



Audubon | TEXAS

## **2022 SUMMARY OF IMPACT**





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# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends,

The work of Audubon Texas over the last year has focused on one thing, building the foundation and connections for future impact. In 2022, our team was busy at work on strategic planning to create a framework of action, engagement, and accountability that will take us into the next five years at Audubon Texas and the National Audubon Society. We have assessed existing programs, determined future directions, and sought to create strategic connections between initiatives and across our network. Audubon continues to evolve as an organization, recognizing that the ongoing relevance of our mission to protect birds and the places they need must include a long-term commitment to building community relationships founded on humility, respect, inclusion, and trust.

As we celebrate 100 years of Texas coastal conservation in 2023, we look back to the many partnerships and the body of conservation actions that comprise the implementation of Audubon's impactful work in Texas. What better way to begin this retrospective, than to look at the last year.

In 2022, Audubon Texas, the state office of the National Audubon Society, implemented key programs in coastal conservation, bird-friendly communities, grassland and working lands conservation, water and climate policy, and community education. Throughout this report you will see what we achieved with partners from every major urban center in Texas as well as numerous communities from across Texas's rural landscapes.

Thank you for your continued support. Remember, what's good for birds is good for people, too! The future of bird and habitat conservation and the vitality of Texas communities depends on all of us, and we can't wait to see what we accomplish together in 2023!

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Gonzalez', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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

# COASTAL CONSERVATION & STEWARDSHIP

## CONSERVATION ON THE COAST

As we look back at another year of stewardship and partnership on coastal bird islands across the Texas coast, we are grateful for our dedicated Coastal Wardens and the support of conservation partners. Audubon Texas's coast-wide portfolio of leased islands serves to protect birds and their nesting and feeding habitats on rookery islands all along the Texas Coast. Our team and partners were on the ground in 2022 in **Galveston Bay**, **Matagorda Bay**, and the **Lower Laguna Madre**, ensuring birds have places to rest and nest throughout the year. During the breeding season we minimized disturbance, allowing waterbirds to successfully nest and fledge chicks safely. During the non-breeding season, our team removed litter and marine debris, managed invasive species and vegetation, installed and repaired signage, and monitored for predators. Because of this work, we celebrated a successful year of nesting for the **Black Skimmer** in Galveston Bay, one of the most successful breeding seasons ever on **Chester Island** in Matagorda Bay, and upgraded predator monitoring on **Green Island** in the Lower Laguna Madre.

Audubon Texas launched a new program in partnership with the Harris County Department of Education (HCDE). This project is generously funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality through the **Galveston Bay Estuary Program**. The grant is a collaboration between HCDE, Audubon Conservation Leaders (ACL) and the Audubon Texas Coastal Program. We were thrilled to hire a recent ACL graduate as a Coastal Program Intern to implement our **Observe a Bird** afterschool program connecting 3rd – 5th graders to birdwatching, community science, and environmental science. The project continues through April 2023, reaching up to nine schools in Houston ISD.

Looking ahead to 2023 we will be celebrating 100 years of conservation on the Texas Coast. Audubon Texas will share insights into the history of bird and habitat conservation on the Texas Coast, tell the stories of passionate Audubon leaders, and share in a fun year of local engagements. *Please join us as we celebrate **100 years of Audubon conservation in Texas!***



Brown Pelican chicks (left) and Black Skimmers (right) on Chester Island in Matagorda Bay, Texas



# BIRD FRIENDLY URBAN COMMUNITIES

## LIGHTS OUT, TEXAS!



### Lights Out Bird Migration

One-third of **birds migrating** through the US pass through Texas each year. Birds tell us the effects of land use, pollution, climate change and weather trends. They need our help! Please turn off all non-essential lights from 11pm-6am each night until November 30.



During fall migration, **1 in every 3 birds** migrating through the U.S. passes through Texas, a state with an estimated 83% of its overall population classified as urban. As urbanization increases, so do threats for birds and other wildlife, but herein lies the opportunity; as conservationists we have the unique ability to influence and foster important community connections and actions within urban spaces.

