



# Audubon TEXAS

A State Program of the National Audubon Society

**Annual Report 2016**



Dear Friends,

This past year, a major supporter of Audubon told us we appear like a 100-year-old “startup.” While we have the longevity and legacy of a conservation organization that has been working in Texas since 1899, we are also rapidly evolving with the times to address current and emerging conservation challenges.

This year, National Audubon Society completed our 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, of which Texas was a major part. Over the next five years, through our core strategies of Water, Coasts, Working Lands, Climate, and Bird-Friendly Communities, Audubon will deliver meaningful conservation impact on the ground and engage hundreds of thousands of Texans in educational and outreach experiences.

Thank you for all you make possible, and I hope you enjoy reading about our shared accomplishments in 2016.

Yours in conservation,



Brian Trusty  
Central Flyway Vice President,  
National Audubon Society



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## EXTENDING CONSERVATION REACH

### Audubon's 2016–2020 Strategic Plan

Audubon's 2016–2020 Strategic Plan focuses the network on building seamlessly coordinated flyway-scale strategies for full life-cycle bird conservation throughout the Americas.

We aspire to be the most effective conservation network in America and organize our efforts around five core strategic priorities—**COASTS, WORKING LANDS, WATER, CLIMATE, AND BIRD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES**—protecting birds and the places they need today and tomorrow.

The plan's conservation vision is bold. It brings science, policy, and conservation planning to bear. It captures the most pressing challenges facing birds and their habitats and reflects our growing ambition to drive conservation through leadership, sound science, and action.

The plan challenges the network to engage in hemispheric conservation priorities while working together on best practices and homegrown solutions. This kind of engagement requires a higher level of program management and greater collaboration to advance a common agenda and ensure that the quality of programming reflects Audubon's history of great work.



Rufous Hummingbird by Walter Nussbaumer

## A GOLDEN-CHEEKED VICTORY

Thanks to the pivotal role played by Travis Audubon and other Audubon chapters and partners, the conservation community breathed a sigh of relief in June 2016 as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced that the Golden-cheeked Warbler will remain on the endangered species list, despite a delisting petition filed in 2015.

This species builds its nest from the bark of mature Ashe juniper trees found only in the 33 unique and beautiful counties that make up the Texas Hill Country. This bird is a true Texan—it cannot raise its young anywhere else in the world.

The USFWS put the bird on the endangered species list in 1990. In an August 2014 report, it noted that the bird “continues to be in danger of extinction throughout its range” due to “ongoing widespread destruction of its habitat.”

Texas is experiencing some of the country's fastest growth, including the emerging Texas Triangle megaregion (home to Austin and San Antonio) where more growth is projected to occur in the coming decades. This boom in new residents drives a rapid expansion, often at the expense of sensitive habitat areas.



Golden-cheeked Warbler by Gil Eckrich





## Audubon TEXAS WOMEN IN CONSERVATION

On Thursday, March 3, 2016 in Fort Worth, we presented four outstanding conservationists with the second annual Terry Hershey Texas Women in Conservation Award.



JANICE BEZANSON  
*Executive Director,*  
Texas Conservation Alliance



DEBORAH CLARK  
*Conservationist & Partner,*  
Birdwell & Clark Ranch



ANN HAMILTON  
*Conservation Philanthropist*



MARTY LEONARD  
*Board Member, Fort Worth Nature Center  
& Tarrant Regional Water District*



Join us April 13, 2017 as we honor next year's awardees at the third annual Texas Women in Conservation Luncheon at Pearl Stable in San Antonio.

BLAIR FITZSIMONS,  
Chief Executive Officer, Texas Agricultural Land Trust

KAREN HIXON, Conservationist & Philanthropist

SUSAN HUGHES,  
Vice Chairman, Edwards Aquifer Authority Board of Directors

RUTH LOFGREN, Environmentalist & Community Advocate



## TOMORROW'S CONSERVATION LEADERS— YOUNG WOMEN IN ACTION

The Conservation Leaders Program for Young Women, funded by the Texas Women in Conservation Program, encourages careers in conservation by stewarding **45** high school girls through a free year of hands-on learning, field experiences, and mentorship.

The young women embark on outdoor learning experiences from their local Audubon Center and participate in a variety of off-site experiences with our partners. The 2016 opportunities ranged from outdoor expeditions to Q&As with women in conservation across the state, litter cleanup, and behind-the-scenes tours.

