



The Naturalist

Celebrating 50 Years of Bird Conservation

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July/August 2019



Greg Lavaty

Houston Audubon's Natives Nursery Provides Plants for Schools Across Houston

by Anna Vallery, Conservation Specialist

Spring was very busy in Houston Audubon's Natives Nursery. The nursery provided plants for many yards, restoration efforts, and plant sales. This spring, though, brought another group to the nursery—teachers! Thanks to the National Wildlife Federation's Monarch Heroes program, teachers from across Houston were given all the tools necessary to plant pocket prairies and pollinator gardens at their schools.

The Monarch Heroes program provides interested schools with professional development workshops for the science teacher leading their pollinator garden project. It also provides curriculum to teach alongside the garden, a grant to purchase supplies, and multiple site visits to help with layout and planning.



Travis Elementary

Pollinator gardens and pocket prairies provide a cost-effective and flexible educational tool for schools. They can provide lessons on the importance of pollinators, teach students about food web interactions, and provide the opportunity for citizen science to be conducted by the students. Alongside these educational benefits, pollinator gardens provide excellent food and habitat for our local bugs, thus providing more food and habitat for wildlife.



Monarchs by Joanne Kamo

Houston Audubon staff and volunteers have helped teachers from over 17 schools, most with additional support and education from the National Wildlife Federation, pick the perfect plants for their schoolyard. Some teachers have even brought along excited students to help pick the plants on a Friday morning. We are very excited for the future for monarchs, pollinators, and birds in Houston with all the habitat and support from their new, young advocates!



Garden Oaks Montessori

Our Mission: To advance the conservation of birds and positively impact their supporting environments.

Houston Audubon is a financially independent 501(c)(3) charitable conservation organization registered in the state of Texas and a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

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The Naturalist is also available in digital format on our website.

Sign up for E-News on our website for monthly updates and a link to The Naturalist.

Board of Directors Election Results

At the May 30 membership meeting, the slate of candidates to Houston Audubon's Board of Directors was elected as proposed.

Starting July 1, Lucy Barrow and Diane Schenke will be new Directors. Skip Almoney is the new President-Elect. Re-elected to the Board are Andy Lopez, Janeen Judah, Mary Carter, Rebecque Demark, James Vavasour, and Robert Westendarp. Leaving the Board are John Bartos, Doris Heard, and Peter Morris. We thank all our Board members for their invaluable service to Houston Audubon.

Houston-Galveston Wins City Nature Challenge!

Citizen scientists in the Greater Houston and Galveston area competed in the Third Annual City Nature Challenge and won first place in the United States for most species identified during April 26-29, 2019. The city took third place globally with Cape Town and Hong Kong coming in first and second respectively. The 2019 results are on the City Nature Challenge website at citynaturechallenge.org.



Meet Lauren Miheli

We've got a new face here at Houston Audubon! Lauren Miheli has just started as the Sanctuary and Volunteer Manager where she will be managing the Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary as well as organizing Houston Audubon's amazing volunteers. Prior to joining us, Lauren worked with The Nature Conservancy in Washington where she managed a statewide volunteer program focused on supporting conservation and outreach goals. Lauren is a fledging birder but an avid conservationist and environmentalist and is ready to learn more about Houston's feathered friends. With this position, she is most excited about the opportunity to use her creativity to find ways to connect more people to nature and to birds. Please join us in welcoming her!



Photo: Hannah Letinich

New Volunteer Orientation

Work in the Woods with Us! Conserve Nature. Learn New Things.
Saturday, August 10, 2019 | 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. | Edith L. Moore Log Cabin
For more info, contact Lauren Miheli at 713-932-1639 ext. 102
lmiheli@houstonaudubon.org

Plastic Free July

For the first time, and as part of our Plastic Pollution Initiative, Houston Audubon is participating in Plastic Free July! Plastic Free July was started in Western Australia in 2011 and has since grown to include millions of participants from more than 170 countries. The goal of Plastic Free July is to encourage individuals and organizations alike to be more aware of their plastic use.

If you would like to join Houston Audubon staff in their Plastic Free July participation, visit www.plasticfreejuly.org. Be on the lookout for regular tips and tricks for limiting your consumption of single-use plastic on our social media channels and website throughout the month of July. There are details about alternatives for plastic on the Plastic Free July website.

—Anna Vallery, Conservation Specialist



Birdathon

Thank you for helping to make
Birdathon 2019 a huge success!

