and Meeting Communities Where They Are



Facilitated by: Dallas Kelley, Audubon Texas Public Affairs Director

Dallas Kelley is an impassioned advocate who has spent more than 20 years representing clients at the local, state and national levels. Her expertise and leadership in forming strategic partnerships has resulted in earned national and local media placement; increased brand awareness resulting in expanded market share; clients winning \$300m in public infrastructure contracts; and favorable public policy decisions. As Audubon Texas's Director of Public Affairs, she enjoys her work educating and empowering Texans to conserve our natural and cultural resources. A graduate from the University of Texas at Austin, Dallas has a B.A in Government with a minor in Spanish and a concentration in Business.



Chloe Crumley, Audubon Texas Engagement Manager

Chloe is an experienced campaign and engagement manager with a career focused on bipartisan conservation efforts across Texas in the nonprofit sector. She comes to us most recently from the National Parks Conservation Association, where she was instrumental in leading local efforts to move members and supporters up the ladder of engagement to active advocates. She designed and implemented the Texas Regional Haze Campaign, a national priority for the organization to clean the air with justice and equity and managed the region's young professional council to amplify diverse voices in the park space. She received her B.S. in Environmental Science and Public Policy and is proud to be selected for the 2022-23 Leadership Austin Class.



Discussion - Connecting Conservation Programs to Communities Through Audubon Centers



Co-Facilitated by: Sara Beesley, *Mitchell Lake Audubon Center Director*

Sara Pruneda Beesley is Center Director at the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, where she oversees conservation initiatives and strategies at the Center and across the San Antonio region. She holds a B.A. from Trinity University and an M.S. from Our Lady of the Lake University. She recently served on the South San Antonio Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, where she was Tourism Chair; and contributed to the Sustainability and Climate Action plans for the city of San Antonio. Nationally, she is a member of The Climate Reality Project Leadership Corps and serves on the American Birding Association Board of Directors as Diversity and Inclusion Committee Chair, and on the Association of Nature Center Administrators Equity and Diversity Committee. Sara is passionate about making the outdoors a safe space for everyone.



Co-Facilitated by: Shelly White, *Trinity River Audubon Center Director*

Shelly White began her role as Center Director of Trinity River Audubon Center in August 2019. Born and raised in Dallas, she has a longstanding connection to the Trinity River, beginning with her role as Executive Director of Trinity Strand Trail in 2008. Shelly received her Master's in business administration from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, and her Bachelor's in business administration from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. She has also earned certification as an Integrative Nutrition Health Coach through the New York-based Institute for Integrative Nutrition.



Participant Engagement Boards

Throughout the day, Roundup participants shared their thoughts on engagement boards stationed around the room identifying some of their favorite birding locations, community science programs, and species of birds to view in nature. Items noted with + received multiple votes.

Great Places to Bird in Texas

Galveston (all of it!) +++
[Aransas National Wildlife Refuge](#) ++
[Big Bend National Park](#) ++
[High Island](#) ++
 Rio Grande Valley ++
[Colorado River Refuge](#) (Bastrop)
[Commons Ford Metro Park](#) (Austin)
[Edinburg Scenic Wetlands and World Birding](#)
[Estero Llano Grande State Park](#) (Weslaco)
[Goose Island State Park](#) (Rockport)
[Hornsby Bend](#) (Austin)
[Mitchell Lake Audubon Center](#) (San Antonio)
 My backyard!
[Paradise Pond](#) (Port Aransas)
[Warbler Woods](#) (Cibolo)

Favorite Texas Birds

Painted Bunting+++
 Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher+++
 American Robin
 Bewick's Wren
 Black Skimmer
 Carolina Wren
 Gray Hawk
 Magnificent Frigatebird
 Mississippi Kite
 Painted Redstart
 Reddish Egret
 Road Runner
 Roseate Spoonbill
 Yellow-Crowned Night Heron
 Yellow-Shafted Flicker

Favorite Community Science Programs

[Audubon Christmas Bird Count](#)++
[iNaturalist](#)++
[Big Sit](#)
 Bird Strike Study for Lights Out Texas
[Audubon Climate Watch](#)
[CoCoRaHS](#)
[eBird](#)
[Texas Litter Database](#)
[Texas Stream Team](#)



Image of engagement boards placed around the meeting room to collect participant feedback.