The year culminates with a week-long, outdoor-immersion trip to the Texas coast tying together the skills the students learned and solidifying a foundation for lifelong conservation stewardship. Experiences include bird ID workshops, bird population surveys, volunteer projects to assist nesting birds in Important Bird Areas, and a four-hour educational boat trip led by the University of Texas Marine Science Institute.





## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: **FROM SINK TO SEA**

Faced with the challenge of a fast-growing state population and increasing demands on our water supply, Mitchell Lake Audubon Center and our TERN citizen science program created **From Sink to Sea** to connect people with nature and address water issues that directly relate to our ecosystems and overall quality of life in Texas.

This spring, more than 150 students from Santa Rosa ISD in the Rio Grande Valley learned how to implement simple practices at home to create a positive impact on the health of our rivers, bays, and estuaries. Students participated in two experiences aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge & Skills standards (TEKS) and learned the links between everyday actions and watershed conservation in a non-traditional learning environment, impossible to experience in a classroom setting alone.

Students learned how water travels from the sink they use every day, down a watershed, into wetlands, and to the coast. In the field (a local wetland), students learned to identify colonial waterbirds while following scientific survey and data collection protocols to monitor bird populations for conservation.

Increasing our reach across geographical areas with the hands-on activities featured in this program helps students understand and share the idea that everyday behavior can impact the local ecosystem and its wildlife.





# COASTAL CONSERVATION

Photo: Alan Wilde

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## INCREASING NESTING HABITAT ALONG THE TEXAS COAST

Texas colonial waterbirds like pelicans, egrets, spoonbills, and terns depend heavily on coastal bay islands for nesting, many of which suffer from continuous erosion. In 2016, Audubon Texas, in addition to our continued bird monitoring and nesting island management, completed a state-funded research project aimed at providing a scientific basis for coastal managers to plan and implement more strategic island management activities and use restoration dollars more effectively. Islands of high conservation priority were identified, allowing us to advocate for restoration projects to support highlighted islands along the Texas coast.

2016 was also a successful year for continued work in Matagorda Bay. Audubon Texas received funds totaling \$357,600 for two projects; one supports the continued restoration efforts at Sundown Island, a critical Texas rookery island, and the other funds work with engineers and regional experts to determine the potential for creating dredge spoil islands in Matagorda Bay. These islands would serve as additional nesting locations for birds like Reddish Egrets and Roseate Spoonbills, thus providing resiliency in the Matagorda Bay System.



## 2016 BY THE NUMBERS



**5,604 SERVICE HOURS**



**1,139 VOLUNTEERS**

## SUNDOWN ISLAND

In 2016, Sundown Island received a very important gift from the United States Army Corps of Engineers: over 700,000 cubic yards of sand and shell from a nearby dredging project. This material created close to 10 new acres of island serving as new breeding habitat for terns, gulls, and other ground nesting species. Thanks to the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Black Skimmers and Royal Terns now have more land to thrive.





# CHANGING GRAZING TO RESTORE GRASSLANDS



Participating ranches, retailers, and target states in Audubon's Conservation Ranching Program

Until last year, Loy Sneary firmly believed that anything growing at his ranch 80 miles south of Houston, other than the Bermuda grass his cattle grazed on, was competing for water and soil nutrients and had to go.

And why wouldn't he believe this? He went to good agriculture schools and his family

has been ranching in Texas for four generations. Spending \$30–40 an acre on herbicides, insecticides, and mowing “weeds” was his norm.

Loy started exploring grassfed beef opportunities and his curiosity led him to Audubon's Conservation Ranching Program, a market-based incentive program that benefits ranchers who voluntarily improve grassland bird habitat. Through meetings and site visits, he learned terms like “high-density stocking rate” and “adaptive grazing”, which essentially means sectioning a ranch into small paddocks that cattle move between daily on a large-scale rotation. More or less the opposite of traditional grazing techniques, the benefits are immense. Confining cattle into a small space for a small amount of time means 100% of the

ground benefits from “hoof action,” which tills the soil, stirring latent seed beds from native grasses that haven't been seen in generations.

The cows' natural fertilizer and saliva builds soil health through micronutrients and fungi. In return, the diverse and nutrient-rich food source of the resulting native grassland breeds healthier, happier cattle as well as native birds and wildlife.

