HOUSTON AUDUBON ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025

July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025



Yellow Warbler / Scott Buckel



ABOUT US

HOUSTON AUDUBON'S MISSION IS TO ADVANCE THE CONSERVATION OF BIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS IN THE GREATER HOUSTON GULF COAST REGION.



Houston Audubon protects over 4,100 acres of wetlands, piney wood forest, coastal woodlots and prairie, and beach habitat within its system of sanctuaries located throughout the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region. Our sanctuaries provide critical habitat for almost 400 species of birds and serve as community spaces where people walk, learn, meditate, socialize, explore, and connect with nature. Houston Audubon is a nationally accredited land trust and a recognized leader in avian conservation and nature education, delivering hundreds of programs annually that connect people to nature and inspire communities to take action to protect birds and wildlife.



Red-headed Woodpecker / Lili Banta

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends,

As I reflect on Fiscal Year 2025, I am reminded of the resilience and deep sense of purpose that define Houston Audubon. This past year was one of transition — from a period of interim leadership following the departure of a long-tenured President & CEO to my arrival in January. Although I have only been with the organization for six months as of the close of this fiscal year, I began this work with immense respect for Houston Audubon's legacy and an even greater passion for its mission.

My first months were focused on listening and learning: getting to know our dedicated staff, visiting our sanctuaries, understanding our operational strengths and challenges, and meeting the supporters, partners, and volunteers who make this mission possible. What I found was an organization rooted in scientific excellence, beloved in the community, and guided by people who care deeply for birds and the places they depend on.

Even amid leadership transitions, FY25 was a year of meaningful progress. Most notably, we launched the Save Bolivar Campaign—a transformational effort and one of the most significant conservation investments in Houston Audubon's history. This initiative supports the acquisition of over 52 acres on the Bolivar Peninsula to protect vulnerable coastal habitats and strengthen the ecological integrity of Bolivar Flats. This work represents not just a land acquisition, but a generational commitment to safeguarding one of the most important migratory bird sites in the hemisphere.

Throughout the year, we also demonstrated strong financial stewardship, ensuring that resources were managed prudently while continuing to advance critical conservation work. Despite the transitions, we maintained stability in our programs, sanctuary operations, and community engagement. This resilience is a testament to the professionalism and dedication of our staff, volunteers, and supporters who uphold Houston Audubon's standards of excellence.

As we look ahead, the groundwork laid this year positions Houston Audubon for a period of renewed focus and strategic growth. My goal is to honor the remarkable history that brought us here while guiding the organization into its next chapter—one that strengthens our sanctuaries, deepens our community impact, protects critical coastal landscapes, and ensures that birds thrive across the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.

Thank you for your continued trust, generosity, and belief in this mission. Together, we will ensure that Houston Audubon remains a resilient, forward-thinking leader in bird conservation for decades to come.

With gratitude,

Jed Aplaca

President & CEO, Houston Audubon

SANCTUARIES



In FY2025, Houston Audubon owned and managed 17 nature sanctuaries spanning Greater Houston and the Upper Texas Coast, totaling over 4,100 acres of diverse habitat critical to almost 400 species of birds.

We welcomed thousands of visitors from all 50 states and more than 20 different countries to our coastal sanctuaries to witness the magic of spring migration on the Upper Texas Coast.

WEATHER IMPACTS

The new fiscal year started with a bang! On July 8, 2024, Hurricane Beryl barreled ashore near Matagorda, TX and traversed the Houston region, causing widespread power outages and tree damage. While our coastal sanctuaries were spared the brunt of the storm, our urban and northern sanctuaries weren't so lucky. Several large fallen trees and limbs



ELMNS July 2024

impacted boardwalks, bridges, and buildings, prompting the closure of Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary for several weeks while staff and contractors worked to address public safety concerns. At Winters Bayou, multiple downed trees made the trail impassable until staff and volunteers from the Piney Wood Lakes Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists were able to coordinate a workday in November 2024. Thank you to our incredible staff and volunteers for all the hard work clearing trails and keeping visitors safe after this unfortunate event.

In January of this year, coastal staff were faced with more severe weather in the form of a snow storm. Over 3 inches of snow fell in High Island—a rare but beautiful occurrence. This storm pushed in some unexpected feathered visitors in the form of several warblers (both waterthrushes and some Ovenbirds), a Wood Thrush, and a Chuck-will's-widow that ultimately spent the remainder of the winter at Smith Oaks.