Programmatic Perspectives



Image of Robert Perez, Coordinator, Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture, American Bird Conservancy, presenting

100 Years of Coastal Conservation along the Texas Coast: The Past Can Inform the Future

Presenters: Alexis Baldera, Tim Wilkinson and Tony Williams

- Coastal bird conservation is grounded in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- Early warden work consisted of protecting birds from poachers, today our work is less confrontational and is focused on reducing disturbance, and leading education and outreach activities.
- Audubon is celebrating 100 years of coastal conservation, from where it all began in 1923 with Audubon first Texas coastal island leases to where we are today collaborating with partners to protect 177 Texas coastal rookery islands. We look forward to a year of engagements and celebration in 2023.
- The protection of coastal bird habitats is more important than ever. The Texas Coast is predicted to see an accelerated rate of sea level rise. The same amount of sea level rise that occurred over the last 100 years (1-2 feet coastwide on average) is expected to occur over the next 30 years.



Tim Wilkinson

- Tim assumed the role of Chester Island Coastal Warden from his father-in-law, Chester Smith, who managed the island since the 1980s. Chester Smith helped recover Brown Pelicans by creating habitat and implementing “creative” approaches to introducing chicks to the island.
- Today, the threats to the island are related to coastal erosion and predators. Audubon works with the US Army Corps of Engineers to deposit needed sediment on the island from the Matagorda Ship Channel and Tim monitors and removes predators, like the feral hog, an invasive species in Texas.
- Tim and his wife, Peggy, provide presentations to local communities and continue Chester’s legacy of bringing kids and family out to the island to experience the spectacular site of tens of thousands of birds nesting on 70-80 acres.

Tony Williams

- Audubon Texas and the GLO have a long history of partnership from the first island leased in 1923 to the leases Audubon holds today along the Texas coast, covering more than 2,200 acres.
- Looking ahead the Texas Coastal Resiliency Master Plan (the Plan) is the GLO’s state-led, long-term, ongoing coastal planning effort for our state providing a vision to protect coastal communities, habitats, and infrastructure.
- The Plan does this by offering a range of nature-based infrastructure improvement ideas. This creates a multiple lines of defense approach that the Army Corps has promoted as a method to comprehensively confront the ever-changing threats to our coastal areas.
- The 2019 Plan recommends 123 specific “Tier 1” projects that have been vetted as offering a boost to coastal resiliency and the GLO uses this list to inform funding priorities.
- The GLO is currently working on the third iteration of the Plan due in early 2023, that builds on the work in the 2017 and 2019 Plans, and the GLO continues to aim to adapt the planning process to changing conditions and evolving needs of our citizens.
- GLO views the Plan as an incubator, a platform, and a funnel. The incubator to foster collaboration and consensus-building on which projects to promote; the platform to communicate value of the coast, the vulnerabilities confronting us, and the best opportunities we must capitalize on, and the funnel to justify and direct funding to these opportunities.



Infrastructure: Policy Opportunities for Network Engagement

Presenters: Scott Moorhead, Hugh Daigle and David Buggs

- Texas is at a crossroads, and so are Texas birds. The two greatest stressors to North American birds are habitat loss and climate change, stressors that are bundled in the same feedback loop. Climate change exacerbates habitat loss and increases the risk for all of us as we experience more extreme conditions and weather events, putting our built environment at risk, and threatening the life cycle of many bird species.
- Against this backdrop, Texas is growing rapidly, with more demand for power, water, land, and resources. Meeting the needs of a future Texas with 40 million people will be daunting, and yet, we have an imperative to decarbonize our economy quickly, while delivering affordable energy and goods, and ensuring we do not arbitrarily build power and water supplies at the expense of the communities and ecosystems who rely on those places to survive and thrive. We must make these difficult decisions at a pace that can meet our climate goals, while ensuring that the people whose lives are most impacted have a decisive role in the conversation.
- Eight of every nine new Texans identify as persons of color. The conservation movement does not have a good record of accomplishment of including diverse communities. Audubon must engage in a way that advances the complex suite of ecological, social and economic challenges facing habitats and diverse communities across Texas.