“Not only will these practices add to our bottom line, there's no better way of building soil than animals, wild or domesticated, and cattle are easy to move”, said Loy.

As someone who's ingrained in the agricultural community in Texas, Loy was surprised by how little information is available. “We are one of only a few ranches doing this in our area,” he said. “I credit Audubon Texas for the knowledge we've acquired very rapidly.”

There are larger-scale impacts, too. As soil health improves, its ability to absorb and process water and nutrients increases, reducing unhealthy bacterial loads in streams and estuaries that feed nearby Matagorda Bay (home to Sundown Island, one of the Texas Gulf Coast's most productive colonial waterbird rookeries). Improved water quality is critical to the health of our forage and commercial fisheries. Can you imagine a Texas where every ranch is a conservation easement for wildlife, as well as a home to healthier cattle, which provide a more sustainable food source for us while transforming entire ecosystems for the better?



# PRAIRIE & GRASSLAND CONSERVATION



Photo by Loy Sneary



# URBAN CONSERVATION

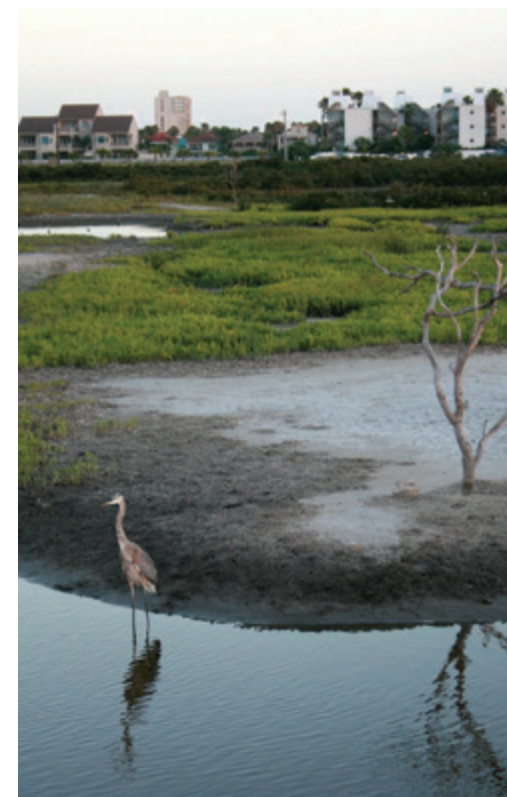
Two pillars support successful bird conservation in our cities:

## CREATING HABITAT & REDUCING THREATS

### PLANTS FOR BIRDS

When we reintroduce native plants back into our urban and suburban gardens and greenspaces, we're not only bringing back the legacy of our own Texas landscape; we're re-weaving the web of critical connections that provide the food, water, and shelter that birds need to survive. Through Plants for Birds, Audubon Texas Urban Conservation Program engages people in the process of creating beautiful, healthy habitats that benefit the whole urban community— human, bird, and pollinator.

Building on this foundational science, Audubon Texas is continuing to work with partners to incorporate native plants into a diversity of urban spaces. In 2016, we completed a long-term Monitoring and Management Plan for the Trinity Forest Golf Club in Dallas. This adaptive management plan lays out best-management recommendations the course's 70-plus acres of native prairie plantings, including a wildlife management and monitoring plan.



### SAFE PASSAGE FOR BIRDS

Collisions with buildings are the number two human-related cause of death to birds in the U.S., after outdoor cats. As host to 98% of all of North America's long-distance (Nearctic- Neotropical) bird species, Texas plays a vital role in providing safe passage to birds as they navigate our urban landscapes of light and glass. Our Bird-Friendly Buildings program addresses collision issues and ways to take action through reporting window collisions via D-bird, modifying windows, or participating in Lights Out during migration.

As birds don't see borders, Audubon Texas also works to protect our birds as they move across the whole Central Flyway. This year, Audubon Texas was part of an innovative, cross-Flyway consulting team evaluating the impacts of a major state penitentiary slated for construction adjacent to Audubon's Gillmor Sanctuary in Utah. Audubon's Bird Friendly Design recommendations for this project will protect many of Texas' migratory birds, including American White Pelicans and Black-necked Stilts, which use the Great Salt Lake for breeding or migration stopover.