In Fall 2022, Audubon Texas assumed the lead in coordinating the statewide **Lights Out, Texas!** outreach campaign in partnership with local Audubon chapters and community partners. We created a new suite of communications and engagement materials including outreach and social media toolkits, Spanish language resources, and much more. Partner engagement and participation across social media showed great results. Partnering organizations shared **428 posts** across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and had a combined follower reach of nearly **8 million people!**

Across major cities like **Austin, Houston, and Dallas**, **112 volunteers** provided more than **1,000 hours** of monitoring for bird casualties. We are grateful to the organizations and individuals that spend their time to collect data and help measure the success of Lights Out. Audubon Texas is excited to continue this work throughout spring migration and influence supporters to adopt the bird friendly **Lights Out** practices year-round!

### Lights Out Texas Founding and Coordinating Organizations:



# BIRD FRIENDLY URBAN COMMUNITIES

## BIRD CITY, TEXAS



BIRD  
CITY  
TEXAS

**Community-led and community-focused conservation** is bringing the joy of protecting birds to a local park near you! At the close of 2022, eight Texas communities are enrolled in the Bird City Texas certification program, a collaboration between Audubon Texas and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Each certified community has done incredible work to protect birds and their habitats where we live, work, and recreate. Communities host festivals celebrating birds and the quality of life they bring to our communities, like **Galveston Island's FeatherFest** or **Surfside Beach's NatureFest**. The festivals encourage both locals and visitors to appreciate the natural beauty around us through family-friendly activities and accessible bird walks. **Dripping Springs**, **San Antonio**, and **Bastrop** have maintained community-driven monitoring projects, like Bastrop's monthly Big Sit events, Dripping Spring's bi-annual surveys in Charro Ranch Park and Rathgeber Natural Resource Park (and others), and San Antonio's Climate Watch programming, which follow's the National Audubon Society's methods to ensure high-quality community science data are collected.

In addition to creating welcoming spaces for birds and people to cohabitate, certified Bird City Texas communities are focused on resiliency through adaptation. In 2022, **Port Aransas** finished installing a new boardwalk at Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center, which was destroyed in 2017 by Hurricane Harvey. The community has rallied around building back better, including structures that will be more resistant to future hurricanes.

The **City of Dallas** has been fighting a battle against the invasive Emerald Ash Borer, which requires swift action to protect the nation's largest urban forest, the Great Trinity Forest. The forest, which is comprised of about 40% Ash trees, provides important bird habitat at all times of the year. Finally, in **Houston**, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, in conjunction with Houston Audubon, has been hard at work making neighborhoods and nature centers more beautiful and drought resistant through native plant sales and volunteer planting events throughout the city.

With the close of 2022, the Bird City Texas program received its fourth round of applications. We are eagerly anticipating the outcome of the certification review and selection process to announce the next cohort of Bird City Texas communities!

# GRASSLAND & WORKING LANDS CONSERVATION

## AUDUBON CONSERVATION RANCHING

**Audubon Conservation Ranching (ACR)** is a voluntary, market-based, conservation approach offering incentives to ranchers for grassland stewardship through a certification label on beef products. With grassland birds being among the fastest declining bird populations in the U.S. and more than 95% of Texas lands held in private ownership, ACR offers benefits to landowners while also working to protect and restore important grassland habitat in Texas.

**ACR** enjoyed an abundance of success in 2022, including **five** newly certified ranches in Texas representing **32,674 acres**. The Texas ACR portfolio now includes **15 fully certified ranches** encompassing **69,261 acres** of land. An additional 7 ranches covering 351,888 acres of land are advancing through the certification process. These numbers illustrate the impact that market-based approaches can have to increase conservation of important habitats in Texas. Approaching a half million conservation acres, ACR is striving towards meaningful scales, and this is only the beginning.

Audubon Texas is working to utilize ACR as a tool for the benefit of geographies and bird species most in need. During 2022, the **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation** awarded Audubon Texas funding to expand ACR, other grasslands conservation practices, and Lesser Prairie-Chicken recovery within the short-grass prairies of the Texas Panhandle and Eastern New Mexico. 2022 also brought about the opportunity to participate at grassland conservation conferences and field days. Audubon Texas staff connected with more than **200 landowners, land managers, researchers, and producers** highlighting the benefits of regenerative practices and ACR, and recruiting new ranches to the ACR certification program.