Bird Friendly Communities: Building Momentum for Bird-Safe Spaces

Presenters: Richard Heilbrun, Kelsey Biles, Greg Whittaker, Dallas Kelley

- Bird friendly spaces create habitat for birds, other wildlife, and people. We sit in a unique position to connect science, communities and policies that create and conserve these spaces, and must seize the opportunity to mitigate and adapt to changes in our climate in order to conserve our way of life.
- ***Birds tell us*** how we are doing – they provide ecosystem services and are a barometer for the communities in which we live. From large urban areas to smaller, more rural communities, there are individual and community-based programs and practices that can support creating more bird friendly spaces.
- Approximately one of every three birds migrating through the U.S. in spring, and one in every four birds migrating through the U.S. in the fall, or nearly 2-billion birds, pass



through Texas.¹ However, up to 1-billion birds across the country die annually during these migration periods.²

- Community collaborations such as *Lights Out Texas*, aimed at reducing bird mortality began here in Texas after a single, catastrophic bird collision event in Galveston in 2017. Over the past five years, founding partners for the statewide coordinated effort include the Cornell Lab of Ornithology BirdCast, Houston Audubon Society, and Texas Conservation Alliance. With



Image of Bird Friendly Communities: Building Momentum for Bird-Safe Spaces presenters

statewide coordination now supported by Audubon Texas, additional local communities, municipalities, and Audubon Texas chapters have joined the effort to document bird mortality in our urban landscapes, and work with building owners and managers and individuals to turn lights out at night for birds.

- It is important for birds to have clear, safe paths along the entirety of their migration routes. While they may successfully stopover in one safe-haven coastal community, their journeys continue through major urban corridors. A Cornell Lab of Ornithology study listed Houston as the 2nd worst city for bird deaths in the United States due to building strikes, with Dallas ranked as 3rd. The Houston Audubon Society has been working with non-traditional partners, such as development districts and business owners to make the Greater Houston region safer for birds. They emphasize the accessible nature of helping birds—work can be done from balconies and community spaces—it isn't just for people with 'backyards or tall buildings.
- Another successful community-led initiative is Bird City Texas, a partnership between Audubon Texas and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Entering its 4th year, Bird City Texas has certified eight communities: Bastrop, Dallas, Houston, Port Aransas, Galveston, San Antonio, Surfside Beach, and Dripping Springs.

¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-018-0666-4>

² <https://academic.oup.com/condor/article/116/1/8/5153098?login=false>



- Bird City Texas is a commitment to sustained, intentional conservation. The partners' goals are to serve and listen to communities.
- Bird City Texas highlights the importance of working with partners in the community to create change.
- Galveston has been working directly with Norwegian cruise line on the development of a new building which follows bird-friendly guidelines and uses native plants.

Private Lands Conservation: Meeting Landowners Where They Are

Presenters: Robert Perez, Romey Swanson

- A 2019 study highlighted the loss of nearly 3 billion birds across North American since 1970.³ These losses are not experienced evenly across all groups of birds and Grassland birds have experienced the heaviest losses at over 50%. Although Texas is a land of dramatic contrasts, it is our rangelands and grasslands that bind 12 distinct ecoregions and the wildlife that characterize them.
- Fertile and productive rangelands have shaped rural economies while leading the nation in cattle-based food and fiber production. This means that the role of grasslands stewardship falls predominantly on the shoulders of landowners working to remain profitable with their operations while also meeting the needs of society. Unfortunately, Texas also leads the nation in the loss of working lands with over 2.2 million acres lost over a 20-year period.
- Audubon Conservation Ranching is a program designed to work with these landowners to provide incentives for implementing bird-friendly management principles while growing awareness among grass-fed beef consumer markets. The program is built upon three protocol pillars: habitat management, animal health & welfare, and environmental sustainability. The Texas ACR program includes 15 fully certified ranches representing nearly 70,000 acres of improved management with over 330,000 additional acres represented in the ACR pipeline – all meaning the program is reaching meaningful scales.
- The Migratory Bird Joint Venture initiative is a collection of critical partnerships working to affect grassland and grassland bird conservation in Texas. Texas includes five Joint Ventures and Audubon Texas is included on the management board of both the Rio Grande and Oaks & Prairies Joint Ventures. The Grassland Restoration Incentive Program is administered by Oaks & Prairies Joint Venture which covers much of Central