By the numbers

- \$43,107 raised
- 34 teams registered
- 93 participants registered, including 44 new to Birdathon
- 97 elementary school participants, including 32 first-time birders

Award Winners

- Oberholser/Most Species Identified: Feather Struck with 172 species
- Whittington/Most Funds Raised: High Island Crew with \$5,834
- Rookie of the Year: Bad Birders of Houston are a first-year team that raised \$4,684 and identified 155 species
- Raven Award for most corvids: High Island Crew with 31 corvids
- Best Story: Bad Birders of Houston
- Best Team Name: No Egrets
- Best Photo: Steve Astrich (Magnolia Warbler invading my personal space)

Birdathon Committee

Jonni Almoney, Cindy Bartos, Judith Schott, Becky Smith, Pam Smolen

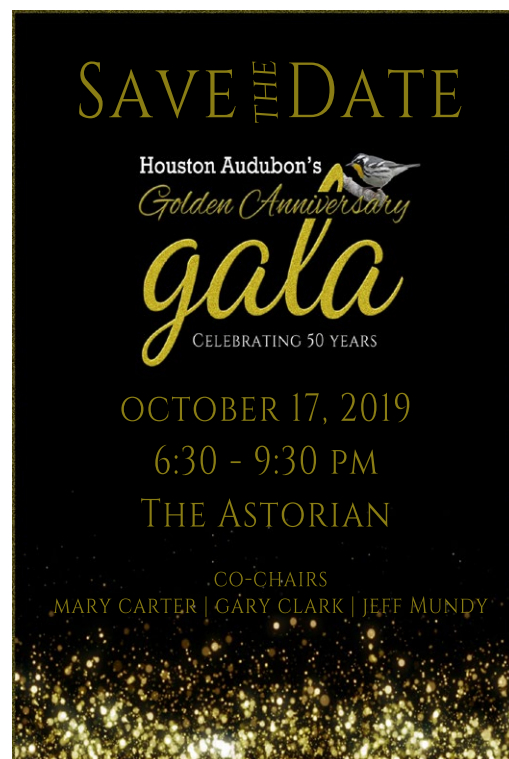
Sponsors

Abbott Contracting, Copy.com, Houston Camera Exchange, Land Sea & Sky, Sword Plumbing, Wild Birds Unlimited

Donors

Copy.com, Hoffman Haus, The Inn at Fulton Harbor, Moody Gardens, Raven Grill, Rockport Birding, Saint Arnold

Find the Top 10 Leaderboards for Most Species Identified and Most Funds Raised on the Birdathon 2019 page of our website. While you're there, check out the photo gallery of the celebration party!



Vote for the Bird of Houston!

What bird comes to mind when you think of Houston? Is it the Great Blue Heron foraging along the bayou or the Great-tailed Grackle scoping out the local HEB parking lot? We want to hear from you! Help us select a bird species that perfectly represents the Bayou City.

We're currently taking submissions until July 15, after which we will open voting for the top 5 birds. Visit houstonaudubon.org/birdofhouston to nominate a bird!

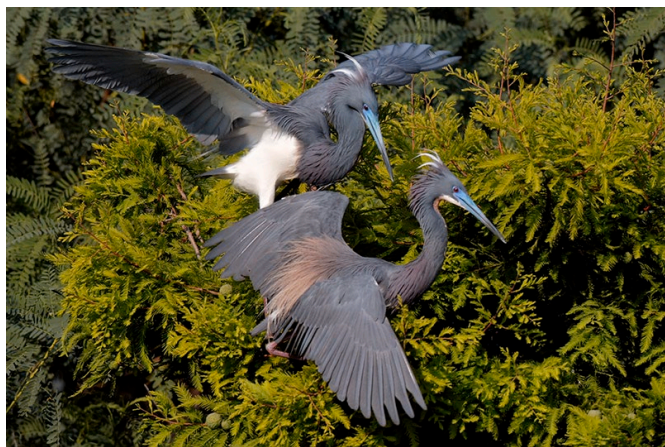
We'll announce the winner at the beginning of our 50th anniversary Bird Week festivities the last week of September.

High Island Spring Migration 2019

by Richard Gibbons, Conservation Director

Another fine spring migration has yielded to the steady onshore winds of summer. By the time the last wave of migrants pushes northward through the Gulf region, the tide of migration will change with the first wave of southbound migrants passing them. The cast of avian characters is ever changing. So it was in High Island as well. Bryce Loschen, Lark Heston, and Maria Hart, Houston Audubon's seasonal Conservation Technicians, spent months removing and treating exotic invasive plants; maintaining trails and boardwalks; helping volunteers and visitors; and monitoring birds at various locations. They provided a steady presence in High Island and we're grateful for their work.

