



A Strategic Roadmap to
Collaborative Conservation that
Benefits Birds, Wildlife, and People in
the Houston Gulf Coast Region

September 2023

HOUSTON AUDUBON

2024-2034 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



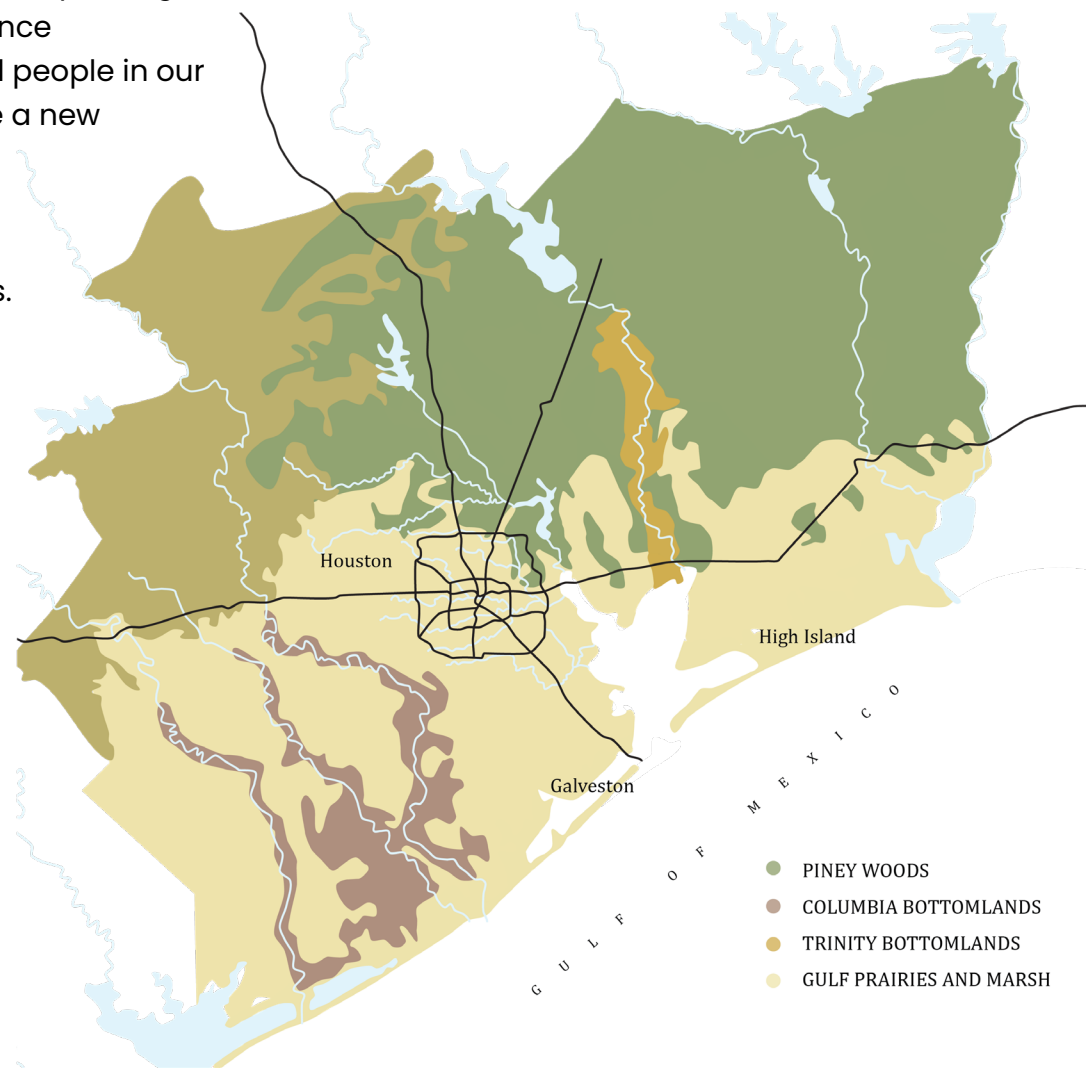
Birds make big contributions across habitats, and they're crucial for people and the planet to thrive. When avian species are lost, their particular functions and benefits disappear, too. From controlling pests, pollinating plants, serving as nature's cleaning crew to helping to maintain ecological balance within various landscapes, birds are essential to our daily lives.