³ <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw1313>



Texas and provides technical assistance and cost-share funding for the implementation of on-the-ground grassland restoration activities that contribute to national bird population recovery goals. These programs further the additional goals of keeping working lands working, supporting grassland recovery while maintaining or increasing bottom lines, encouraging conservation behaviors, and to make permanent the adoption of beneficial practices.

Discussions: Defining the Audubon Texas Network

After lunch, Roundup participants self-assigned into one of three working group conversations focused on Centers, chapters and community science. Summaries of the conversations are provided below.

Overview

Participants in this working group communicated a common feeling that now is the time for Audubon chapters and Centers in Texas to come together to elevate the work of implementing Audubon's mission. There is a desire for greater integration between Audubon's work at the state level and what can be accomplished in communities through Centers.

The Audubon network in Texas is a community of 21 chapters, three Centers, one sanctuary, a state office, more than 80,000 members, and nationwide programs consisting of people who care about bird conservation. Audubon members often ask the questions, *Which Audubon are you? Which Audubon am I? Where do I join? What did I join?* Uncertainty about the relationships between chapters, Centers, state, flyways, and national organization presents both challenges and engagement opportunities. Solutions to increase communication and awareness of one's position in the network when one joins Audubon are desired by members and present an opportunity for the organization.

Connecting Conservation Programs to Communities through Audubon Centers

Participants discussed Audubon Centers and the roles that they can play to connect to communities and volunteers. Center members and volunteers desire greater coordination across network nodes and more streamlined communications. There is a desire for greater clarity around the activities that Audubon Center membership supports. Center members would like to see that their membership funds have a local impact; greater transparency would go a long way toward increasing comfort levels around Center memberships and giving. This is not a unique problem for Audubon. Participants would like to see Audubon Texas play a coordinating role between local, regional and national connections across the network.



Each Texas Center is unique and as such should strive to have distinctive programs that reflect the local ecosystem and community, and the Center's position within the surrounding built environment. With a focus on natural habitats and the birds and other wildlife that depend upon them, equally important are the local community's social fabric and needs and history of human use, including environmental justice concerns (past and present).

The Trinity River Audubon Center model of outreach is one that could possibly have major influence on the outreach models at other Centers across the state. In addition to welcoming people to the Center, staff regularly go out into the community, host community gatherings, and work with local partners to understand and accommodate the needs of the local community. This represents a model that also has great potential at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center in San Antonio and Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center in Cedar Hill.

All three Audubon Centers in Texas work as conservation action Centers. Mitchell Lake Audubon Center is working to restore up to 50 acres of upland grasslands in south San Antonio and assessing opportunities to support future wetland restoration projects at Mitchell Lake. Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center is located at the convergence of ecoregions that exist in east, west and central Texas. This Center's work to document observances of the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler and its collaboration with local partners to increase the footprint protected habitats is ongoing. Trinity River Audubon Center operates a LEED-certified green building and involves local volunteers and students in prairie restoration activities.

The three Audubon Centers in Texas are working at the forefront of community engagement and conservation action in Texas urban Centers. The strength of the Centers is their ability to be on the ground community focal points that connect people living in urban Centers to physical places of real conservation. Centers can also act as access points to begin many different conversations between community members, Audubon chapters, and local partners.

