



# Impact Report

2023





# Dear Friend,

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In 2023, the work of Audubon Texas has exemplified a central theme: recognizing where we have been so that we can envision and build a path forward where birds thrive and communities prosper across Texas. To be successful in this work we must continue to build a powerful, diverse, and growing Audubon network as a force for conservation.



This year we celebrated 100 years of Audubon's coastal conservation work in Texas, acknowledging our many partnerships and a century of conservation actions. We recognized the two young women that began the very first Texas Audubon society in Galveston in 1899. Alongside, we celebrated two contemporary conservation leaders – Helen Drummond, Executive Director of the Houston Audubon Society, and Virginia Rose, Founder of Birdability. Helen and Virginia are committed to expanding the birding community and eliminating barriers to the enjoyment and conservation of natural spaces.

Audubon Texas's conservation programs reached new heights, growing in reach and participation. We've expanded the Audubon Conservation Ranching program in Texas with nearly 30,000 new acres of ranchland enrolled and began providing technical assistance to private landowners who are incorporating these conservation practices on their property. More than 20 species of colonial waterbirds utilized Audubon-leased nesting islands along the Texas Coast, and a host of new cities and communities have joined Lights Out, Texas! and Bird City Texas conservation engagement programs.

Audubon Centers in Texas continue to play an important role in creating new ways for people to experience the outdoors. Every Audubon Center in

Texas has now removed access fees, and center staff are committed to offering inclusive programs at the centers and outside center doors in the community. And, collaboration across the Audubon network created policy wins in the Texas legislative session for public lands and species like the Golden-cheeked Warbler.

Please enjoy the enclosed highlights from Audubon's work and impact in Texas in 2023. I invite you to join us as we prepare for takeoff in 2024. It will be a year for expanding high quality bird habitat, fostering inclusive conservation leadership, taking climate action, and adding hemispheric benefits for birds. Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership.

Warmest regards,

Lisa Gonzalez



Lisa Gonzalez

Cover: American Oystercatcher

# Coastal Program: A Conservation Program Highlight



This year our leased islands successfully hosted **40,000 pairs of colonial nesting waterbirds and shorebirds**. Coastal islands, managed by Audubon Coastal Wardens, monitored nesting pairs from **21 species including Roseate Spoonbills, Reddish Egrets, Brown Pelicans, Black Skimmers, Terns, and American Oystercatchers.**

Audubon Texas proudly commemorated 100 years of formal conservation in Texas. Beginning along the Gulf Coast with the formation of local Audubon chapters, followed by Audubon's lease of Green Island in 1923, our coastal footprint now has grown to 175 coastal bird island leases from Galveston Bay to the Lower Laguna Madre. Audubon Texas and its network has grown to more than 90,000 members and supporters—connecting geographic regions, Audubon Centers and chapters, and various community programming and partnerships.

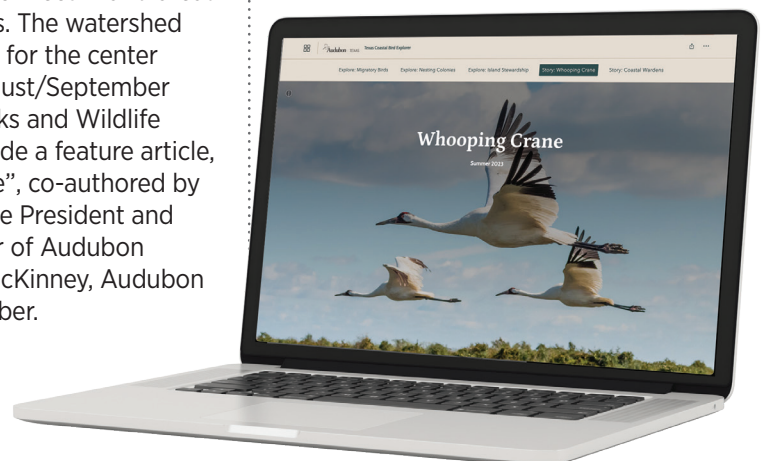
Audubon Texas celebrated its “Coastal 100” at bird festivals, community events, and conservation meetings across the state. We launched a new Coastal bird

explorer where viewers can interact with a set of story maps showcasing our areas of coastal conservation, sea level rise predictions, and a Texas view of migratory species. And, we created print maps illustrating our stewardship work on bird rookery islands across the coast and the watersheds that connect inland areas to coastal habitats. The watershed map was adapted for the center spread of the August/September issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine, alongside a feature article, “Birds Everywhere”, co-authored by Lisa Gonzalez, Vice President and Executive Director of Audubon Texas and Larry McKinney, Audubon Texas board member.