RARE BIRD SIGHTINGS

Spring migration in the High Island sanctuaries was characterized by strong south winds and few fronts, making visitors work a little harder to find birds, but better weather for the migrants themselves. A strong front finally arrived during the first week in May which produced three fantastic days of migrants feeding in the woods before continuing north. Highlights from this spring include:



- Red-footed Booby and Cassin's Kingbird at Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary
- Yellow-green Vireo and Western Tanager at Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary
- Hooded Oriole at Boy Scout Woods Bird Sanctuary
- American Flamingos at Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary & Evia Island Vagrants to the region outside of Houston Audubon properties included several exceptional occurrences such as a Yellow-headed Caracara in Galveston, "Amur" Stonechat at Jocelyn Nungaray (Anahuac) NWR, and Gray Kingbird in Houston.



LAND CONSERVATION

HABITAT RESTORATION

Staff, volunteers, and contractors managed to remove invasive plant species from a total of 16 acres within our coastal properties this fiscal year. Efforts were primarily made within Boy Scout Woods and Eubanks Sanctuaries. An additional 14 acres of prairie and wooded habitat were maintained via mowing and removal of invasive plants as-needed within Boy Scout Woods, Gast Red Bay, and Smith Oaks Sanctuaries.



NATIVE PLANT NURSERIES

Our Natives Nursery at Edith Moore Nature Sanctuary provides plants for community members and partners to restore habitat in their own spaces. Our fall and spring plant sales sold over 1,700 plants! In total, over 6,300 native plants from this nursery were sold, donated, or planted in our sanctuaries.

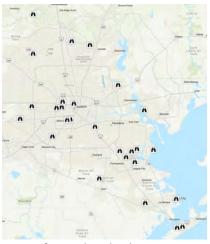
Plants propagated at our Entergy Coastal Natives Nursery in High Island are used for restoration at our coastal sanctuaries. Over the course of this fiscal year, staff and volunteers propagated approximately 650 native trees/shrubs and 400 forbs. 300 plants grown from our nursery were planted within our sanctuaries.

SURVEYING & MONITORING

Staff and volunteers are continually monitoring species in and around our sanctuaries. This valuable data helps direct management efforts and contributes to larger data sets for use by federal, state, and other regional professionals. This year, we completed 35 Audubon Coastal Bird Surveys at Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary and High Island beach, 41 Roosting surveys of the Smith Oaks Sanctuary Rookery, and 10 surveys of Long Bird and Evia Islands, the last of which Houston Audubon is contracted by the Port Houston Authority for management and monitoring.



HA staff performing bird surveys



Map of HA urban bird surveys

URBAN BIRD SURVEYS

We conduct monthly urban bird surveys across the region with the help of our volunteers and partners. This critical community science effort gathers data that will help scientists evaluate population changes and understand which species might require special management. We added five survey locations this year, bringing us to 28 locations. In total, we completed 227 urban bird surveys and documented a combined 249 species.

TEXAS WATERBIRD CENSUS

Staff surveyed eleven sites throughout Galveston Bay and High Island for nesting colonial waterbirds in May. Highlights included continued increases in nesting birds at the Smith Oaks Rookery in High Island. This included the highest counts of Roseate Spoonbill and Anhinga nests in about a decade. Large numbers of Black Skimmers utilizing Long Bird Island was also a pleasant surprise as the species has declined by nearly 70% in the past 50 years in Texas.

BEACH-NESTING BIRDS

Each summer, staff monitor five sites on the Bolivar Peninsula for beach-nesting birds. Despite the flooding from Hurricane Beryl, the summer 2024 season was successful for Wilson's Plovers with most nests hatching just prior to the beginning of the fiscal year.



Wilson's Plover nest Sarah Belles, American Bird Conservancy

Four clutches were observed following Beryl's passage. A Snowy Plover chick with adult in close attendance was also observed near High Island in the day following Hurricane Beryl, a surprise first documentation of breeding for the Bolivar Peninsula in nearly a decade. Least Terns on the other hand had virtually no productivity in summer 2024, though many first-year birds were present. In summer 2025, several hundred pairs attempted to nest at both Bolivar Flats and the Port Bolivar Ferry Landing beach with a high count of approximately 100 nests documented.

BIRD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

BIRD-FRIENDLY SPACES

The Bird-Friendly Spaces program, which recognizes community members and organizations who are actively supporting birds and wildlife in their personal spaces, continues to grow with 18 new participants recognized for their work in creating a bird-safe space around their home. In the community, we partnered with Rice University's Holistic Garden where collaborations between Houston Audubon and the Holistic Garden will aim to make the campus at Rice more bird-friendly.