Stunned Tennessee Warbler  
by Stephanie Beard



## 2016 BY THE NUMBERS

 **4,400 VOLUNTEER HOURS**

 **13,000 VISITORS**

 **6,500 STUDENTS**



## WELCOME, OLLIE

This year, thanks to hundreds of hours of volunteer work from the Indian Trails Master Naturalists, the support of Mr. and Mrs. Steve Puckett, and board member David Finrock, our dream of housing a resident live bird at Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center became a reality.

Ollie the Barred Owl was flying across a road when he was struck by a pick-up truck. The people who accidentally injured the owl took him home to try to care for him but soon realized they needed professional help. By that time, the broken wing was set and could not be repaired. Ollie would not be able to fly again. This would be detrimental to his survival, as he would not be able to hunt or readily escape attack from prey. Ollie would need to be either euthanized or forever live in an enclosure.

We decided he was a perfect fit for our center; not releasable, but healthy and able to be a great ambassador to teach people about birds and how to love and protect them.



 **DOGWOOD CANYON Audubon**  
CENTER AT CEDAR HILL







## THE FUTURE STARTS NOW

In 2016, Mitchell Lake Audubon Center finalized a long-term conservation plan and began work. We consulted with habitat management professionals from Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Ducks Unlimited, Native American Seed, Texas A&M University – San Antonio, and more on current best practices for land management and invasive species removal. In addition to the management plan, we achieved three first-year milestones:

- Completed 2.9-acre vegetation survey of our native plant trail with the help of students and faculty from nearby universities and Texas Master Naturalists
- Removed aggressive retama (*Parkinsonia aculeata*) around Bird Pond to promote wetland biodiversity
- Created a vegetative management plan for 10.5 acres of mixed non-native and native grasslands to remove old growth vegetation, stimulate new growth of native grasses, and increase biodiversity



## 2016 BY THE NUMBERS

- 🛠️ 4,500 VOLUNTEER HOURS
- 🔭 9,600 VISITORS
- 🎓 3,100 STUDENTS





Photo by Scot Miller

## 2016 BY THE NUMBERS

 **7,400 VOLUNTEER HOURS**

 **51,400 VISITORS**

 **26,800 STUDENTS**



## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: SCHOOLYARD INVESTIGATIONS

The 2015-2016 school year brought a new campus partnership, a customized version of our Eco Investigations program on elementary school campuses. Two days a week, Audubon educators lead students and teachers in each class and in each grade through an exploration of the ecology of the school campus where they spend their days.

This year, students at Lakewood and Cochran Elementary strengthened environmental literacy and stewardship skills, improved the water quality of nearby water sources, and enhanced green space on their campus.

Results from evaluation by Southern Methodist University's Center for Research and Evaluation show positive impact in promoting environmental responsibility.

Next year, we will pilot a teacher professional development component and better align with specific TEKS objectives. Funding for this program was provided, in part, by the Boone Family Foundation.