Engaging Local Chapters and Meeting Communities Where They Are

Discussions centered on impactful actions that the Audubon network in Texas is best positioned to take over the next five years. There was consensus that the name "Audubon" and the network need to be a household name in conservation. This aligns well with the 3-year Audubon Texas strategic plan which will be released in 2023.

The Audubon network in Texas can and should play a role in "lifting up" communities by connecting Audubon's bird conservation mission to community issues and needs relating to green space, community resilience, and other issues. Participants suggested the state office can elevate and support chapter initiatives through social media promotion of engagements, by coordinating bi-monthly chapter leadership meetings, and assisting with identification of chapter meeting speakers locally and from within Audubon. There is an opportunity to create greater synergy between National Audubon and chapters through improved communications



and coordination focusing on what is relevant to chapters. There is also a need to create stronger connections and synergies between Audubon chapters in Texas. Bimonthly convenings would be an excellent start to this work and should be facilitated by Audubon Texas. Additionally, an onboarding toolkit for chapters that includes resources such as administrative requirements, filing and paperwork requirements, National Audubon Society image files, coordination suggestions, and best practices for chapters would be helpful.

Audubon Texas and Centers are setting a goal of increasing membership over the next five years. Audubon Texas (state population: ~29 million) currently has more than 80,000 members across the state. While this is a sound membership base, states like Florida (state population: ~21 million) and California (state population: ~39 million) have statewide membership totals of more than 100,000 and 150,000 people respectively. Texas can and should increase its membership to more than 110,000 over the next 3-5 years.

To meet this goal, participants suggested the following strategies:

- Increased partnership and coordination with Texas Master Naturalist programs;
- A focus on conservation work force development programs including high school and college internships;
- Partnerships with mission-aligned affinity/lifestyle brands for younger demographics;
- Communication pieces for chapter newsletters, websites, and social media;
- Engagement activities that meet younger and diverse audiences “where they are,” such as trash and marine debris clean ups, social hours, and connections to climate-focused groups and networks; and
- Increased Girl Scout and Boy Scout connections with chapters and Centers.

Connecting Across the Network through Community Science Opportunities

Participants in this group discussed the community science programs they participate in, why they are involved in community science programs as volunteers, and what they enjoy about community science initiatives. Ten community science initiatives rose to the top of the list.

Community Science Tools

[Merlin](#) is an information application developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to aid with bird identification. This application opens the door to birding, especially for people who are interested but intimidated by bird identification. In addition to visual identification, Merlin has a bird song and call audio identification feature which is difficult for many novices. Knowing bird calls can be intimidating – Merlin helps one overcome that barrier. Understanding birds can start people on a path of participation and a ladder of greater engagement. Bonuses that birders appreciate data are reported to eBird; Merlin is a gateway tool for birding and connecting to environmental issues; and the application works well as an accessibility tool for the visually impaired.



[BirdsEye TexasOS](#) is an application developed by the Texas Ornithological Society that helps users conduct a smart search to identify birds most likely to be in a specific local area.

[iNaturalist](#) is a widely used species identification application. The tool is used for education and serves as a library and database for some schools and organizations such as [City Nature Challenge](#). This application is a successful tool that creates new entry points for broader engagement.

Benefits include:

- Reported sightings can be grouped by location and projects/organizations;
- Data describing different taxa are connected;
- Ease of use by the backyard enthusiast or property owner;
- Ownership created in a community;
- Validation that your space is important for pollinators;
- Inspiration to go deeper into natural history interests;
- Gamification of science, making it engaging and fun, creates competition;
- Wide use by groups like Parks for Pollinators in Galveston, Pollinator BioBlitz, and many nature walks, and community surveys.

Birdsongs and [Leafsnap](#) are identification tools that facilitate sharing with other people.

[Community Science Databases](#)

[eBird](#), developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, has become the preeminent application that turns local bird observations into a national database, connecting bird sightings to far reaching science, research, and conservation. Data can be used to support policy activities and make the case that birds are using specific habitats that require protection in Texas. For example, Audubon Texas used eBird data in 2022 for permit proceedings relating to a coastal desalination plant near Corpus Christi.