Above: **Audubon Texas' watershed map**, featured in a fall issue of **Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine**

Below: <https://tx.audubon.org/conservation/texas-coastal-bird-explorer>







Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher

# Conservation

## Texas Women in Conservation

Each year Audubon Texas has bestowed the Terry Hershey Award to women who have made great impacts in conservation as part of the Texas Women in Conservation (TWIC) Program. This year we honored Helen Drummond of the Houston Audubon Society and Virginia Rose of Birdability, as well as posthumous awards for Cecil Seixas and Estelle Hertford, both of Galveston. All represent the past, present, and future legacy of Audubon Texas, Audubon chapters, and community partners — a fitting tribute as the organization celebrates its centennial year of coastal protection activities. Audubon hosted “salon style” gatherings in Galveston, Houston, and Austin this year to engage and celebrate these leaders.

## Texas Leaders in Conservation Program

Audubon's Conservation Leaders Program for Young Women (ACL) had a year of growth and change in 2023. Curriculum this year focused on coasts, and we continued our long-term partnership with the Irma Lerma Rangel Leadership School in Dallas and the Young Women's Leadership Academy in San Antonio. This past school year we hosted a cohort of 24 participants, who self-identified as 63% Latina, 25% biracial, 8% White, and 4% Black. Audubon Texas also established a new partnership; Ball High School in Galveston began its first ACL cohort this past September.

As we launched our 9th year of the program in September 2023, Audubon hosted a conversation with participants that included considering

a new, more inclusive name for the program. We are pleased to share that our high school program has been renamed to Texas Leaders in Conservation (TLC). The goal is for more students to find and feel a sense of belonging in this program. We look forward to welcoming more students into the program, creating positive impact for themselves and the ecosystems in Texas.

Audubon Texas  
leadership programs  
**celebrate visionary  
leaders** and  
help students  
**foster inclusion  
and belonging.**



## Community Conservation: Lights Out, Texas!

Lights Out, Texas continues to bring awareness and action in Texas thanks to many partner and community organizations across the state. Media outlets such as CBS, KXAN and CHRON (Houston Chronicle online) continued to share the messaging of Lights Out, Texas. To date, 70 media placements have made more than 63 million impressions in 2023. Online publications such as SciStarter and Texas Farm Bureau have shared this community action campaign to connect with a wider audience in Texas, and beyond. Social media continues to create a large impact for awareness.

New communities have taken action and committed to going Lights Out in 2023, including Farmers Branch, Brownsville, Frisco, and Rockwall County.

**More than 20 cities and counties across the state have made new or continued commitments to Lights Out, Texas!** And, cities are not the only ones making an impact. Rice University and Texas A&M University at College Station created bird survey programs this year to track how light impacts birds on their campuses and are using these data to inform campus facility managers.

This summer, Audubon Texas co-hosted a Lights Out Symposium with Texas A&M University Biodiversity Research and Teaching Collections. Thirty attendees from local cohorts

including Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and Austin, as well as researchers and partners such as Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texan By Nature participated in the symposium to share best practices, create a vision for the future, and learn about 11 research projects benefiting from Lights Out, Texas. Additionally, a Lights Out, Texas steering committee was formed to establish the framework and grow the impact of the campaign across the state. Audubon Texas is working with National Audubon Society Lights Out partners across the U.S. on opportunities to inform bird-friendly design of our communities.



Fort Worth buildings go **Lights Out** at **Bass Towers** and **777 Main Street**

# Bird City Texas

In 2023, we welcomed Austin and Cedar Hill into the Bird City Texas flock of 10 Texas communities committed to being places where birds thrive and people prosper. Austin engaged volunteers and educated the public in clever ways—like hosting “catio” tours to encourage keeping cats indoors. Cedar Hill exemplified how growing cities can be bird friendly by designing their new library with bird-friendly glass and dark-sky-compliant lights. Bastrop, Dallas, Houston and Port Aransas recertified this year, once again committing to implement the Bird City Texas standards of science-backed actions with community education. Recertifying cities presented updates on maintaining programs for no-mow areas, increasing access to green space with trails, and more.



Above: **Cedar Hill Rendention of Library.** Left: **Cedar Hill Proclamation.** From left: Chloe Crumley, Audubon Texas Engagement Manager; Julie Collins, Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center Director; Gregory Glover, Cedar Hill City Council member. Below, from left: Chloe Crumley, Erin Magerl, Julie Collins, Jake Poinsett, Yvette Stewart.