A visit to High Island is, at its essence, shaped by volunteers. From the Boy Scout Woods kiosk admissions and sales tables to the Smith Oaks greeting tent and spotting scope stations, volunteers with decades of experience and neophytes on their first hitch brought energy, good cheer, and a deep well of knowledge to help visitors have a wonderful experience. For that we simply can't say thank you enough.



Tricolored Herons at High Island
by Joanne Kamo

There were professionally led bird walks provided by the inimitable Tropical Birding Guides five days a week, three times a day. In addition, this was the inaugural year for wildlife photography walks, also led by Tropical Birding. This was a wonderful follow-up activity after the first annual Flight in Focus weekend, a series of wildlife photography speakers and workshops catering to the burgeoning birding-with-a-camera visitors. Participants enjoyed sunrise and sunset shoots at the rookery and shared their images during lunch and dinner gatherings.



Black-throated Blue Warbler at High Island
by Joanne Kamo

There are always birds that help us remember a particular spring and this year was no different. Probably the most memorable species this spring were the Black-throated Blue Warblers seen on several days and the Fork-tailed Flycatchers that were observed for three days, first near Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge then in the Smith Oaks parking lot.

Land Sea & Sky and Swarovski helped visitors try out new equipment and troubleshoot equipment issues. The new Swarovski "Experience" trailer had its maiden voyage in High Island, and it was fabulous. There were scopes and binoculars pointing every which way, providing ridiculously fine views of all kinds of birds and wildlife.

Of course everyone comes to see the nesting egrets and spoonbills. The engineered water conveyance improvements made the water level in Claybottom Pond higher than anyone could remember, which meant there was nesting habitat far to the south of the main nesting island. Grackle Pond in Smith Oaks was a fan favorite with nesting Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, Little Blue Herons, and Roseate Spoonbills.

Speaking of visitors, a good variety of human visitors continued with registered guests from 46 states and 16 countries. We estimate there was a modest increase of visitors over the previous year.

Another bit of buzz this spring was the unveiling of the Smith Oaks Improvements. New permanent restrooms, a renovated pumphouse pavilion, and the Kathrine McGovern Canopy Walkway have a target completion date of March 2020.

Many visitors noticed the steady march of habitat restoration in Smith Oaks. What keeps us all going is the mission to provide sanctuaries where birds can rest and refuel. That we can watch these migratory birds use this stopover habitat and learn at the same time is what makes this hill in the marsh so special. We hope to see you there next year!

Flight in Focus

by Mary Anne Weber, Education Director

As Houston Audubon celebrates 50 years of bird conservation this year, we also continue to look to the future of birds, bird conservation and birding. The dawn of the more accessible DSLR camera and the seriously great cellphone camera has launched a new love affair with birds for people around the world. Birders are now carrying both binoculars and cameras and in many instances just cameras. The new passion for photographing birds is hard to miss at popular hot spots around the region.

In 2007 we launched the Houston Audubon Nature Photography Association. This group is open to all Houston Audubon members and meets monthly at the Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary. As the popularity of bird photography by both novices and professionals has increased, it seemed like a good time to celebrate both Houston Audubon's anniversary and this new exploding hobby. Flight in Focus 2019 was the end result of careful planning by the conservation and education teams.

The weekend event was held at the High Island Community Center and was chock full of fantastic speakers and excursions to the rookery at Smith Oaks. Participants enjoyed talks on bird photography basics and beyond. Photography workshops were held on a variety of topics including hummingbirds, shorebirds, eagles, and much more. Folks also had the opportunity to try out new equipment from Swarovski at both the rookery and at the raptor photography shoot on day 2.

The weekend was so successful that we are already planning for a mini version on October 12 at the Houston Audubon Raptor and Education Center in South Houston. On the first weekend in April 2020 we will hold a two-day event at High Island. If you would like additional information, please contact me at maweber@houstonaudubon.org



Great Egret and Neotropic Cormorant at the Smith Oaks Rookery by Mary Anne Weber

2019 Coastal Volunteers

Thanks to all who helped out on the coast!