[Nurdle Patrol](#) is a community science project run by the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas, Texas. Nurdles are plastic pellets that form the raw material for the manufacturing of plastic products. The Nurdle Patrol program gathers information about where nurdles are located, aids removal of nurdles from the environment, and creates awareness about the issue.

[Texas Litter Database](#) and [Take2ForTexas](#) by the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC), Keep Texas Beautiful, and Black Cat GIS and Biological Services are a statewide litter database and coalition of organizations working to advance monitoring and removal of litter and marine debris.

Events and Activities



Bird walks, bird counts, and bird surveys like Audubon's 123rd annual [Christmas Bird Count](#) bring people from diverse backgrounds together and advance bird conservation knowledge in local community.

[Lights Out Texas](#) and bird collision surveys and studies like those conducted by the [Texas Conservation Association](#) engage young people in volunteer efforts helping them can get involved and gain hands-on experience.

[Great Backyard Bird Count](#) and [FeederWatch](#) by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology create annual challenges and enable connections to the natural world around you.

What Can We Do Better? Where Do We Need To Improve?

Participants and Audubon Texas staff engaged in conversations about how to expand engagement to include to the next generation of conservation leaders and advocates. Additional discussions focused on removing disconnects that exist across the Audubon network in Texas through both formal and informal collaborations and activities.

Areas of Opportunity

Audubon Texas should work with community leaders to create opportunities to broaden engagement by coordinating with communities and providing them tools that are relevant to their work. *Lights Out Texas* and Bird City Texas are excellent examples of programs where this approach could be effective.

Audubon Texas should continue to focus on building relational versus transactional connections. In short, know when to lead and when to step back and support. Strive for relationships that create long-term mutual benefit and avoid focusing on short-term returns.

When working with chapters and other organizations, Audubon Texas should take care to understand the level of privilege and capacity that it requires to get involved in programs. Understand needs – do chapters and volunteers need equipment (binoculars, camera, etc.), travel resources, property access, smart phones, and data plans? Do participants feel safe going out alone into natural spaces? Safety is a real consideration for community scientists, volunteers, staff, and partners. Accessibility and mobility are relevant considerations as is accommodating children.

Think about inclusivity. Language such as “in your backyard” can be excluding; not everyone has a backyard. It is more inclusive to think broadly and use language and create programs that are inclusive of multiple family housing in which 35% of US households reside.⁴ Recognize that cost of entry to Audubon Centers represents a barrier to access. If payment is required, no matter how small, people are being excluded. Free parks and natural areas will welcome more people.

⁴ 2021 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, US Census Bureau, Table B25003 & Table B25008. Updated 11/2022.



An example of new approaches is [TPWD's first time user pass](#) which provides free entry to Texas state parks for one year. These actions would create an opportunity to advocate on a broader scale to make parks free.

[Programs to Increase Engagement](#)

While birds are Audubon's "why" that drives the organization's conservation mission, the organization should pivot to broader conservation issues. Examples include:

- The intersection between bird conservation, birding, and plastics/litter cleanup, or "plirding;"
- Social media usage, internet outreach;
- Increased emphasis on [Climate Watch](#);
- Outreach to diverse cultures, show up to events, in new communities, go to them;
- Project Wild is not a free program in Texas; find ways to bring the program to more schools at no cost to them;
- Emphasize local birding opportunities; less travel is better for the earth, birds and people too;
- Connect to water resources through [Texas Stream Team](#);
- Message around threat mitigation, resilience and how it benefits human communities; a
- Increase the focus on programs with schools—both students and parents—to create outdoor and conservation champions

Conclusions & Next Steps

Birds tell us...The time to come together for birds in Texas is now. Today we know that the populations of more than half of bird species in North America are in decline and 3-billion birds have been lost since 1970. With more than 98 percent of North American migratory species passing through Texas on their seasonal journeys, successful conservation actions in Texas can have benefits for bird across our hemisphere.