The first in-person Bird City Texas gathering was hosted this October, rolling out the new criteria established by Audubon Texas and Texas Parks and Wildlife in an effort to increase accessibility to all communities. We engaged sixty participants from both certified and interested communities, spanning from the Hill Country to far East Texas. Over the coming years, these new updates will help put in place a stronger Bird City Texas network which will increase bird-friendly communities across the state.

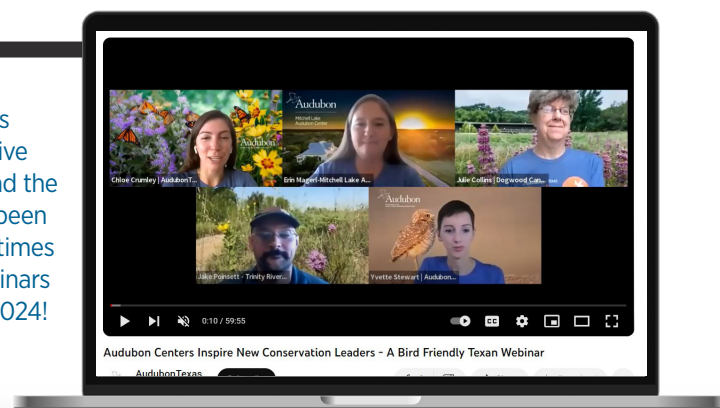
Bird City Texas expands to **10 communities**

## BIRD-FRIENDLY TEXAN WEBINARS

This year Audubon Texas launched the Bird-Friendly Texan Webinar series. The series focuses on direct, tangible actions that individuals and communities can take to create change across Texas— to help

birds and the places they need. Featured on the Audubon Texas YouTube channel, these 5 presentations host panelists and Audubon team members on topics ranging from youth conservation, clean air, and our Coastal 100 anniversary.

Nearly 500 people have joined us this year for the live conversations, and the recordings have been viewed over 150 times online. More webinars are planned for 2024!





# Audubon Conservation Ranching

Audubon Conservation Ranching (ACR) is a voluntary, market-based conservation approach offering incentives to ranchers for grassland stewardship with a certification label on their beef products. With grassland birds 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.

The Texas ACR portfolio now includes 14 fully certified ranches encompassing 88,643 acres of land—with program expansion planned in 2024, including newly certified ranches representing 29,400 acres. This will bring the total ACR acreage to more than 118,000 acres of land committed to bird habitat.

Grassland bird monitoring was conducted at eight ACR sites during the Spring of 2023, bringing valuable data to the National Audubon Society science teams and ACR producers alike. Every certified ranch is monitored at least once every other year with several sites monitored annually. Additionally, three ranches are currently advancing through the certification process and are set to increase the ACR portfolio in Texas to 118,100 acres. The ACR program has seen great success nationally, expecting to impact 3 million acres within the year.

Audubon Texas staff engaged more than 500 landowners, land managers, researchers, and producers in 2023, highlighting the benefits of regenerative practices and ACR, and recruiting new ranches to the ACR certification program.

*Grassland birds have suffered an unparalleled decline over the past half century, stemming from widespread development of North America's grasslands. Ranches enrolled in the Audubon Conservation Ranching initiative are taking steps to help keep grassland ecosystems intact and create strongholds to safeguard birds' survival.*

*Audubon Conservation Ranching in Texas is expanding to certify more than 118,000 acres committed to bird habitat.*



**Jon Taggart**, an ACR partner and producer of **Burgundy Pasture Beef**, stands among his herd and tall grasses.







This year we participated in many statewide grassland conservation conferences and field days, connecting with landowners and partners through presentations and peer-to-peer learning. Audubon Texas also welcomed two new employees dedicated to expanding ACR's impact in critical areas of the Gulf Coast and Panhandle regions.

The beginning of 2024 will mark the first release of Audubon Texas' Landowner Toolkit, an interactive webpage designed to help landowners navigate the multitude of federal, state, and private conservation assistance programs in Texas.

### **Audubon Texas' Landowner Toolkit will be a resource and guide for landowners and managers interested in bird habitat improvement.**

Audubon Texas has also created the Texas ACR Advisory Committee. Composed of 11 industry professionals, this committee is working to address multiple conservation issues and barriers to program implementation.



