

HOUSTON AUDUBON ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2023–2024

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024



*Black-necked Stilts / Andrew McCullough
2023 Flock Together Photo Contest Winner, Birds of All Feathers Category*



WWW.HOUSTONAUDUBON.ORG

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.



White Ibis & Roseate Spoonbills / Crystal Garrett [2023 Flock Together Photo Contest Winner, Small-in-Frame]

MESSAGE FROM OUR INTERIM PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends,

I've been honored to serve as interim President & CEO since June of this year. As a Houston Audubon member for almost 20 years, I've long supported the mission and vision of this wonderful organization. I have been honored to serve on the Board of Directors since 2020, and to be Chair of the Bolivar Peninsula Nature Trail (BPNT) Committee and Co-chair of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) Committee.

I was drawn to Houston Audubon by a love of birds, and have stayed a member due to my belief in an amazing organization with hard working staff and volunteers. I've been excited to learn about Houston Audubon activities in depth during the last few months and to share that with you in this annual report.

During FY2024, we continued to focus on our 17 sanctuaries and countless programs. The final piece of the 2017 High Island Master Plan, the Boy Scout Woods entrance, was completed. Along with the rest of the city, we navigated natural disasters such as the derecho and Hurricane Beryl that left our Edith L. Moore sanctuary with downed trees, resulting in a 7 week closure that impacted our summer camp programs.

We continued to engage diverse communities with a focus on five target communities in underrepresented areas. This fiscal year marked our 5th successful Houston Bird Week with over 40 events, a result of our strong community partnerships and our dedicated volunteers.

In May, after years of behind the scenes project development, we signed an agreement with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) for the Bolivar Peninsula Nature Trail. This project was paid for with federal funding from the Department of the Treasury under the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act). This initiative will design and install a cohesive wayfinding system, develop visitor facilities, and implement habitat protection at twelve sites on the Bolivar Peninsula.

Thanks to our staff, volunteers, donors, and members, Houston Audubon remains a strong, resilient organization dedicated to protecting birds and their habitat in the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.

PAM SMOLEN

Interim President & CEO, Houston Audubon

SANCTUARIES



Houston Audubon owns and manages 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.



INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS



BOY SCOUT WOODS GETS A NEW ENTRANCE

The entrance to Boy Scout Woods Bird Sanctuary was revitalized, thanks to a generous donation from Allison and Dan Ryder. With expertise from SWA Group and Renfrow Co., a new entrance gate, fence, and gathering area were constructed to better reflect the destination experience that is spring migration in High Island.

IMPROVED BOLLARDS AT BOLIVAR FLATS SHOREBIRD SANCTUARY

Shorebirds at Bolivar Flats have increased protection, thanks to funding from the Susan Vaughan Foundation. Staff secured the necessary permits to reconstruct the bollards and cable, which restricts vehicular traffic on the beach. The first phase included installing new posts and cable from the dunes to the low tide line, which has drastically reduced unauthorized vehicle access to the sanctuary and has made it a safer place for both migratory and nesting birds. The final phase of the project will extend the bollards up to 100 yards into the Gulf of Mexico to prevent access during extremely low tides.



NEW TRUCK ACQUIRED FOR LAND CONSERVATION



Thanks to generous support from the Drax Foundation, we were able to purchase a new 2024 Chevy Silverado for use on the coast. The previous work truck was purchased over 10 years ago and the deteriorating effects of salt air deemed the vehicle unusable. The new truck will enhance our coastal operations by transporting essential equipment like our tractor, UTV, boat, and two utility trailers across our coastal properties.

LAND CONSERVATION

HABITAT RESTORATION

Staff and volunteers successfully restored 17 acres of coastal woodlot and prairie habitat within our High Island sanctuaries. This brings our total acreage treated and under active management in High Island to 115 acres. Continuous and persistent treatment of invasive plant species is vital to ensuring quality habitat for the hundreds of thousands of birds that use our sanctuaries every year, not to mention the thousands of visiting birders hoping to see those birds.