Skip Almoney • Nick Aring • Dawn Asher • Norma Barnes • Cindy Bartos • John Bartos • Lynn Bell • Annie Benzon
Betsy Black • Peggy Boston • Marcie Brown • Simone Brown • Winnie Burkett • Debbie Burnett • Angela Busceme
Richard Carey • Carlton Collier • Fred Collins • Ellen Coombs • Pam Defazio • Effie Dickensens • Donna Diggons
Nancy Dobbs • Mary Dodson • Marianne Feeney • Joanna Friesen • Julia Garrett • Renee Gedaly • Betty Glass
Carol Golden • Mary Good • Robert Goode • Carol Beth Gore • John Gray • Milton Gray • Shelia Hargis
Betsy Harwood • Barbara Hickl • Ed Hickl • June Hill • Karen Hoffman • Bernice Hotman • Ben Hulsey
Charlona Ingram • Bernice Jackson • Ed Jackson • Mike Jeter • Debbie Kimmey • Paige Krekler • Laurel Ladwig
Crystal Larson • Stein Larson • Leif Larson • Meade LeBlanc • Andy Loker • Carol Lynn Loker • Rhonda Marshall
Bill Matthews • Michael McGinity • Sandy McHone • Sandra Moore • Millie Morgan • Kathleen Murphy • Lisa Murray
Steve Murray • Tim O'Connell • Alice Anne O'Donell • Les Pearce • Frank Perkins • Vaughn Phillips
Mindee Poldrack • Steve Powell • Lisa Purnell • Nigel Purnell • Sherri Roden • Terry Rooney • Judith Schott
Jim Sirois • Nina Sitra • Houston Sliger • Becky Smith • Elsie Smith • Sam Smith • Dede Snaveley • Chris Steinke
Barbara Stern Ceal Stirling • Bruce Storts • Billie Strickland • David Swaim • Mark Swanson • Lily Sweet • Gretchen Thoman
Mike Thoman • Barbara Tilton • Regina Tippet • Don Verser • Kelly Walker • Joan Ward • Frances Weston
Greg Whittaker • Jana Whittle • Betsy Winn • Jim Winn • Mary Yurkovich • Brenda Zeh • Liz Zivley

High Island Partners

Tropical Birding • Land Sea & Sky • Swarovski Optik • High Island ISD • Joanne Kamo • Greg Lavaty • The Cottage

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher—*Empidonax flaviventris*

by Glenn Olsen, GO Birding Ecotours

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher breeds in the boreal forest and bogs of Canada and a few northern states with the proper habitat. They migrate through our area primarily in mid-April through May en route to the breeding grounds. We are next likely to encounter them in fall migration, mid-August through September, as they return to Mexico and Central America for the winter.

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher looks very much like the other empids, making identification both a challenge and a learning opportunity. Much of the identification metrics for a particular empid is based on comparing it to other empids. For example, the Yellow-bellied is overall olive-green on the upper parts like the Acadian Flycatcher but the Acadian is a lighter, brighter tone of green. While other empids may have a tinge of yellow in the undersides, the undersides of the Yellow-bellied generally has a more pronounced yellowish wash overall. In addition, it usually has a yellow wash in the throat and chin which all other eastern empids lack. However, in the fall and in some spring individuals, the yellow wash may not be so distinct. Great caution must be exercised in determining color as it appears different if the bird is in a shaded area versus a sunny area. The quality of your optics as well as your own perception can also lead you astray.

Other characteristics to look for include a large, round-headed appearance, usually a pronounced eye-ring, small bill, long primary projection, and bold wing bars in the spring (more worn in the fall). The primary projection is the relative length of the extension of the primary wing feathers beyond the tertials on the folded wing of a bird. This is once again a comparative measure relative to the other empids. Bear in mind that the field marks used for identification are subjective in nature and open to different interpretations. Most empids are best identified by song; however, they are not usually singing when they pass through our area. So, if you are not certain of the ID—and this often happens to me—it is perfectly acceptable to say that it was an empid and leave it at that.

Thank goodness the other eastern flycatchers are not this difficult to ID!



Yellow-bellied Flycatcher by Greg Lavaty

Birding Classes with Glenn Olsen

Fall Semester 2019 (September–December)

Subjects: Flycatchers (Sep), Hawk Migration (Sep), Introduction to Birding (Oct), Wintering Sparrows (Nov), and Wintering Waterfowl (Dec). Each course includes a class at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary and a field trip.

Urban Birding is offered at the Glasscock School of Continuing Studies at Rice University.

Details are on our website.



A Sampler of Houston Audubon's Fall Programs

See our website for the complete list of fall activities.

Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

Titmouse Club, Bayou Buddies, Owl Prowls
After School Nature Explorers Club, Field Trips

Raptor and Education Center

BIRD Buddies, Owl Prowls, Field Trips

Behind-the-Scenes Tours of the Raptor and Education Center

Get "enraptured"! Learn about our native raptors and their conservation, meet raptors up close with lots of photo ops and discover what it takes to run a raptor center. This private event occurs before our open hours and space is limited.