In 2022, Audubon Texas shared the ACR story with 20 statewide chapters. We are working to expand our reach to Gulf Coast Prairies, the Chihuahuan Desert, and North-Central Texas. We will drive ACR brand awareness, expand monitoring capabilities, promote the resilience and adaptation benefits of regenerative land management practices, and work with landowners to explore benefits relating to carbon sequestration.



*Bairds Sparrow Photo: Romey Swanson*

Grassland **bird monitoring** was conducted at eight ACR sites during the spring of 2022. Every certified ranch is monitored at least once every other year with several sites monitored annually. In 2022 Audubon Texas launched a new partnership with Conservation Biology and Landscape Ecology faculty at the **University of North Texas** and the Natural Resource Institute at **Texas A&M University**. Partnerships like these allow Audubon Texas to expand the geography of monitoring efforts and work with universities to train the next generation of conservation scientists and leaders in Texas.



# WATER & CLIMATE POLICY

## CONSERVATION POLICY FOR THE NEXT 30 YEARS

The conservation landscape in Texas has an opportunity and a need to foster change relating to infrastructure, land development, and climate change. Audubon Texas is a key stakeholder in formal and informal policy discussions at the local and state levels.

Audubon Texas participated with local partners in a contested case hearing concerning the first state siting permit for a **coastal desalination discharge facility** located near Aransas Pass. This two-year process illuminated concerns with the proposed site of the discharge, elevating concerns about marine larval recruitment to the estuary and what that might mean for species of greatest conservation need, such as **Whooping Crane** and **Piping Plover**.

Seawater desalination is identified as a necessary water supply resource by the Texas State Water Plan. Proper siting, operation, monitoring, and mitigation of such facilities will be important to maintain the biodiversity of Texas bays and estuaries that also face challenges with decreasing freshwater inflows, rising sea level, more intense hurricanes, and infrastructure expansion.

Elsewhere, our ongoing focus on West Texas, grasslands, and water in an arid system is showing progress. Working with partners and land managers, we successfully completed our first year of innovative water deliveries in the **Pecos River** system, and our work within the **Rio Grande Joint Venture** also paid dividends as a series of encouraging discussions around water management in the Rio Grande watershed are underway.



*Whooping Crane and Sandhill Crane Photo: Beverly Houwing / Audubon Photography Awards*

This includes a goal of more adaptive management of the system, and increased collaboration between land managers, water managers, and stakeholders living and working on both sides of the river.

Our commitment to clean and ample water moves forward in 2023. Two of the great stressors to North American birds are the interrelated challenges of **habitat loss** and **climate change**. Our work in the coming Texas 88<sup>th</sup> legislative session will focus on water resources, natural infrastructure opportunities, and thoughtful enforcement of existing and evidenced-based regulatory frameworks around infrastructure siting and decommissioning.



# AUDUBON CENTERS & COMMUNITY EDUCATION

## SONGS FROM OUR CENTERS



Three Audubon Centers in Texas returned to full operating hours in 2022! Collectively, our center teams have connected with more than **25,500 visitors; 3,800 students; and 2,000 volunteer hours.**



Golden-cheeked Warbler at Dogwood Canyon  
Audubon Center Photo: Michaela Kral

### **Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center**

The **Golden-cheeked Warbler** is a small, colorful songbird that spends the winter in southern Mexico and Central America. It is also a Texas breeding endemic, meaning it nests exclusively within the boundaries of Texas, with every individual a naturally hatched Texan. It requires mature ecosystems, like Dogwood Canyon, where the stripping of bark of native Mountain Cedar or, more precisely, Ashe juniper, is required to construct its nests. However, this warbler species had not been documented in Dallas County for over a decade... until **May 2022!**

In May, staff and volunteers of Dogwood Canyon were thrilled to document a gorgeous, very vocal male Golden-cheeked Warbler in the sanctuary, *proof that conservation efforts are benefitting birds*. A partnership with the City of Cedar Hill will support the purchase of three sound recording devices to be used in a formal survey of the Golden-cheeked Warbler at Dogwood Canyon in spring 2023. The goal is to determine whether the species is returning to the area, document any nesting and breeding activities, and contribute to the body of data describing the population.