On November 4, 2022, nearly 100 people came together virtually and in person at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin to engage in a day of conversations about bird conservation, issues, programs, and network engagement. The conversations held that day provide valuable information for Audubon Texas, the network of local Audubon chapters in Texas, and other partners as we implement a new strategic plan and reengage the Audubon network in Texas over the coming years.



Summary of Key Points

Texas is at a crossroads, and so are Texas birds. The two greatest stressors to North American birds are habitat loss and climate change. Climate change exacerbates habitat loss and increases the risk for all of us as we experience more extreme conditions and weather events, putting our built environment at risk, and threatening the life cycle of many bird species. These two stressors drive Audubon Texas's work moving forward.

The Texas Coast is predicted to experience an accelerated rate of sea level rise. The same amount of sea level rise that occurred over the last 100 years (1-2 feet coastwide on average) is expected to occur over the next 30 years. With Texas's low-lying coastal topography, rookery island and nearshore habitats are at risk of being converted to open water by processes relating to inundation, erosion, and subsidence.

Avian population level losses are not evenly distributed across all groups of birds. Grassland birds experience the heaviest losses at over 50%. Texas's rangelands and grasslands bind 12 distinct ecoregions and the wildlife that characterizes them.

The human population in Texas is increasing, with a population of 40 million Texans expected by the year 2050. Population growth is driving an increasing demand for power, water, land, and natural resources. Eight of every nine new Texans identify as persons of color, and the conservation movement does not have a history of including diverse communities.

Up to 1-billion birds across the country die annually during spring and fall migration periods, many due to interactions and collisions with the human built environment. Local collaborations with municipalities, community partners, Audubon chapters, and other aspects of the Audubon network are creating programs to ensure the availability of habitat in urban spaces, drive bird-friendly changes to the human built environment, and ensure accessibility to birding for all.

Audubon must engage in a way that is helpful in advancing the complex suite of ecological, social and economic challenges facing habitats and diverse communities across Texas. Solutions to meet human needs must be developed at a pace that can meet climate goals, sustainably safeguard remaining natural habitats across the state, and ensure that the people whose lives are most impacted have a decisive role in the conversation.

Audubon Texas thanks all of the partners and supporters that participated in the 2022 Audubon Texas Roundup, as well as all who continue to make impactful contributions to bird conservation in Texas. The recommendations from this report will guide the work of Audubon Texas as the state office seeks to effectively engage with, support, and lift up the work of Audubon chapters, Centers, and partners who make up the Audubon network in Texas.



Audubon Texas Roundup Recommendations

The list below is a summary of the recommendations made by Audubon network participants. Audubon Texas will work with chapter and network partners to advance these aims over the coming months and years:

1. Recognize that each Audubon Center in Texas is unique and as such should strive to have distinctive programs that reflect the local ecosystem, culture and needs of the community.
2. Recognize and more broadly promote the concept of the Audubon network in Texas (i.e., chapters, Centers, Audubon Texas, National Audubon Society), and the idea that working together will increase the impact and effectiveness of all for the benefit of bird populations in Texas and beyond.
3. Lift up and support local communities by connecting Audubon's bird conservation mission to community issues and needs relating to green space, community resilience, and other issues.
4. Partner with local leaders to create opportunities to broaden engagement by coordinating with communities and providing them tools that are relevant to their work.
5. Using birds as the entry point, pivot to addressing broader conservation issues in Texas.
6. Work together to host bimonthly Texas chapter leadership meeting facilitated by Audubon Texas.
7. Work with chapters to increase Audubon network memberships statewide.
8. Work to understand the level of privilege and capacity that it requires to get involved in programs.
9. Better understand and respond to the needs of chapters and volunteers to conduct programs and conservation initiatives. Needs might include accessibility and safety requirements, equipment, smart phones, travel resources, property access, etc.
10. Focus on building relational versus transactional connections. In short, know when to lead and when to step back and support. Strive for relationships that create long-term mutual benefit and avoid focusing on short-term returns.

The logo for Audubon Texas, featuring a stylized bird in flight above the word "Audubon" in a serif font, with "TEXAS" in a sans-serif font below it, separated by a horizontal line.