Entergy Coastal Natives Nursery

COASTAL NATIVES NURSERY

The Entergy Coastal Natives Nursery in High Island cultivates native plants for use in restoration projects at our sanctuaries. It also supplements the capacity of our Edith L. Moore Natives Nursery in west Houston. Over 1,000 native grasses and forbs were propagated at our coastal nursery, and we received several hundred sapling trees. All of these plants will eventually find a home within the coastal sanctuaries.



SURVEYING & MONITORING



Staff conducting a coastal bird survey

Staff and volunteers continuously monitor species both within and adjacent to our sanctuaries. These surveys serve as a metric to inform our management practices and contribute to a greater network of wildlife professionals and scientists working in our region and beyond. 34 Audubon Coastal Bird Surveys were completed this year at Bolivar Flats and High Island Beach. 42 evening rookery surveys were conducted at Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary in High Island. A total of 315 bird species were documented on Houston Audubon properties this fiscal year.



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 four survey locations this year, bringing us to 23 locations. In total, we completed 298 urban bird surveys and documented a combined 296 species.

TEXAS WATERBIRD CENSUS

In May, Houston Audubon staff surveyed 12 sites for nesting waterbirds, 11 of which were islands within Galveston Bay. The rookery at Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary in High Island was also systematically surveyed and a total of 1,241 nests belonging to 10 different species were found this year. This annual effort is a part of the 50+ year tradition of the Texas Waterbird Society's coast-wide nesting waterbird census.

BEACH-NESTING BIRDS

We posted symbolic fencing for beach-nesting birds across 23 acres on the Bolivar Peninsula. A total of five sites were regularly monitored from High Island to the Ferry Landing in Port Bolivar. 11 Wilson's Plover nests were found with six known to have



Nest of Wilson's Plover chicks

hatched and a total of 20 chicks observed. A Snowy Plover chick discovered at High Island Beach was the first evidence of this species breeding on the peninsula in over eight years. While nearly 100 Least Tern nests were observed, very few managed to hatch due to tides, disturbance, and predation serving as a prescient reminder of the many threats facing nesting birds on our popular Texas beaches. This monitoring was done in collaboration with American Bird Conservancy, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, and other partners.

BIRD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

EDITH L. MOORE NATIVES NURSERY

Our fall and spring plant sales sold nearly \$20,000 worth of plants to help establish habitat in the surrounding community. That's approximately 2,200 plants in the ground. We also kicked off a multi-year partnership with the Houston Parks Board to supply 1,785 plants per year for native plantings throughout the city. Our partnership with the National Wildlife Federation also continued to get native plants to schools all over the region for education and pollinator gardens for students. Thank you to our dedicated nursery volunteers and partners for helping us grow our impact.



Fall 2023 plant sale at Edith L. Moore Natives Nursery



Blue Jay / Christa Denning

BIRD-FRIENDLY SPACES

Houston Audubon's Bird-Friendly Spaces program recognizes those who are actively supporting birds in their personal spaces by creating inviting habitat, limiting threats to birds, and connecting with others. There was a drastic increase in acreage of Bird-Friendly Spaces, in big part due to multi-acre lots being recognized along with a large local cemetery that decided to go bird-friendly!

32

NEW PARTICIPANTS

250

ACRES ADDED

16

NEW ZIP CODES

LIGHTS OUT FOR BIRDS

Now in its 8th year, the Lights Out program encourages individuals and businesses to turn off or dim building lights to deter bird strikes. This spring, Hines pledged 12 new buildings to go Lights Out. We also worked with the MetroNational team at Memorial Plaza to retrofit their management offices with anti-collision window film. This pilot initiative will inform future bird-safe building decisions for other MetroNational properties.

Social media action alerts to go Lights Out on nights with a high migration forecast have reached hundreds of thousands of individuals. We continued to work with volunteers to monitor bird collisions by collecting and reporting data on bird injuries and fatalities in downtown Houston during spring and fall migration.



Lights Out exhibit at Texas A&M University

Houston Audubon partnered with Texas A&M University on an exhibition about bird collisions. Preserved collision bird specimens from Houston and other Lights Out Texas cities were assembled and displayed along with paintings of migratory birds and examples of bird-safe glass to generate awareness regarding the issue.