In Fiscal Year 2022, Dogwood Canyon served **4,260** onsite visitors. A special thank you to Dogwood Canyon Advisory Board members and the City of Cedar Hill and who offered time and talents volunteering at the center, we appreciate you!



# AUDUBON CENTERS & COMMUNITY EDUCATION

## SONGS FROM OUR CENTERS



Mitchell Lake Audubon Center Photo: Sean Fitzgerald

### **Mitchell Lake Audubon Center**

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center offers sincere thanks to the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) for the continued partnership with Audubon. This partnership inspires community members and partners to care about local habitats and works to build support for investment in water quality protection and public access to green space.

In 2022, Mitchell Lake Audubon Center and SAWS collaborated with the City of San Antonio and District 3 Councilwoman Phyllis Viagran on the successful funding of a new front entrance gate and inclusion of a **\$6 million** Mitchell Lake improvement program in the 2022-27 city bond program. Thank you, Mitchell Lake Advisory Board members and Bexar Audubon Society, for supporting these efforts. Project planning is underway and will include a series of community input opportunities in 2023.

The Bexar Audubon Society and the Quail Coalition of San Antonio are partnering with Mitchell Lake Audubon Center on a 50-acre grassland restoration project. In 2022, we successfully worked with Native American Seed on the removal of 12 acres of encroaching brush and non-native species and look forward to beginning restorative seeding efforts in 2023. The past year also saw the addition of new staff and development of future wetland restoration opportunities.

**7,960** people engaged, a 46% increase compared to Fiscal Year 2021.

**3,610** onsite center visitors.

**875** students served by education programs.

On May 7, 2022, residents of San Antonio approved **\$6 million in infrastructure improvements** for Mitchell Lake Audubon Center.



# AUDUBON CENTERS & COMMUNITY EDUCATION

## SONGS FROM OUR CENTERS

### Trinity River Audubon Center

Engaging the community is a priority for Trinity River Audubon Center. The focus of this work includes local, underrepresented communities, and Dallasites who remain unaware of this hidden jewel along the Trinity River.

In April 2022, the Center piloted a new family-friendly *green spaces* event with activities such as horseback riding, guided hikes, and even a drum circle! With the support of local organizations and volunteers, we were able to recognize, celebrate, and uplift community green spaces. Staff have also made great strides in going out into the community to libraries, community centers, and recreation centers for offsite education and programming enabling us to engage in a meaningful way. By engaging with local park, community center, and environmental organizations, staff doubled the number of Center partnerships.