Yard of Melissa Stappen, Bird-Friendly Spaces participant





Lights Out, Texas! documentary screening and panel discussion in partnership with the Houston Zoo

LIGHTS OUT FOR BIRDS

Migrating birds navigate using celestial bodies and earthly landmarks; however, this becomes extremely difficult when the sky is veiled with light pollution from our cities. The result is that migrating birds are disoriented and drawn towards cities, often colliding with windows or getting lost on their migration route. Our Lights Out for Birds program was launched in 2017 to reduce light pollution in Houston to protect birds, and this year we focused our efforts on building relationships with property owners and managers in addition to spreading the word to the community.

Our partners at MetroNational continue to amaze us with their dedication to creating safer buildings for birds. In fact, 12 additional buildings managed by MetroNational pledged to turn their lights out during migration. An additional 25 buildings in Houston also made the Lights Out pledge!

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



We continue to maintain the pollinator garden at Burnett Bayland Park alongside Harris County Precinct 4, Madres del Parque, Migrants and Refugee Leadership Academy Houston, and Fit Houston. The native plants in this garden come directly from the Natives Nursery at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary and include blue mistflower, little bluestem grass, American basketflower, Texas coneflower, black-eyed Susans, and rattlesnake master.



Houston Audubon staff were thrilled to participate in the Texas Crab Festival on the Bolivar Peninsula in May 2025. We enjoyed getting to know the locals better and meeting many of the part-time residents and visitors at this fun community event. We had great conversations about our impending Bolivar Peninsula Nature Trail, Save Bolivar campaign, our beach-nesting birds initiative, and all of the other fun events and volunteer opportunities we have on the coast.



Witness event "Blooming into History: Beautiful, Fierce and Free" at Keegans Bayou, April 2025

Houston Audubon participated in The Witness Series again this year—an Artist Led, Nature Centered and Community Driven series of events led by Kristi Rangel, Houston-based multi-disciplinary artist and education advocate, and co-curated in partnership with artists from the Native American, African American, Latinx, Pacific Islander and Asian communities. Every Witness experience is designed to bring communities together through the power of nature and provide historically under-served

communities with greater access to nature-based opportunities. Our activities included nest box giveaways, walks to identify birds and native plants, and reflective walks that highlighted notable African-Americans in history with relationships to birds and nature.

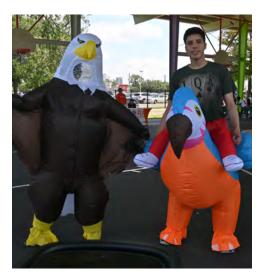
EDUCATION & OUTREACH PROGRAMMING

This fiscal year, Houston Audubon reached over 11,000 people through over 200 education and outreach programs at our sanctuaries and across the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.



We collaborated with Dulles High School student Amanda Jerng and our partners at Cullinan Park Conservancy to lead a student bird walk this spring. Over 40 people attended, spotting a variety of species including Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Common and Purple Gallinules with chicks, and Limpkins. In Amanda's words, "Everyone was still, focused, and teetering with suspense to see what would pop out next, generating a sense of unity that was hard not to smile at."

Houston Audubon, Madres del Parque, and Harris County Precinct 4 hosted a World Migratory Bird Day celebration at Burnett Bayland Park. We celebrated this year's theme of "Shared Spaces: Creating Bird Friendly Cities and Communities" with fun and educational activities for the whole family. For kids, there were bird-themed games, crafts, and face painting. Some of the cultural highlights were a live mariachi band, Mexican folk dances and an Ethiopian coffee ceremony. Attendees were able to view our pollinator gardens and learn about the importance of native plants.





Houston Audubon volunteer Adelayde Rivas led a Forest Therapy walk for Hispanic businesswomen at Edith Moore Nature Sanctuary, sponsored by the Pretty Woman Live talk show. Participants put away their phones and engaged all their senses in reconnecting with nature, quietly observing the trees and animal movements while walking along the trails. Afterwards, everyone sat down together with tea to share about their grounding experience.

HOUSTON BIRD WEEK 2024

The 6th annual Houston Bird Week in September 2024 featured 44 different events throughout the region. Events included bird walks, trash cleanups, art classes, cycling events, birdy yoga, and more. We welcomed almost 2,000 combined event attendees, with over 32,000 people reached digitally. Thank you to our fantastic partner organizations, volunteers, and participants. Special shout out to our YPAC for leading the effort and coordinating an awesome week of free events for the community.