#### **Cougar Hollow Ranch, Lipan, TX.**

Laura and Greg Bird proudly display the ACR certification seal at their Cougar Hollow Ranch. Joined by Jon and Ben Taggart of Burgundy Pasture Beef, this seal distinguishes farms and ranches committed to raising livestock in a manner that enhances habitat for focal bird species and other wildlife, allows cattle to graze on open pastures, and adheres to the compassionate treatment of animals to ensure environmental sustainability. From left to right (Jon Taggart, Ben Taggart, Laura Bird, and Greg Bird.)



# Policy Update

The Texas Legislature conducted its biannual session this spring and Audubon Texas, Audubon chapters, and partner organizations were involved in many conversations and critical legislation protecting green space across the state. Audubon Texas has joined nearly 90 partner organizations in the Texas Coalition for State Parks to support the \$1 Billion Centennial Parks Conservation Fund, appearing on the November ballot for Texas voters. With voter approval, we have the opportunity to ensure future generations of Texans will have access to more open spaces and wild places by conserving vital habitat.

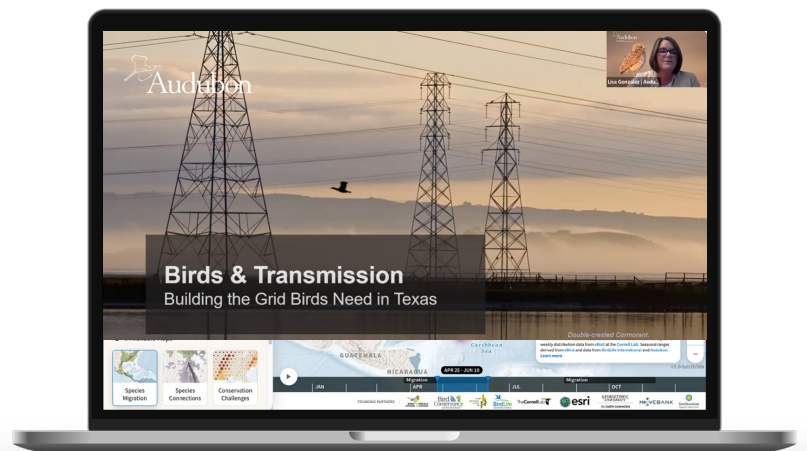
Audubon Texas also led advocacy efforts to stop a bill that would allow for the destruction of Golden-cheeked Warbler habitat across Central Texas. Alongside Bexar Audubon Society, Travis Audubon Society and the City of Cedar Hill, Audubon organized our network and worked until the last day of session with lawmakers and staff to ensure that Senate Bill 1426 was not considered for a final vote.

While Session may have ended in May, work continues with lawmakers and the public on several key initiatives that were not addressed or have important deadlines approaching. Of high priority, Texas Governor Greg Abbott has not convened lawmakers to consider changes to the Texas grid system and its delivery models or sources. Audubon Texas and partners continue to discuss how renewable energy should play an important role in a sustainable energy system that has reached critical capacity and failed

delivery benchmarks. National Audubon Society recently released the report, “Birds and Transmission: Building the Grid Birds Need”, outlining the importance of upgrading the U.S. transmission grid and transitioning to a clean energy economy in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change for birds and people. This report was featured in a Bird Friendly Texan webinar with plans for an additional conversation in 2024.



Above: **Eastern Meadowlark**  
Below: **Birds and Transmission webinar**



# Songs from Our Centers

Audubon Texas Centers have engaged more than 40,000 visitors and students in 2023.

## **Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center**

### **NATIVE PLANT SALES**

Dogwood Canyon promotes Audubon's Plants for Birds effort each year with spring and fall native plant sales. Plants sales have increased once again this year by promoting online sales prior to the in-person sale. Dogwood is on track to surpass 5,200 plants sold, an increase from 1,488 sold last year. Native plant sales at Audubon Centers and sanctuaries are part of our toolkit to raise funds, provide local education opportunities, and promote conservation through better home landscapes.

### **EVOLUTION OF PROGRAMS**

Dogwood Canyon is transitioning programs primarily from school groups to more community-based education. All Audubon Centers and sanctuaries are in the process of transitioning to Audubon Action Centers, and Dogwood Canyon continues to be a gateway for the community to engage with nature, often for the first time. Visitors view Dogwood as an approachable, small, and safe place to explore nature and engage with other community members. Through a variety of activities, including First Saturdays hosting yoga, bird walks, monthly animal encounters, introductory classes to birdwatching, community science, and bird ID walks, Dogwood Canyon provides resources and hosts a number of community clubs and school groups, providing space for workshops, homeschools, and Girl Scouts. In 2023, Dogwood hosted more than 2,100 visitors and added two additional staff members.



