

I was President of Houston Audubon from 2005 to 2007. However, that was not my first experience with Houston Audubon.

I joined the Houston Audubon board in 1980, when Carmen Stahl asked me to be on the Board and I served on the Houston Audubon Board from 1980 until 1990. Then I moved to Austin. When I moved back to the Houston area, I was on the board from 2002 to 2009.

I want to say this about Houston Audubon. I did a lot of research in nonprofit organizations and environmental organizations and it was very impressive to me that Houston Audubon was the first environmentally focused organization in Houston.

So, when I was on the board the first time around in the 1980, I had just begun birding. I went to Bolivar Flats and there were four wheelers running through the birds and over and over again and I just said they don't know what they're doing, they don't know how valuable this is and what they're doing. There is nothing here to let them know that the thousands of Bolivar Flats shorebirds should not be disturbed. Further, there is nothing here to let non-birder people know the significance of this habitat nor how much these species depend on being able to eat, and most significantly, rest on Bolivar Flats!

I was also going to school at U of H Clear Lake, getting a degree in environmental management, where I was learning all the laws and how all the agencies work.

So, there's got to be a way to do something about this. And the first way that I found was going to Galveston County and asking them to restrict vehicular traffic because that was something they could do. So, I went to Houston Audubon as a board member and said would Houston Audubon support this and they said sure, go for it. And so, I did and I appeared before Galveston County Commissioner's Court in 1984. Well, first I did a yearlong survey.

Myself and Brenda Donalio and I did a yearlong survey once a month at Bolivar and then we went to Commissioner's Court and it's a long story. I'm going to try to make it as succinct as possible, but on the very first time that I appeared I thought I was going to be the only person there from Houston Audubon, the only birder, but when I got there and it was my turn to speak and I looked around and there were all these birders there and so, okay, I'm going to do this.

And it took about four years to get the order in place to restrict the vehicular traffic and the concept was, okay, Galveston County couldn't make this a bird sanctuary, although it was being called that. If you look at the newspaper articles, there are about ten newspaper articles in the Galveston Daily News about it. They were calling it a bird sanctuary, but there was no real designation.

So through what I was learning, I realized that anybody could ask for a 99-year lease from the General Land Office on any land that they had jurisdiction of. And they had jurisdiction of land from vegetation in all the bottoms of every water in Texas. So I could ask for a lease and I went to Houston Audubon and we prepared the lease and sent it to the General Land Office.

And there are other things that happened in between, but we're getting to the nitty gritty of it. So in 1990, we filed a lease proposal to the General Land Office to lease 1.72 acres where Houston Audubon would hold the lease on the west end of Bolivar Peninsula. Nothing happened until 1992, when all of a sudden General End Office approved the lease.

And now Houston Audubon has at lease for 99 years on Bolivar Flats and I think the price was minimal, whatever it was, very minimal. So, in the summer of 1992 we finally dedicated the Bolivar Flat Shore Bird Sanctuary, and the then President (*Gary Woods*), Sandi Hoover and I, along with Pat Hallisey, who was Head of Galveston Parks Board, who told me many times you'll never get this done. But he's smiling. So that was one of my most rewarding projects, or my first big project with Houston Audubon. But through the years Houston Audubon has always stepped up.

One of the things about Bolivar Flats that we don't have time for right now that impressed me so much was all the organizations that supported the effort to make Bolivar Flats a Shorebird Sanctuary. One of those was the Houston Outdoor Nature Club that gave me this award, but there were many other organizations that showed strong support for Houston Audubon and Bolivar Flats.

In 1989, a subdivision was built along the shoreline of Armand Bayou. My previous employment had been for four years with Armand Bayou Nature Center. I was there when the doors opened and so Armand Bayou was near and dear to my heart. A subdivision was permitted and ready to start building. It would have a stormwater discharge point directly into Armand Bayou. And that would be the first discharge point into Armand Bayou.