Yet across North America, bird populations are declining at unsustainable rates. Some grassland bird species have lost as much as 95% of their population since 1970, and over three billion birds have been lost overall, according to the 2022 State of the Birds report. While these losses are alarming, hope lies in collective conservation action that delivers benefits for birds at scale and at the regional level.

The Houston Gulf Coast region is an ecologically diverse area situated between the East Texas Pineywoods, Columbia and Trinity bottomland forests, Gulf prairie and marsh, bays and estuaries, and the Gulf of Mexico. It is a hotspot for avian migration with hundreds of millions of birds passing through the region each year—and approximately two billion birds migrating through the state annually. Over 400 species of migratory and resident birds have been observed in the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.

Our region also contains the fourth largest city and second most rapidly developing area in the United States. In addition, Houston is one of the most demographically diverse and is at the forefront of dealing with the effects of climate change.

In the face of climate change and growing development in our region, Houston Audubon aims to keep common birds common, build ecological resilience, protect critical bird habitat, help migratory birds passing through our region, enhance greenspace for birds and people in our communities, and inspire a new generation of conservationists and a broader community of stewards who value birds. Applying lessons learned from successes in wetlands conservation and the protection of wetland-dependent species as noted in the 2022 State of the Birds report, Houston Audubon's road map to 2034 focuses on collaborative conservation throughout the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.



- Mission** To advance the conservation of birds and their habitats in the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.
- Mission Pillars** Land conservation, education, conservation advocacy, monitoring, research, and community engagement are supporting pillars.
- Vision** We envision a future where birds are thriving in healthy natural areas, people are inspired by the sense of wonder birds bring, and diverse communities are connecting through a shared appreciation of the avian world.



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| Core Values | Strategy | We make thoughtful decisions, informed by science and our community, and we are not afraid to take advantage of big opportunities consistent with our mission. |
| | Stewardship | We manage our lands, resources, and relationships with care and respect to ensure that future generations will continue to benefit from our work. |
| | Inclusion | We believe diversity is a strength. We welcome all who desire to join us in taking conservation actions at home and in our communities. We aim to advance equitable access to educational, recreational, and employment opportunities connected to our work. |
| | Collaboration | We engage partners and our neighbors to further conservation. |
| | Excellence | Passion and expertise combine to drive our work every day. |

ASPIRING ORGANIZATIONAL GOAL

By 2034, through collaboration with partners, HAS will transform the Greater Houston Gulf Coast area into a model for regional bird conservation that builds a sense of place and connectivity around birds.

Guiding principles defining our model for regional bird conservation:

- The Houston Gulf Coast region supports healthy and diverse native bird populations as assessed through monitoring data and other information.
- Habitat conservation efforts consider the full annual cycle needs of targeted avian species that depend on our region for a critical life cycle phase.
- Federal and state agencies, local governments, community groups, and other partners collaborate to improve the region for birds as measured by participation in bird-related joint ventures like symposia and other regional events.
- Conservation actions important to protecting birds are demonstrated and shared as measured by the dissemination of information between collaborating partners and the public.
- The number of community members engaged in actions to help birds consistently grows as measured through participation in our community-centered programming, including Bird-friendly Spaces, plants distributed via the Natives Nursery, Lights Out, bird surveys, and other educational outreach initiatives.
- Data and other information about birds are highlighted and published in local and community papers as measured by articles, blogs, press releases, and other public platforms covering content related to birds, conservation, and engaging in nature.
- Cities in the region are promoting or engaged in bird conservation as measured by the number of cities actively taking actions to protect birds or promoting birding.
- Access to tools and resources is made broadly available as measured by the diversity of audiences accommodated and included.
- Access to birdwatching is facilitated by providing transportation opportunities to sanctuaries, supplying binoculars, and offering trails and viewing platforms that accommodate different abilities.



Red Knot / Greg Lavaty

Strategic Focus Area 1

Manage HAS nature sanctuaries for birds and people

Houston Audubon aims to model bird conservation within its sanctuaries. Conservation activities demonstrated include restoring habitat, building ecological resilience through land protection and land management practices, creating safe and immersive opportunities to connect people to nature, and educating visitors about birds and their habitat as well as actions they can take to help.