HOUSTON CELEBRATES 20 YEARS AS AN URBAN BIRD TREATY CITY

In addition to being a Bird City, Houston also holds the esteemed status of being an Urban Bird Treaty City, a program from U.S. Fish and Wildlife that supports city partners in conserving birds and their habitats. Houston Audubon maintains this designation along with integral help from the Houston Parks and Recreation Department through our shared work in the areas of land conservation, educational impact, bird threat reduction measures, and volunteerism.



World Migratory Bird Day 2023 native planting

EDUCATION, OUTREACH, AND ENGAGEMENT

Houston Audubon reached over 10,000 people while delivering close to 300 education and outreach programs at our sanctuaries and across the Greater Houston Gulf Coast region.

Educational programs were held for more than 50 public and private schools through class visits, field trips, and bird walks.



Attendees at a Purple Martin Watch Party

We hosted three Purple Martin Watch Parties and Swift Night Out to provide people an opportunity to witness the natural wonders of the communal roosts of these vitally important insectivore bird species.

Adults and families explored the night life of Edith L. Moore at our Night Hikes and Owl Prowls. Attendees were treated to views of the opossums, raccoons, owls, snakes, and nocturnal invertebrates that provide important ecosystem services at night.

We continued to host Cabin, Coffee, Conversation – a free open house held at Edith Moore Nature Sanctuary to give the public a chance to learn more about Houston Audubon in a casual meet & greet setting. In October 2023, we set up an eclipse-viewing area on a large screen while guests marveled at the crescent-shaped shadows created by the trees of the Edith L. Moore canopy.



Eclipse shadows at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary



Brush & Beak Art Class

We introduced a new bird art series for adults called Brush & Beak. Classes quickly sold out, even with the addition of extra sessions. Students took a close look at bird anatomy, feather groups, and field marks before trying out sketching techniques and creating their own works of art to take home.

HOUSTON BIRD WEEK 2023

2023 marked the five-year anniversary of Houston Bird Week, with 42 events around the Houston region from September 23-30. Houston Audubon and partners reached hundreds of people at birding-related events around the city. For the anniversary year, there was truly something for everyone, with birding bike rides, themed yoga, bird walks, native plantings, cleanups, and classes for children and adults.

COMMUNITY-BASED OUTREACH

We continued our community-based initiatives to build relationships, collaborate with, and support underrepresented communities. We seek to engage individuals reflective of Houston's diversity and to gain the perspectives of people with varying backgrounds. In order to narrow our efforts, we focused on engaging five neighborhoods in the greater Houston region: Gulfton, Alief, Sunnyside, Park Place, and Third Ward.



Third Ward is a predominantly African American community with a rich history and cultural legacy. Houston Audubon partners with Friends of Columbia Tap, a group dedicated to the well-being of the Columbia Tap Trail. This 4-mile hike-and-bike trail connects Downtown Houston to the Brays Bayou Greenway trail, following the historic Columbia Tap railroad route. We have joined forces to lead bird walks and bike and birding opportunities on the trail. We also enjoyed engaging with the community at the third annual block party.



The Gulfton community is one of the hottest parts of Houston, clocking in at 17 degrees warmer than the coolest part of Harris County. Busy roads and long stretches of pavement hold in heat, and very few trees mean that pedestrians have scarce shade to provide a reprieve from the unforgiving Houston temperatures. In April, Houston Audubon partnered with Madres del Parque, Harris County Precinct 4, and The Nature Conservancy to conduct a community planting event at Burnett Bayland Park, creating two native plant beds near the front entrance. Community residents have volunteered to help us maintain the garden.

VOLUNTEERS

Houston Audubon has thrived for more than five decades due to the passion and commitment of its volunteers. Since a small but mighty group of eighteen visionaries founded the organization on September 24, 1969, volunteers have been the heartbeat of everything we do. Back then, those individuals recognized the critical need for environmental education and advocacy for wildlife habitats, and their dedication laid the foundation for what Houston Audubon has become today. Learn more about our founding volunteers and leaders on our history page at www.houstonaudubon.org/history.