So, I was very concerned about all the litter and trash that comes from a subdivision and was worried about the water quality of Armand Bayou. I went to Houston Audubon Board. I was on the board and asked if they would support an effort to mitigate that or to do whatever we could to lessen the impact of that discharge, and they said yes.

So, the first step in that process was to give Houston Audubon some standing on the issue and in order to get standing on the issue we sent in an application to lease the bottom of Armand Bayou because that was under General Land Office's jurisdiction and anybody could lease anything from the General Land Office. So that application gave us standing. And then, working with Jim Blackburn and another friend, Paula Thedford, we filed an intent to sue and this was approved by the Board. You know, the Houston Audubon Board was all behind it. And with that filing, all of a sudden the head of Friendswood Development was interested in talking to us, so we were eager to talk with them.

I met with the president of Friendswood Development and we discussed the issues and what came out of that discussion was them changing their plans. Rather than a direct discharge, they agree to educate the community to put in grates on the storm drains of a certain diameter, to keep litter out and to build a retention pond that would treat and let the initial storm flow settle out and mitigate as much as possible the water quality impact to Armand Bayou.

And for that, Houston Audubon gave me this award and it was a success that didn't cost very much money at all, but it was a great step for the water quality and Armand Bayou and for the environment all around. It wouldn't have happened without Houston Audubon.

In 1999, I moved to Austin and was on the Travis County Audubon board there.

And when Houston Audubon had the campaign on to buy property around Bolivar Flats, I

solicited Travis Audubon for funding for Houston Audubon's efforts to buy the property around Bolivar Flats. I don't remember how much was raised, but I was surprised at the amount and I was rewarded with another recognition from Houston Audubon. So, this is a recognition for that effort and I am just so delighted and pleased with all the nesting birds that are out on Bolivar Flats now. I see Piping Plovers and many different species there, and numbers as great as they were in the '80s. So that is very rewarding.

I moved back to the Houston area in 2001 and Jeff Mundy asked me to be on the board again. I was more than happy to get back to Houston Audubon. It felt like coming home.

One of the things I did in Austin was to start a monthly bird survey at Hornsby Bend, and that was so successful I decided that it needed to happen in Houston. So, I went to the Board and asked about starting monthly bird surveys and of course everybody was all for it.

And we started with Bolivar Flats and did a monthly survey until 2008 when Hurricane Ike hit. And it was a chore - so many birds to count. But it was very rewarding and the data is in eBird now. I also personally started monthly bird surveys at Armand Bayou, at Baytown Nature Center and at Seabrook Pine Gully Park and I'm working on Texas City Dike now to start one there.

There are many other bird surveys, monthly bird surveys that Houston Audubon sponsors now, and it really does my heart good to see how many people are being reached and how much is being done throughout the Houston area.

The next project that just fell in my lap was in 2007 when birders had been watching Chimney Swifts coming out of a chimney at Pershing Middle School in Houston.

And one day they went there and there was a construction crew taking things down and they got in touch with me. And I called Texas Parks and Wildlife and sent everybody the information.

Then I called the manager of the project and talk to him and said that disturbing nesting birds were prohibited by the Migration Treaty Act. He was very pleasant and they stopped until it could be confirmed by Parks and Wildlife. Yes, there were chimney swifts nesting there and the chimney couldn't be destroyed. So, while everything was going so good, I thought, why not ask can it (the chimney) be left and not destroyed. He said sure we'll check on its integrity and let you know and sure enough it's still there!

And Mary Anne Weber started doing Chimney Swift Nights Out and that has followed chimney swifts throughout Houston. So, you never know. Just got to take advantage of what falls in your lap. That was a great outcome of that effort.

Another campaign during my tenure as President which we tried to get going. However, it didn't quite fly. It was a Birds and Bayous campaign with the Greater Houston Partnership and it was an effort to have Houston recognize birds as a resource. As it turned out, it was an idea that was just a little too far ahead of its time. But now we do have a Bird of Houston (Yellow-crowned Night-heron) and we do have a bird campaign for Houston. Houston is recognized as one of the first Birding Cities in Texas - so be patient. If everybody keeps working on things, they usually work out.