SMART Goals are **Specific**, **Measurable**, **Achievable**, **Relevant**, and **Time-Bound**

SMART Goal 1 By 2034, HAS sanctuaries will model a healthy ecosystem for birds, land management that builds climate resilience, improvements for equitable access, and spaces that inspire people in nature.

By 2025, HAS will assess and define the unique characteristics and use of each sanctuary and outline specific improvements needed to create a model space that reflects its purpose. Improvements may include the creation of protected areas, invasive species removal, habitat restoration, visitor amenities and new infrastructure, interpreted and wayfinding signage, and fencing.

SMART Goal 2 By 2025, HAS will install and pilot an automated system for tracking sanctuary visitation at ELMNS or a High Island sanctuary and assess the feasibility of expanding to other relevant locations.

SMART Goal 3 By 2025, HAS will deliver a suite of place-based programs that promote a connection to nature, protect sanctuary integrity, and achieve a net positive income to supplement grants and other income in support of non-fee-based programming.

SMART Goal 4 By 2026, HAS will identify and monitor bird species breeding across the 4,100 acres contained within HAS sanctuaries and manage habitat to support breeding of high priority species while providing benefits to diverse resident, wintering, and migrating species.

SMART Goal 5 By 2033, HAS will conserve an additional 1000 acres through fee acquisition or conservation easements to protect areas ecologically connected to HAS-owned lands that facilitate the movement of diverse habitats and help build ecological resilience.

SMART Goal 6 By 2034, HAS will provide management assistance and support for 10,000 acres of salt, estuarine, and freshwater marsh habitat in and around our coastal sanctuaries to help improve the survival of the endangered black rail.

Metrics

- Acres conserved, restored and/or under management
- Breeding species identified and managed for
- \$ raised and/or projects completed
- Revenue (programs and sanctuary entry)
- % of urban sanctuary visitors and program participants that become a member, volunteer, bird-friendly space program participant, or participant in another program (need to survey)
- New and retained program participants

Strategic Focus Area 2

Deliver community-centered conservation

Through an integrated approach of habitat conservation, education, community engagement and applied science, Houston Audubon aims to improve overall landscape health and biodiversity, increase opportunities for children and adults to immerse in nature, and foster stewardship values across generations.



- SMART Goal 1** By 2034, HAS will advance bird conservation on 1000 acres of private and public spaces by promoting and facilitating habitat restoration and other management practices known to support birds and improve climate resilience.
- SMART Goal 2** By 2025, HAS will implement a community-based initiative to build relationships, collaborate with, support, and engage groups and communities with varying backgrounds and perspectives to increase the engagement of residents reflective of Houston's diversity.
- SMART Goal 3** By 2025, HAS will annually generate and disseminate a Science Newsletter containing data and information related to the state of birds, climate change in association with bird conservation, and birding for public consumption and for use by HAS teams.

SMART Goal 4 By 2025, HAS will update its communications plan to support the organization's strategic plan, including identifying avenues to educate new audiences about birds and conservation through targeted efforts.

By 2033 increase the amount of educational content being disseminated on our digital platforms to 35%.

SMART Goal 5 By 2026, HAS will convene a Houston Gulf Coast region bird symposium in collaboration with existing regional conservation conferences every three to five years.

SMART Goal 6 By 2026, HAS will develop and launch a community ambassador program to stretch our reach and deepen our connection to neighborhoods and communities in the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.

SMART Goal 7 By 2026, HAS will create an online and/or in person education and training program that provides a pipeline for deepening participants knowledge of the birdlife, biodiversity and conservation needs in our region and equips key partners and stakeholders, such as teachers and community ambassadors, to amplify our message and community reach.

SMART Goal 8 By 2026, HAS will implement a community centered campaign to address the greatest threats to birds in our region

SMART Goal 9 By 2027, HAS will grow the number of community members taking bird-friendly actions by 30% per year over the 2023 baseline.

SMART Goal 10 By 2027, HAS will increase participation in Lights Out by 30% from 2023 baseline.