641
VOLUNTEERS

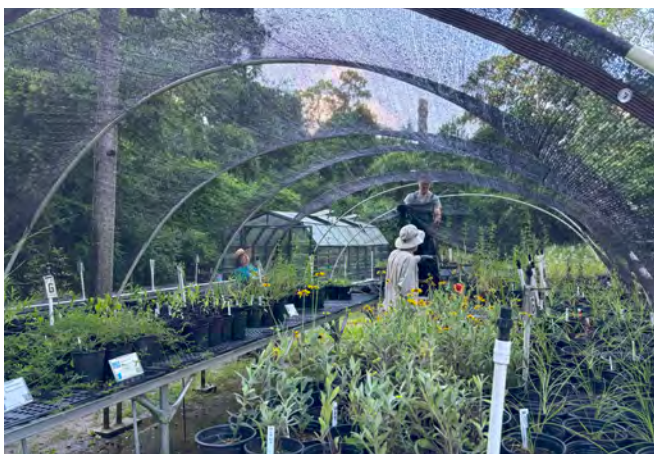
\$385,228
FINANCIAL IMPACT

12,061
HOURS



Volunteer assisting young visitors at High Island

Volunteers are essential partners in our work, from keeping our trails pristine at our sanctuaries to fostering a deeper appreciation for birds. This past year has been no exception. Our volunteers have shown up in big ways, particularly at our natives nursery during a period of staff transitions, where their knowledge and dedication have truly shone. We're also grateful to the wonderful cohort of RV caretakers who flocked to High Island during spring migration, our busiest season. Their energy and enthusiasm were so contagious, many are already planning to return next year!



Natives Nursery volunteers installing a shade structure



Spring 2024 RV volunteer caretakers

FUNDRAISING EVENTS

AVIAN AFFAIR 2023

Houston Audubon's 2023 Avian Affair celebrated the sound of birds, their beauty and diversity, and the vital role they play in our region. Over \$385,000 was raised to support Houston Audubon's work protecting birds in the Houston Gulf Coast region. Event co-chairs, Heather and Jeff Firestone and Carol and Dan Price, planned a lively evening at The Revaire including a silent auction, wine pull, and raptor experience. Renowned Houston quintet Windsync performed pieces inspired by birds, including a world premiere written exclusively for the event and performed for the first time that evening. The Kathrine G. McGovern Urban Conservation Award was presented to Dr. Cin-Ty Lee, the Harry Carothers Wiess Professor of Geology at Rice University, for his efforts in preserving and protecting urban habitat and inspiring kids and adults with his love of birds.



Avian Affair 2023 silent auction and reception



Avian Affair 2023 honoree Dr. Cin-Ty Lee and guests

BIRDATHON 2024

Birdathon, our annual spring fundraiser, is a fun community event where teams compete to identify the most bird species while fundraising for bird conservation. The Noddy Roadrunners won the Oberholser Award for identifying 178 species in 24 hours. Stuart Nelson won the Whittington Award for raising over \$10,000. In total, over \$55,000 was raised to support Houston Audubon's mission.



Ecologist School Houston students

DONORS

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

\$100,000+

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\$50,000–\$99,999

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Liz and Frank Wozencraft

Contributions received July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

JULY 1, 2023 – JUNE 30, 2024

REVENUE

Contributions with donor restrictions	\$ 413,866
Contributions without donor restrictions	1,032,117
Special events	413,258
Less: direct donor benefits	(108,417)
Admission, program fees and other income	373,270
Merchandise and native plant sales	90,920
Net investment return	376,695
Total revenue	<u>2,591,709</u>