Another project that Houston Audubon has helped tremendously with - and couldn't have

happened without Houston Audubon – is involving childing with birding at an early age. One of those efforts was participating in the Great Texas Birding Classic. We had several teams that Houston Audubon supported and we had so much fun. There is no word to tell you how much fun we had.

But the rules for the children, 13 and under was always the group that I worked with, was that an adult cannot point out a bird, and an adult cannot identify a bird.

The children have to do all the identifying and during my time as a board member I think we had a team every year. Some were made up of other board members' grandchildren or children. It was a very rewarding experience and we won first place a couple of times. We were always first or second, so I was very proud of the kids and it was a lot of fun. They can only bird for eight hours, so we had some work to do to figure out how we could get to all the hotspots in eight hours.

We took breaks, but it was great fun. And that continues. I've worked with EIH (Environmental Institute of Houston), which is on the University of Houston Clear Lake Campus, to start a youth club there.

We started the youth group there in 2011 and they have continued to do the Birding Classic. I think Houston Audubon has supported teams a couple of times.

Another involvement with the youth was in the Yucatán. Audubon's involvement with the Yucatán started before I came back on the Board, but it had lasting effects.

At some point before 2001, but not that far before a grant, was given to Houston Audubon for International Birding. It was invested in the Yucatán, where a woman by the name of Barbara MacKinnon wanted to start training guides that were from the authentic native Mayan villages. She did that and there were about 25 to 40 participants in each class. And those guides went on to do more. One of the things they did was to start the Niños y Crías program, which is children and animals.

The Maya believe children should start learning how to live and contribute to their community at four years old. The first effort with the native guides was to start teaching children how to bird. And they started doing summer camps for youth. They did at least ten summers, they had training for youth on birding all over the Yucatán. And this is one of the thank you notes that we got where it says Stennie Meadours it should say Houston Audubon because they actually started this and it went further than that because some of the children that they have trained have now made a video about the importance of bird conservation.

In addition, we had a joint foreign exchange with a school in the Yucatán - Westbrook Middle School in Friendswood and a community in the Yucatán. And they made a video of their work and the Texas Ornithological Society published an article about that effort. Both those links will follow.

Also, when I moved back to Houston I joined the Galveston Bay Area chapter of Texas Master Naturalist, and as a Texas Master Naturalist I started doing Oystercatcher nesting surveys and other things along the shore.

And the more time I spent on the shoreline the more upset I got with all the plastic that we were seeing all along the shoreline, every shoreline and the monofilament everywhere. And looking at who could do what. Who could address this?

It was obvious there was no governmental entity or no one person responsible for all the plastic water bottles and all the plastic trash that was littering the shorelines. So, it was going to be up to us, up to the public, up to individuals to do something about it. I live in Galveston County now and I was thinking who has a lot at stake in Galveston County? Houston Audubon has a lot of bird sanctuaries. Who gets damaged most by the plastic? Birds.

So, I went to Helen Drummond and asked her if Houston Audubon would support me in starting a plastic pollution initiative and she went to the Board and sure enough they would. So, we were off and the first step was to get some signage. There was no signage about what plastic was doing to all the birds and all the wildlife and all the marine life. And through Houston Audubon, who funded the signs, and working with Galveston County and getting permission to put up the signs, we designed this sign "litter hurts". This was placed in several places on Bolivar, because that's where we saw the most plastic waste.

We had signs at the North Jetty, the South Jetty, Apffel Park, Texas City Dike, Rollover Pass, French Town Road and Lauderdale Park. Most of these are on Bolivar. Texas City Dike, of course, is not on Bolivar. But we had 17 signs placed and I did a cleanup at French Town Road a couple of weekends ago and the signs are still up.

The one you see behind me was at the north jetty on Bolivar and it was taken down by Hurricane Harvey. I found it and it will go back up sometime. But that was the first step. And Helen wrote a wonderful letter that we can put in this but she clearly outlined all of the problems with plastic pollution.