TRINITY RIVER  **Audubon**  
CENTER

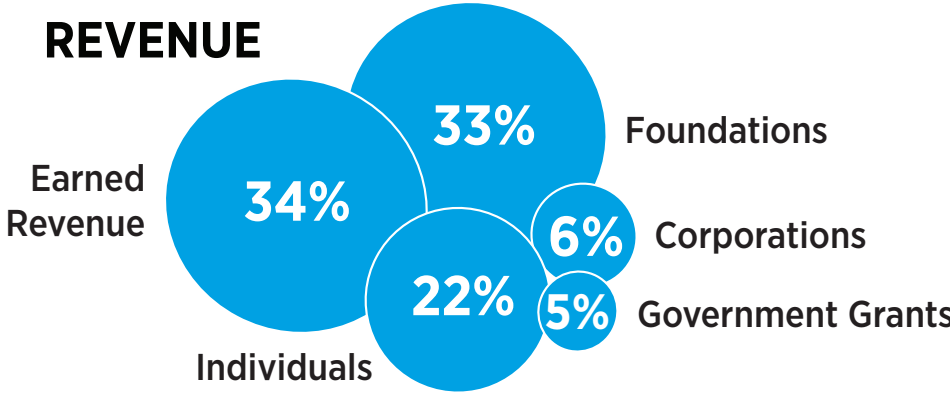


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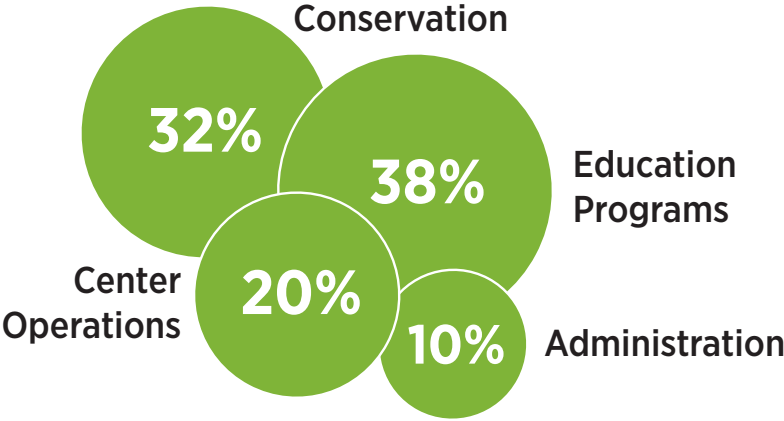
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## REVENUE

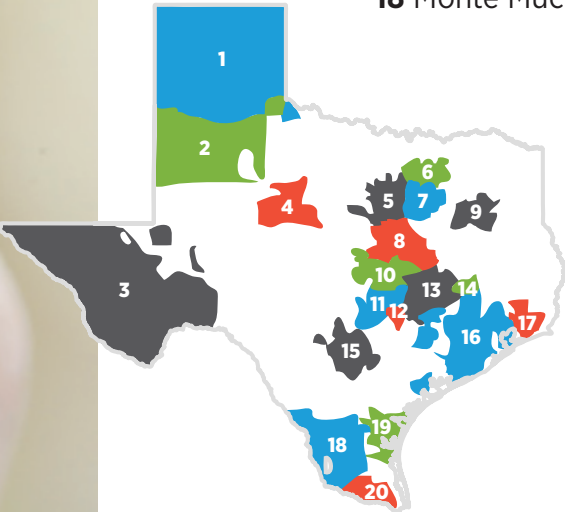


## EXPENSES



# TEXAS AUDUBON CHAPTERS

- 1 Texas Panhandle Audubon Society
- 2 Llano Estacado Audubon Society
- 3 El Paso Trans Pecos Audubon Society
- 4 Big Country Audubon Society
- 5 Fort Worth Audubon Society
- 6 Prairie & Timbers Audubon Society
- 7 Audubon Dallas
- 8 Central Texas Audubon Society
- 9 Tyler Audubon Society
- 10 Twin Lakes Audubon Society
- 11 Travis Audubon Society
- 12 Bastrop County Audubon Society
- 13 Rio Brazos Audubon Society
- 14 Huntsville Audubon Society
- 15 Bexar Audubon Society
- 16 Houston Audubon Society
- 17 Golden Triangle Audubon Society
- 18 Monte Mucho Audubon Society
- 19 Coastal Bend Audubon Society
- 20 Rio Grande Delta Audubon Society



“We are honored to be active participants in Audubon’s efforts to advance outdoor education. The 5th grade study goes right to the heart of the matter – a little outdoor education goes a long way to improve STEM education outcomes, shattering skeptical preconceptions that it can have little benefit with empirical proof. We are proud to help the Dogwood Canyon Audubon Center of Cedar Hill, TX lead the way in outdoor education and research.” – Bruce & Billie Ballangee



2015–2016 HONOR ROLL OF DONORS

We sincerely appreciate these generous donors who gave \$1,000 or more to our programs between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016. To all of our donors, thank you for your philanthropic investment and passion for the natural world we all strive to protect.

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- Galveston Bay Estuary Program

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Galveston Island Convention and Visitors Bureau

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Gulf Coast Bird Observatory

Harte Research Institute

Houston Audubon

International Crane Foundation

Katy Prairie Conservancy

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**GRINNELL LEGACY SOCIETY**

Audubon Texas thanks these generous Texans who have designated National Audubon Society in their estate plans:

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Javier F. G. Saldivar

Dr. and Mrs. Larry D. Sall

Linda Slay

Dr. Sue Ellen and Jackson Kelly Smith, Jr.

Jay Heppner and Sandra Tibbs

Willa K. Wright





**“If you take care of the birds, you take care of most of the big problems in the world.”**

**- Dr. Thomas Lovejoy**



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