Bird walk at E.R. and Ann Taylor Park



Willowbrook Watch Party, July 2024

PURPLE MARTIN WATCH PARTIES

Houston Audubon hosted Purple Martin Watch Parties to invite the public to witness the miracle of martin migration in Houston. We held four events at the Stafford and Willowbrook roosts, drawing in over 450 people, including many families and first-time participants. Thankfully, Hurricane Beryl did not deter them, as they showed up on the weather radar just a few days after it hit.

PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Houston Audubon presented 31 programs for preschool children and their families at Edith Moore Nature Sanctuary, such as Fledgling Friends and Stories & Crafts. Fledgling Friends is a series of 12 classes where children and their caregivers learn about native Texas wildlife. Every class is interactive, engages the senses, and includes stories, songs, movement activities, nature walks and a craft. Our Stories and Crafts program follows a similar format, but allows participants to enroll in individual classes rather than a series. We also accommodated field trips from neighboring preschools.



We also hosted a summer camp at Yorkshire Academy titled "Crawl, Wiggle and Fly: Invertebrate Investigation." 16 young campers explored ladybugs, roly polys, snails, spiders, dragonflies and bees. We are grateful for the National Honor Society students from Stratford High School that volunteered their time to help with the camp.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers remain the heart of Houston Audubon's mission, and this year their dedication shone brighter than ever. In the wake of Hurricane Beryl, when Edith L. Moore Sanctuary suffered extensive damage, our Trail Crew volunteers stepped in with compassion and determination—joined by support from Harris County—to clear debris, repair trails, and help us safely reopen a place beloved by so many.

At the ELMNS Natives Nursery, volunteers nurtured seeds, propagated thousands of native plants, and continued expanding Bird-Friendly Spaces across Houston, carrying on late volunteer Flo Hannah's legacy with care and pride. At High Island, monthly volunteer crews prepared trails, improved habitats, and welcomed the steady rhythm of Spring Migration. Farther north, the Piney Woods Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists supported vital trail and boardwalk repairs at Winters Bayou Sanctuary, ensuring these remote habitats remain protected and accessible. Our Young Professionals Advisory Council (YPAC) volunteers added energy and momentum, leading Bird Week celebrations and welcoming a new cohort of young conservation advocates.

492
VOLUNTEERS

\$305,232 FINANCIAL IMPACT 9,087 HOURS



Winters Bayou Sanctuary workday, November 2024



Students from Klein Cain High School Key Club collected over 25 pounds of litter from the ELM trails

We were honored this year to recognize Mary Spolyar, Mike McGinity, Riki Miller, David Swaim, Sandra Moore, Gretchen & Mike Thoman, and Bette & Paul Lester, whose service exemplifies the generosity and community spirit that sustains our work.

FUNDRAISING EVENTS

AVIAN AFFAIR 2024: SOAR INTO FLAVOR

In October 2024, Houston Audubon hosted its annual Avian Affair fundraiser honoring our former education director, Mary Anne Morris, who dedicated over two decades of service to educating the community about bird conservation. The event's theme, *Soar into Flavor*, centered on the abundance of local foods found in nature enjoyed by both birds and humans. Our guests celebrated the evening on theme by tasting a menu of sustainably sourced dishes paired with exceptional wines. Houston Audubon raised over \$308,000 from our generous guests in support of our mission to protect birds and their habitats in the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.



Avian Affair 2024



Roughwings Birdathon Classroom Team

BIRDATHON 2025

Birdathon is our annual spring fundraiser where teams compete to identify the most bird species in a 24-hour period and to raise the most funds during the season. This year, our teams brought in a breaking \$72,234 for bird conservation! Our participants never cease to amaze us. This year, the High Island Buddies raised \$16,545.90, leading them to win the Whittington Award for the team with the most funds raised. Meanwhile, a rookie team, Meepers Peepers, won the Oberholser Award for the most species identified. Out of all the teams, the general public voted "Out on a Lark" as the best team name and team photo! Congratulations to all of our teams and a heartfelt thank you to our fundraisers and donors!