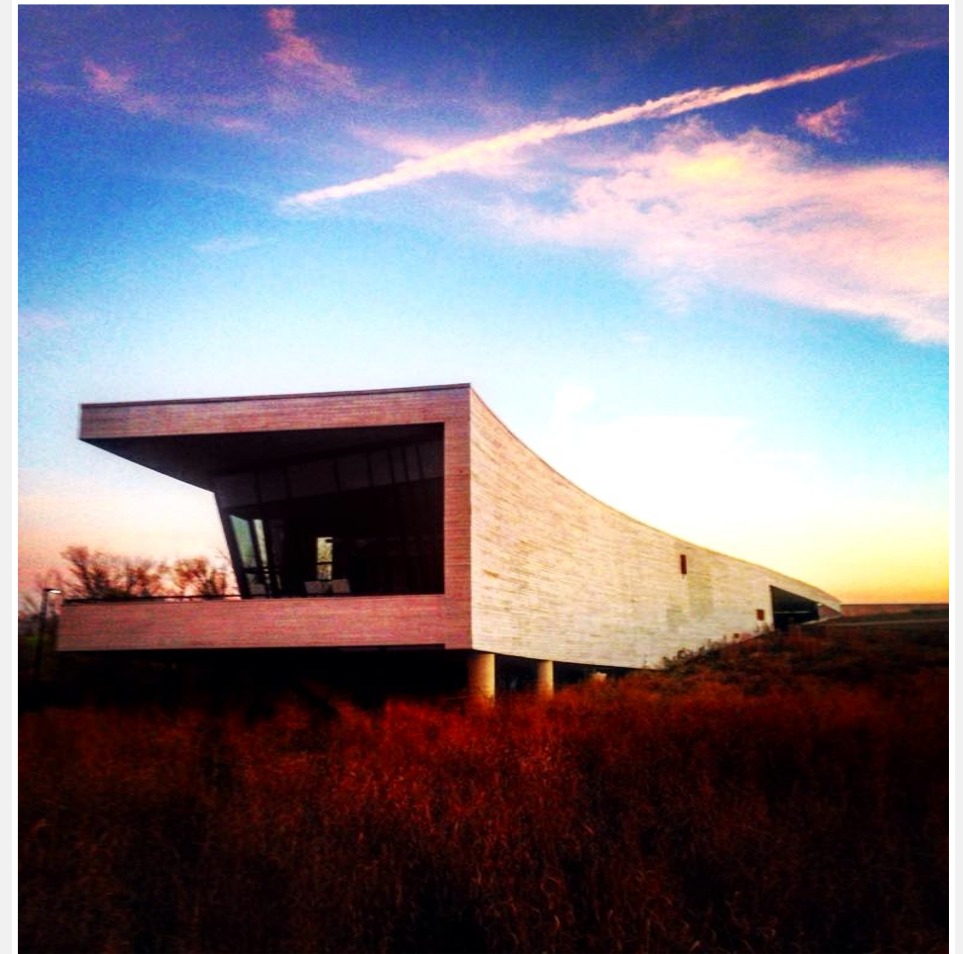
Trinity River Audubon Center also saw the return of two key, annual events: *Scissor-tails & Cocktails* in the spring and *Songbird Supper* in the fall. Trinity River Audubon Center appreciates its partnership with the City of Dallas Park and Recreation Department which provides annual operating support.

We're looking forward to a new, six-month pilot program removing admission fees beginning in January 2023. We believe that offering free admission will increase community access and engagement and foster a sense of belonging. Additionally, a new transportation program linking Trinity River Audubon Center and nearby City of Dallas Park and Recreation Centers minimizes access barriers for the community.

**17,000 center visits**, doubled compared to prior year.

**2,000 volunteer hours.**

**3,000 students** visited the center with a full school program scheduled for Spring 2023.





# MAKING NEW CONNECTIONS

## AUDUBON CONSERVATION LEADERS PROGRAM

The **Audubon Conservation Leaders Program for Young Women (ACL)** launched its 8<sup>th</sup> year of programming in the 2022-2023 school year. Supporting Audubon's mission of protecting birds today *and tomorrow*, the program introduces young women to careers in conservation science and encourages participants to embrace conservation action in their future pursuits. Guiding topics for the five-year curricula focus on the National Audubon Society priorities including Climate, Water, Coasts, Working Lands, and Bird-friendly Communities.

2022 saw the return of in-person field trips for **29 participants** from Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio, with students visiting seven state parks. In addition to introductions to birding, participants learned about water quality monitoring, indigenous efforts to protect clean water, and how water is recycled through industrial processes and the natural water cycle.



Dallas Camp Audubon Conservation Leaders

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### **ACL students speak directly about the ACL program's impact:**

*"In 6 months, I hope I remember the fun and calmness of the day. I really love this group."*

-Estrella P., Dallas Sophomore (Spring 2022)

*"The value of a trip like our kayaking/birding/trash pick-up field trip we had today is one of excitement and wonder. Not only were we able to reconnect with nature, we were able to try something new and do it in a place that's close to home."*

-Sophie R., San Antonio senior (Spring 2022)

*"I'm really happy we did this trip today. Though it rained a little, it was a perfect afternoon to help clean a cool place and make it a better environment."*

-Desiree G., Houston Senior (Spring 2022)



# MAKING NEW CONNECTIONS

## TEXAS WOMEN IN CONSERVATION



***The Texas Women in Conservation Luncheon featuring the 2022 Terry Hershey Awards was held on Tuesday, April 19<sup>th</sup> at the Witte Museum in San Antonio.***

Audubon's Texas Women in Conservation awards debuted in 2015 to honor the role that women play in the conservation field in the Lone Star State and to inspire the next generation of female conservationists. The program includes the annual Audubon Texas Women in Conservation Luncheon featuring The Terry Hershey Awards.