**Black Skimmer**

## **Mitchell Lake Audubon Center**

As we approach the 20-year anniversary of Mitchell Lake Audubon Center (MLAC) in 2024, we are dedicated to creating a vision that is in alignment with community and conservation priorities, while moving towards operational expansion and continued sustainability. Over the last year, the Center increased engagement with the community by 40% from the previous year. We attribute this success to continued support from Audubon Texas and the National Audubon Society, as well as collaboration with San Antonio Water System, investment in Center staffing, and the continued strategic focus of Center leadership. Coming soon,

Mitchell Lake will launch a Community Engagement & Vision process to engage neighbors, community members, partners, and others to help guide the future vision for community use of the Center.

This year was the first full year of programming post-pandemic, and the Center saw a significant increase in visitors and program attendees. Trips were offered once again and engaged more than 2,000 students throughout the year from across San Antonio. Continued partnerships with other organizations, including San Antonio River Authority, San Antonio River Foundation, and University of Texas at San Antonio, inspired program collaboration and maximized the number of students





reached. Over the last year, MLAC engaged more than 11,000 people—and there is great opportunity for expansion on the horizon. As part of the visioning process, we will address the potential for expansion of the Greenway Trail connecting Mitchell Lake, Texas A&M University, and neighboring communities. Between increased engagement, additional funding, and future strategic planning, we are well on our way to creating an improved natural area at MLAC for outdoor recreation, enhancing the area's economic value, and providing an asset to the traditionally under-resourced community in which it is located.

### **Trinity River Audubon Center**

Trinity River Audubon Center (TRAC) provides a gateway to explore the amazing resources of the 6,000-acre Great Trinity Forest, the largest urban hardwood forest in the United States. Like all Audubon Centers, TRAC

provides the community a way to connect with nature and each other. We place special focus on deepening existing relationships and creating new connections within the South Dallas community in an authentic and intentional way, especially within local, under represented communities. This year, the Center welcomed 28,572 visitors compared to 14,798 last year. The removal of admission fees has helped many in the South Dallas community overcome a critical barrier to experiencing the center and the multitude of programs. Since implementing free entry in 2023, TRAC's visitor numbers increased 230% during the same time period last year. Approximately 60% of visitors tell us it is their first visit to the center.

In addition to free admission, TRAC created a free transportation application for community groups and now offers a shuttle from area community centers and libraries to the center. This huge step forward

has helped TRAC address inequities within the community; transportation funding has been identified as a barrier for many organizations and local visitors. We also reduced our facility use fee by more than \$11,000 to community organizations, the City of Dallas, and other partners.

TRAC has expanded staff to welcome new Educator and Center Assistant roles. These crucial additions have allowed us to offer more education and public programs, offer new programming and, notably, offer a Spanish version of our programming. TRAC's education programs impacted 4,096 students and public programs impacted 1,900 attendees in 2023.



Trinity River Audubon Center Boardwalk



# Thank you

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This year we'll continue to expand the acreage of bird habitat, engage and educate communities, and offer new opportunities for impact through our Centers, advocacy initiatives, and outreach.

Your support allows us to make Texas a place where birds and their habitats thrive, and creates the conditions for people and the planet to flourish as well.

**We hope you'll join us.**

#### PHOTO CREDITS:

COVER, MICHAEL CASSELLA/AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS; (2) COURTESY OF AUDUBON TEXAS; (3, FROM TOP) COURTESY OF AUDUBON TEXAS; WHOOPING CRANES, HEATHER ROSKELLEY/AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS; COURTESY OF COASTAL BIRD EXPLORER/AUDUBON; (4) VIC PRISLIPSKY/AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS; (5) COURTESY OF TEXAS CONSERVATION ALLIANCE (2); (6, FROM TOP) CITY OF CEDAR HILL, PGAL AND TEN EYCK LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS; COURTESY OF AUDUBON TEXAS; COURTESY OF BIRD-FRIENDLY TEXAN WEBINAR/AUDUBON; (7) JON TAGGART; (8) GREG BIRD; (9, FROM TOP) MELISSA JAMES/AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS; JILL CLARDY/FLICKR (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0); COURTESY OF BIRDS AND TRANSMISSION WEBINAR/AUDUBON; (10) NIKUNJ PATEL/AUDUBON PHOTOGRAPHY AWARDS; (11) SEAN FITZGERALD; BACK COVER, LORRAINE MINNS/AUDUBON



Painted Bunting