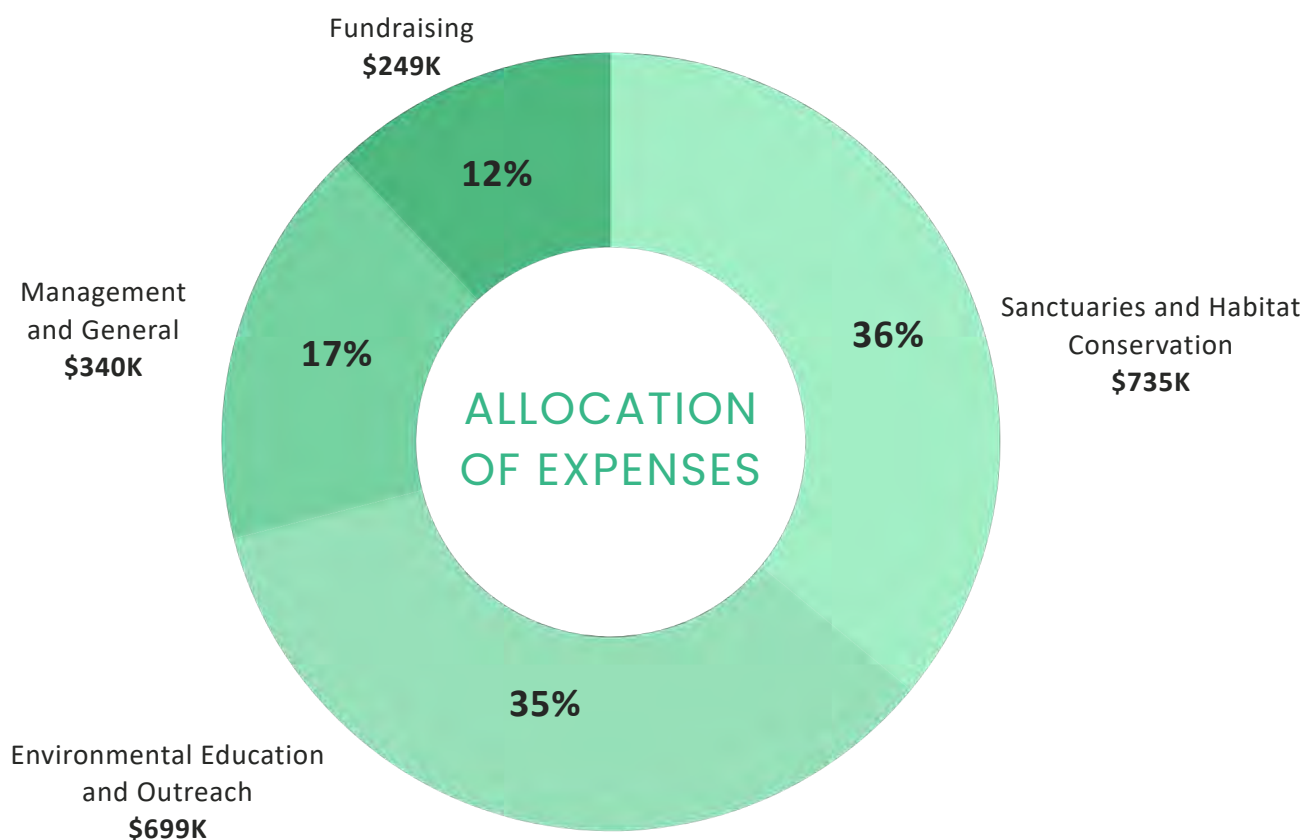
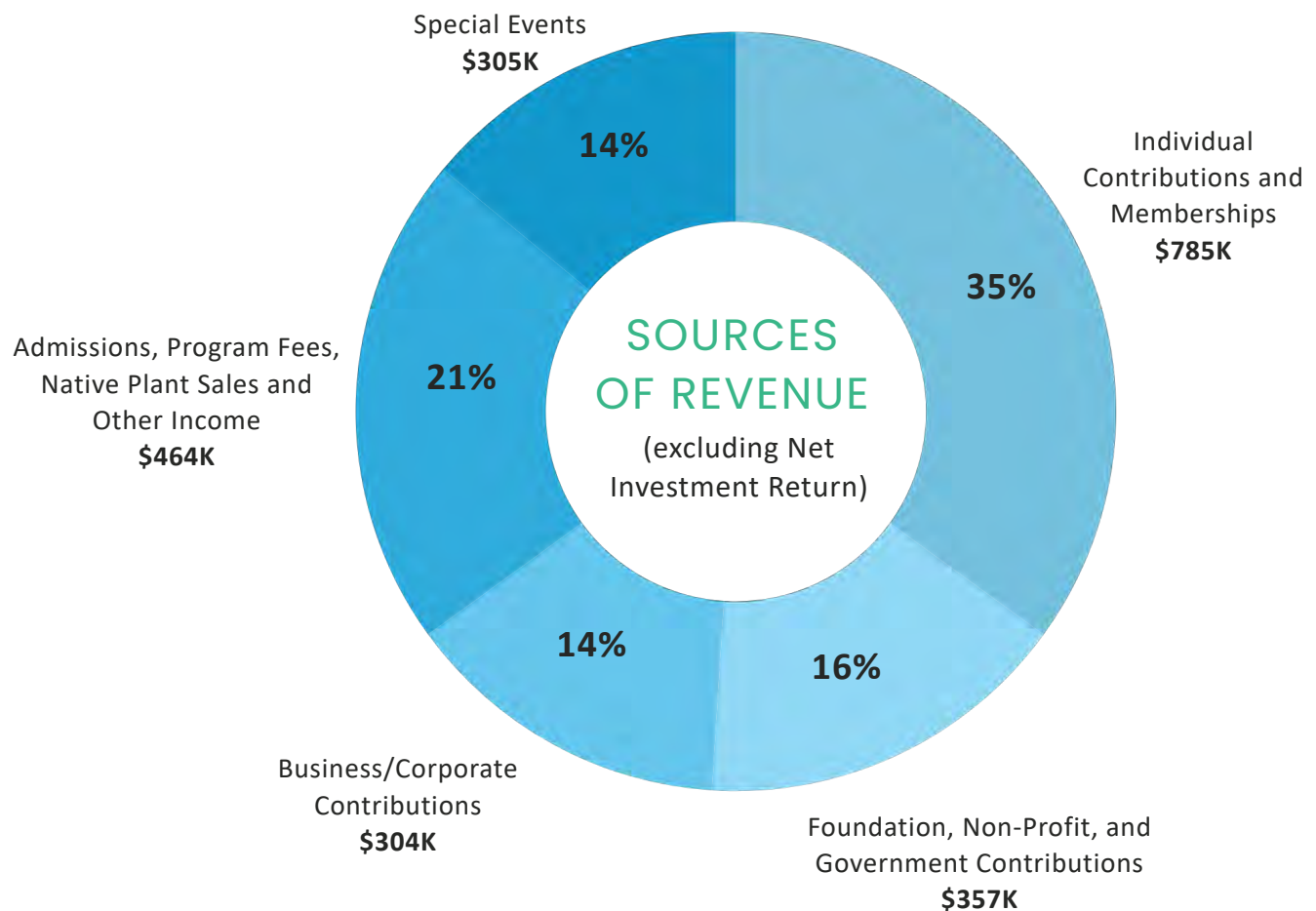
EXPENSES

Program services:	
Sanctuaries and habitat conservation	735,451
Environmental education and outreach	698,714
Total program services	<u>1,434,165</u>
Management and general	339,810
Fundraising	249,508
Total expenses	<u>2,023,483</u>

CHANGE IN NET ASSETS

	568,226
Net assets, beginning of year	<u>13,377,422</u>
Net assets, end of year	<u>\$ 13,945,648</u>

Audited financial statements available at houstonaudubon.org/financials.



LEADERSHIP

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Communications and Marketing Director

Christine Smith

Bolivar Peninsula Nature Trail

Project Manager

Vicki Stelmak

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Vicki Stittleburg

Environmental Educator

Barbara Thompson

Controller

Christine Wehrli

Community Outreach Program Manager

HQ OFFICE

Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

440 Wilchester Boulevard

Houston, Texas 77079

info@houstonaudubon.org

(713) 932-1639

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