Metrics

- # of businesses, schools, other nonprofits, community groups, and individuals supporting birds through conservation actions
- # of acres improved for birds
- # of partners engaged
- People reached through outreach and information dissemination
- # of posts that are user-generated content
- % Engagement
- % growth in support of diverse engagement
- Plants provided for community plantings

Strategic Focus Area 3

Ensure a relevant and thriving organization in the 21st century

Houston Audubon aims to ensure we remain mission-centered and operate in a way that supports effective governance and management, provides a healthy, safe, and productive work environment, creates a culture of well-being and belonging, provides staff and volunteers meaningful support and opportunities, encourages new ideas, and builds trusting relationships and accountability.



Roseate Spoonbills / Greg Lavaty

SMART Goal 1

By 2024, HAS will create a process and set of benchmarks to track the implementation of the strategic plan, including engagement of an implementation committee and development of biennial action plans that connect with annual budget development.

By 2024, HAS will create the first 2-year action plan to achieve progress on goals in the strategic plan, including a resource allocation and personnel plan connected to the annual budget.

SMART Goal 2 By 2024, HAS will develop clear definitions of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging and the guiding vision and values that serve as a foundation of HAS's DEIB approach. A biennial action plan will be developed and executed every two years to incorporate the principles across the organization.

By 2025, HAS will develop and implement a Board, YPAC, and staff recruitment strategy to add diverse voices and perspectives.

By 2025, HAS will develop a roadmap for creating an environment of inclusion across the organization.

SMART Goal 3 By 2024, HAS will continue to implement a competitive compensation, benefits, and professional development plan to recruit, retain, and support a 21st century workforce.

SMART Goal 4 By 2026, HAS will develop an asset acquisition and divestment plan to align holdings with organizational values, facility needs, and conservation goals.

By 2024, HAS will evaluate and define facility and equipment needs to support native nursery, staff and volunteer working space, and education program delivery. See also Goal 1.1.

By 2025, HAS will update the ELMNS masterplan.

SMART Goal 5 By 2027, HAS will develop a conservation easement program and build capabilities to hold conservation easements.

SMART Goal 6 By 2025, HAS will develop a fundraising strategy to grow stewardship endowment by 50% by 2033 and increase operational fundraising targets by 5% every year to address inflation and support strategic plan implementation.

By 2026, HAS will launch and execute a capital campaign to raise funds for sanctuary and facility acquisition and improvements identified during the program and asset evaluation and sanctuary assessment processes under goals 1.1 and 3.4.

SMART Goal 7 By 2026, HAS will identify and invest in technology and training to modernize and streamline operations, increase transparency, facilitate greater access to HAS information, and enhance communications across departments.

By 2027, develop and implement a system for tracking program participants, volunteers and members through various levels of HAS engagement.

- SMART Goal 8** By 2026, HAS will develop methods and tools to track, retain, and elevate engagement of individuals introduced to the organization through our programming.
- SMART Goal 9** By 2026, HAS will update its volunteer management recruitment, training, and management strategies to further equip and empower the 21st century volunteer to support sanctuary management, citizen science, and outreach and education elements of the strategic plan.
- SMART Goal 10** By 2027, HAS will develop and implement visitor services plan, including use of volunteers and staff, training, and offerings, for coastal and urban sanctuaries.
- SMART Goal 11** By 2027, HAS will maximize use of nursery space to realize a 25% increase in the propagation and distribution of a healthy and diverse native plant inventory that supports restoration projects, outreach, and habitat creation.
- SMART Goal 12** By 2026, HAS will build a network of partners to track and respond to policy issues affecting birds.