Houston Audubon Nature Photography Association

Our first meeting of the new year will be on September 4 with Fayette County Rewind and the Chiggers (not your average band). This hearty group that braved the chiggers of Fayette County will tell about their experience exploring Power Plant Lake and Brown Lake with Gene Luhn. They will also show off their favorite photos from the day.

Bus Trips for Seniors

Bolivar Flats & Fort Travis Park

Monday, August 26

Quintana & Quintana Beach County Park

Friday, September 6

These bus trips are only for Houston Audubon members who are 50 and over. The bus departs from Memorial City Mall. Find details about the trips on our website.

Free Sanctuary Walks and Bird Surveys

Bolivar Beach Ramble

First Saturday of each month with Sanctuary Manager Pete Deichmann.

Monthly Surveys

At locations throughout Houston. All experience levels welcome! Find details and maps in the Birding section of our website. Remember to check for last minute schedule updates.

In the Summer Skies Over Houston

Join us at these free events!

Purple Martin Migration

Houston Audubon is hosting Purple Martin Watch Events on

- Saturday, July 27
- Saturday, August 17
- Saturday, September 21

Visit our website for times and locations.



Purple Martins at a watch event by Joe Smith

Swift Night Out

Community Swift Night Out: August 6

To kick off our Swift Night Out events, we have planned a Community Swift Night at multiple locations throughout Houston on Tuesday, August 6. The backup rain date is Saturday, September 14. A count is short and sweet (around 30 minutes at dusk), but can make a real difference in understanding the behavior of this unique species. We'll spread out across the city at various sites where we think Chimney Swifts may be roosting—at large silo-style chimneys and in specially-designed Chimney Swift towers. Details and locations are on our website.

St. Paul's Methodist Church: August 27

Pershing Middle School, Bellaire: September 3

Nature Discovery Center, Bellaire: September 7

Spring Branch Silos: September 8

Lakeview Elementary, Sugar Land: September 20

Kleb Woods: September 27



Join Houston Audubon

Name _____

Address ☐ Please check box to indicate address change

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Telephone _____ E-mail _____

☐ \$500 (Gold) ☐ \$250 (Silver) ☐ \$100 (Bronze)

☐ \$50 (Family) ☐ \$30 (Individual) ☐ \$15 (Student)

I would like to add a donation to my membership: \$ _____

Sign up online with your credit card
at houstonaudubon.org



Send this form to: Houston Audubon Society
440 Wilchester Blvd.
Houston, TX 77079-7329

All funds remain with Houston Audubon
in support of its mission and local sanctuaries.

Houston Audubon

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Calendar of Events

July

- 1 Hogg Sanctuary Bird Survey
- 4 Houston Botanic Garden Bird Survey
- 6 Behind-the-scenes Raptor Center Tour
- 6 Bolivar Beach Ramble
- 6 Seabrook Bird Survey
- 8-12 Summer Camp at Raptor and Education Center
- 8 Hermann Park Bird Survey
- 9 Rice University Bird Survey
- 13 Armand Bayou Bird Survey
- 13 Houston Arboretum Bird Survey
- 13 Woodland Park Bird Survey
- 16 Kickerillo-Mischer Bird Survey
- 20 Willow Waterhole Bird Survey
- 23 Rice University Bird Survey
- 24 Archbishop Fiorenza Bird Survey
- 27 Purple Martin Watch Event
- 29-2 Summer Camp at Raptor and Education Center



Audubon Foundation of Texas
represents Houston Audubon in
the Earth Share of Texas payroll
deduction plan for charitable giving.

August

- 1 Houston Botanic Garden Survey
- 3 Bolivar Beach Ramble
- 3 Memorial Park - Eastern Glades Survey
- 3 Seabrook Bird Survey
- 5 Hogg Sanctuary Bird Survey
- 6 Community Swift Night Out
- 10 New Volunteer Orientation
- 10 Armand Bayou Nature Center Bird Survey
- 10 Houston Arboretum Bird Survey
- 12 Hermann Park Bird Survey
- 13 Rice University Bird Survey
- 17 Purple Martin Watch Event
- 17 Willow Waterhole Bird Survey
- 20 Kickerillo-Mischer Bird Survey
- 26 Bus Trip for Houston Audubon Seniors
- 27 Rice University Bird Survey
- 27 Swift Night Out at St. Paul's Methodist Church
- 28 Archbishop Fiorenza Bird Survey
- 31 Woodland Park Bird Survey