**Meet the 2022 honorees: Betty Bueché and Jeanette Honermann.**

Betty Bueché dedicated her career to preserving and conserving the shared natural areas in San Antonio. Jeanette Honermann uplifts marginalized communities and advocates for connections to the outdoors across San Antonio and beyond.

Proceeds from the event support conservation education, notably Audubon's Conservation Leaders Program for Young Women, which provides opportunities for high school students to become more involved in environmental and conservation science.

### **Thank you, event sponsors:**

- ❖ Anne and Chuck Parrish
- ❖ Katy and Ted Flato
- ❖ REI
- ❖ CAPTRUST
- ❖ Patsy and Tom Inglet
- ❖ Pete and Vicki Moore
- ❖ The Nature Conservancy
- ❖ NextEra
- ❖ Texas A&M University, San Antonio
- ❖ Andy and Nona Sansom
- ❖ Tito's Handmade Vodka



*2022 TWIC Honorees left to right: Betty Bueche' and Jeanette Honermann*



# ENGAGING THE AUDUBON NETWORK



*2022 Audubon Texas Network Roundup Hear about Bird Friendly Communities*

On November 4, 2022, nearly one hundred 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 Audubon network engagement in Texas.

The **2022 Audubon Texas Network Roundup** consisted of conversations that yielded valuable information and a set of recommendations that will guide the engagement activities of Audubon Texas as it engages with a network of 21 independent, local Audubon chapters in Texas, and host of partner organizations.

This engagement framework will support the implementation of a **new strategic plan in 2023**.

## AUDUBON CHAPTERS IN TEXAS

- ❖ Audubon Dallas
- ❖ Bastrop County Audubon Society
- ❖ Bexar Audubon Society
- ❖ Big County Audubon Society
- ❖ Central Texas Audubon Society
- ❖ Coastal Bend Audubon Society
- ❖ El Paso/Trans-Pecos Audubon Society
- ❖ Fort Worth Audubon Society
- ❖ Golden Triangle Audubon Society
- ❖ Houston Audubon Society
- ❖ Huntsville Audubon Society
- ❖ Llano Estacado Audubon Society
- ❖ Monte Mucho Audubon Society
- ❖ Prairie & Timbers Audubon Society
- ❖ Rio Brazos Audubon Society
- ❖ Texas Panhandle Audubon Society
- ❖ Tex-Ark Audubon Society
- ❖ Texoma Audubon Society
- ❖ Travis Audubon Society
- ❖ Twin Lakes Audubon Society
- ❖ Tyler Audubon Society



# RECOGNITION ROUNDUP



*American Kestrel Photo: Fi Rust / Audubon Photography Awards*

## **2022 Audubon Texas State Advisory Board**

- ❖ Bruce Ballengee – Cedar Hill, Texas
- ❖ George Bristol – Fort Worth, Texas (Emeritus)
- ❖ David Buggs – Austin, Texas
- ❖ Juliet Garcia – Brownsville, Texas
- ❖ Ygnacio Garza – Brownsville, Texas
- ❖ Stephen Gast – Houston, Texas
- ❖ Jeanette Honermann – San Antonio, Texas
- ❖ Patsy Inglet – San Antonio, Texas (Secretary)
- ❖ Margaret Keliher – Dallas, Texas
- ❖ David Litman – Dallas, Texas (Emeritus)
- ❖ Jay Lorch – Dallas, Texas
- ❖ Larry McKinney – Corpus Christi, Texas
- ❖ Pete Moore – Harlingen, Texas (President)
- ❖ Anne Parrish – San Antonio, Texas
- ❖ Andrew Sansom – Austin, Texas (Emeritus)
- ❖ Steve Smith – Dallas, Texas
- ❖ Mary Suhm – Austin, Texas
- ❖ Kimberly Wells – Houston, Texas