Metrics

- management systems effectively support employee needs (measured through surveys)
- 2-year action plans connected to annual budget
- Actions implemented to achieve DEIB plan goals and increased diversity
- An empowered diverse volunteer workforce actively contributing to plan goals
- An inspired, skilled workforce working together to achieve the mission
- # of plants distributed and % increase in growth
- Funds raised
- Growth in Stewardship Endowment
- Facilities improvement for staff and volunteers

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First 3 Years at a Glance



Ruby-throated Hummingbird / Greg Lavaty

2024	
3.1	By 2024, HAS will create a process and set of benchmarks to track the implementation of the strategic plan, including engagement of an implementation committee and development of biennial action plans that connect with annual budget development.
3.1	By 2024, HAS will create the first 2-year action plan to achieve progress on goals in the strategic plan, including a resource allocation and personnel plan connected to the annual budget.
3.2	By 2024, HAS will develop clear definitions of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging and the guiding vision and values that serve as a foundation of HAS’s DEIB approach. Annual action plan will be developed and executed to incorporate the principles across the organization.
3.3	By 2024, HAS will continue to implement a competitive compensation, benefits, and professional development plan to recruit, retain, and support a 21st-century workforce.
3.4	By 2024, HAS will evaluate and define facility and equipment needs to support native nursery, staff and volunteer working space, and education program delivery. See also Goal 1.1.

2025

Blue Jay / Christa Denning

2025

- 1.1 By 2025, HAS will assess and define the unique characteristics and use of each sanctuary and outline specific improvements needed to create a model space that reflects its purpose.
- 1.2 By 2025, HAS will install and pilot an automated system for tracking sanctuary visitation at ELMNS or a High Island sanctuary and assess feasibility of expanding to other relevant locations.
- 1.3 By 2025, HAS will deliver a suite of place-based programs that promote a connection to nature, protect sanctuary integrity, and achieve a net positive income to supplement grants and other income in support of non-fee-based programming.
- 2.2 By 2025, HAS will implement a community-based initiative to build relationships, collaborate with, support, and engage groups and communities with varying backgrounds and perspectives to increase engagement of residents reflective of Houston's diversity.

- 2.3 By 2025, HAS will annually generate and disseminate a Science Newsletter containing data and information related to the state of birds, climate change in association with bird conservation, and birding for public consumption and for use by HAS teams.
- 2.4 By 2025, HAS will update its communications plan to support the organization's strategic plan, including identifying avenues to educate new audiences about birds and conservation through targeted efforts.
- 3.2 By 2025, HAS will develop and implement a Board, YPAC, and staff recruitment strategy to add diverse voices and perspectives.
- 3.2 By 2025, HAS will develop a roadmap for creating an environment of inclusion across the organization.
- 3.4 By 2025, HAS will update the ELMNS masterplan.
- 3.6 By 2025, HAS will develop a fundraising strategy to grow stewardship endowment by 50% by 2033 and increase operational fundraising targets by 5% every year to address inflation and support strategic plan implementation.



2026

- 1.4 By 2026, HAS will identify and monitor bird species breeding across the 4,100 acres contained within HAS sanctuaries and manage habitat to support breeding of high priority species while providing benefits to diverse resident, wintering, and migrating species.

- 2.5 By 2026, HAS will convene a Houston Gulf Coast region bird symposium in collaboration with existing regional conservation conferences every three to five years.
- 2.6 By 2026, HAS will develop and launch a community ambassador program to stretch our reach and deepen our connection to neighborhoods and communities in the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.
- 2.7 By 2026, HAS will create an online and/or in person education and training program that provides a pipeline for deepening participants knowledge of the birdlife, biodiversity and conservation needs in our region and equips key partners and stakeholders, such as teachers and community ambassadors, to amplify our message and community reach.
- 2.8 By 2026, HAS will implement a community centered campaign to address the greatest threats to birds in our region.
- 3.4 By 2025, HAS will develop an asset acquisition and divestment plan to align holdings with organizational values, facility needs, and conservation goals.
- 3.6 By 2026, HAS will launch and execute a capital campaign to raise funds for sanctuary and facility acquisition and improvements identified during the program and asset evaluation and sanctuary assessment processes.
- 3.7 By 2026, HAS will identify and invest in technology and training to modernize and streamline operations, increase transparency, facilitate greater access to HAS information, and enhance communications across departments.
- 3.8 By 2026, HAS will develop methods and tools to track, retain, and elevate engagement of individuals introduced to the organization through our programming.
- 3.9 By 2026, HAS will update its volunteer management recruitment, training, and management strategies to further equip and empower the 21st century volunteer to support sanctuary management, citizen science, and outreach and education elements of the strategic plan.
- 3.12 By 2026, HAS will build a network of partners to track and respond to policy issues affecting birds.