EVENING ON THE CANOPY

Our annual Evening on the Canopy fundraiser in April 2025 was a success, bringing in over \$25,000. This event allows guests an opportunity to experience the wonders of spring bird migration in Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary after the crowds have dispersed. Guests joined us in the historic pumphouse for dinner, mingled as they strolled the McGovern Canopy Walkway, and concluded the magical evening with a sunset Rookery Talk in front of the nesting birds settling in for the evening.

DONORS

Thank you to the following generous donors who supported Houston Audubon this year:

\$100,000+

2007 Linder-Gallogly Revocable Trust Carol and Dan Price Jesse W. Couch Charitable Foundation

\$50,000-\$99,999

CenterPoint Energy Foundation CITGO Petroleum Corporation Dallas G. McNamara Estate of Jim Winn Estate of Mary Lou Fowler John P. McGovern Foundation The Brown Foundation, Inc. The Powell Foundation U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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\$2,500-\$4,999

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\$1,000-\$2,499

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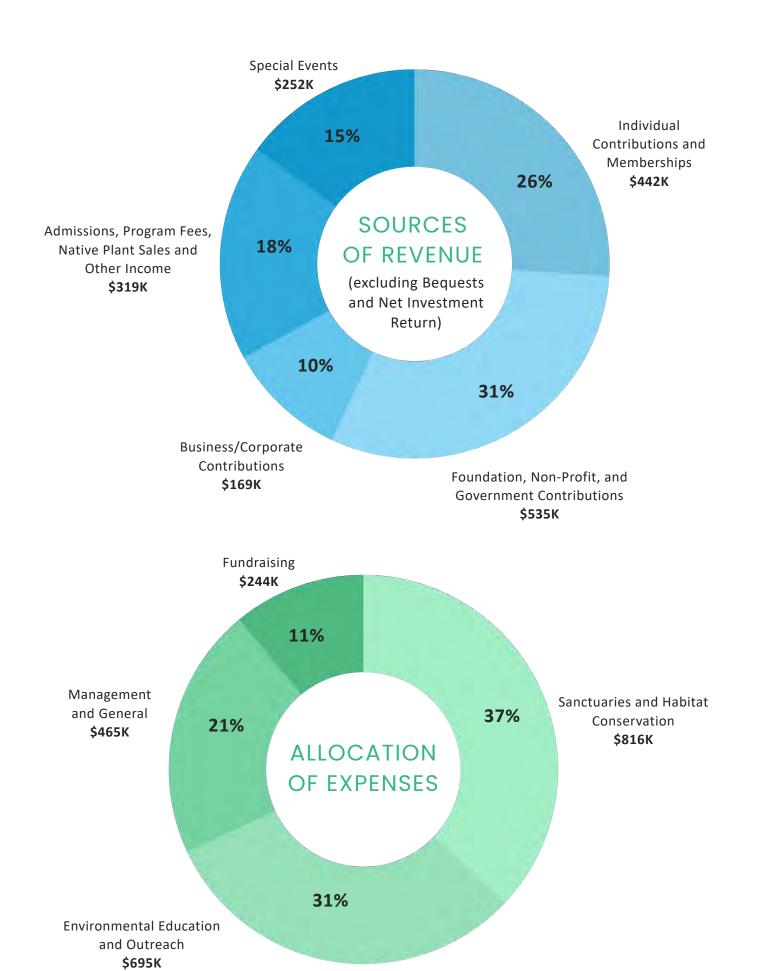
FINANCIAL SUMMARY

JULY 1, 2024 - JUNE 30, 2025

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| Contributions with donor restrictions (excluding bequests) | \$ 453,927 |
|---|---------------|
| Contributions without donor restrictions (excluding bequests) | 691,861 |
| Bequests with donor restrictions | 1,141,528 |
| Bequests without donor restrictions | 2,191,677 |
| Special events | 333,915 |
| Less: direct donor benefits | (82,170) |
| Admission, program fees and other income | 249,525 |
| Merchandise and native plant sales | 70,097 |
| Net investment return | 436,129 |
| Total revenue | 5,486,489 |
| EXPENSES | |
| Program services: | |
| Sanctuaries and habitat conservation | 816,084 |
| Environmental education and outreach | 694,576 |
| Total program services | 1,510,660 |
| Management and general | 464,911 |
| Fundraising | 243,768 |
| Total expenses | 2,219,339 |
| CHANGE IN NET ASSETS | 3,267,150 |
| Net assets, beginning of year | 13,945,648 |
| Net assets, end of year | \$ 17,212,798 |

Audited financial statements available at houstonaudubon.org/financials.



STAFF

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Jed Aplaca

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