So, I could go to anybody, any organization, any government and ask for help with plastic pollution as a representative of Houston Audubon. And I don't think this ever would have gotten off the ground without Houston Audubon. We worked on signs for a while and we had a meeting with all parties that we thought might be interested. We invited every agency associated with Galveston Bay, every organization, and there are a ton. And there was a tremendous amount of support for doing something.

So, we initiated, and I say we, because there was always somebody working with me to let me know there was support. We held a meeting on litter and invited every organization that we could think of that would be interested in it. Audubon Texas was involved because at that time they had a person at Texas City Prairie Preserve that was on staff then.

So, Audubon Texas was one of the initial originators, or supporters of this. But as time went by a lot of people were interested and we decided that we would start a partnership. Everything else seemed too cumbersome and would take too long, so we developed a partnership in 2014. We started this effort in 2014, and the plastic pollution partnership started meeting quarterly in 2015.

And through that partnership we established monthly cleanups along the shorelines. And we worked with Galveston County. And the organizations that were most active in this were

Audubon Texas, Galveston Bay Master Naturalists, and American Bird Conservancy also joined in the initial stages of setting up the plastic pollution partnership.

We did cleanups routinely once a month and at the worst sites. We also undertook an initiative to recycle fishing line, and that project is ongoing. And most recently I participated in a cleanup on French Town Road with Winnie Burkett and our signs were still there. And the area was dismal looking when we got there with so much plastic, it was unbelievable, so much litter; and when we left it was beautiful. And then in 2018, Aransas Research Center sponsored the first annual plastic pollution symposium, which was based on research. I and the Houston Zoo, whose staff was also a member of the partnership, went to that first plastic pollution symposium.

Well, after seeing that, it didn't take me long to decide that Houston or the Galveston Bay area had to be the second annual plastic pollution symposium (2019). So, we started planning and I asked for sponsors, and Houston Audubon once again stepped up and provided staff with Anna Vallery. That helped tremendously in setting up the program. And I'm sorry this isn't in color, but this was the face of the program.

So plastic pollution is still a problem, but after doing the cleanups, we see that it's diminishing and there are many more people aware of it, so we are diligently working on it.

Another event that Houston Audubon played a big role in, one of the issues associated with plastic that we encountered was a huge pelican entanglement.

In 2013, there were over 400 pelicans that were brought in as injured and entangled and there seemed to be more and more birds that were getting injured on Bolivar and Galveston and there wasn't anybody to do about anything about it. Galveston Police Department does have a good animal control system where they pick up the birds, but there was no way to get them to a wildlife rehab.

So, that was the second big need that the plastic pollution partners saw in the Galveston Bay area, that there were many injured birds. There was no way to get them to Texas Wildlife Center for rehab. So, we started an injured bird response team, a Galveston, Galveston Bay Injured Bird Response Team. We started that in January of 2017.

Shortly thereafter that spring, there was a huge die off, of warbler's and migrating songbirds. There were migrating songbirds around a tall building in Galveston. And when Galveston police department called Animal Control Services called me and said "there are lots of dead birds around here, Stennie, I don't know what to do." And I said, well how many, I said are there more than 50?

Oh, way more. Are there more than 100? Oh, way more. I said, oh, we have to do something about this and so I said can you collect them and he collected them. Another member of the team, Sandy Parker, went over and helped him. And I got in touch with Richard Gibbons to see if there was anything we could do of use with these birds and he said yes, we need to get them to, a research university.

So, Sandy Parker and Josh Henderson wrapped up 400 dead birds, many species of warblers, and they were photographed and somehow a photograph got out and the news was all over the earth.

I had a friend that was in France that saw this reported, so there was obviously something that needed to be done and I had contacted Richard Gibbons and told him about it and asked Houston Audubon to get involved and they did. They met with the building owner and now they turn off all their lights between March 15th and May 15th and again in the fall. That bird kill was the result of two things, a bad storm and bad lighting.

We can't do anything about the storms and the northerners, and we have seen dead birds because of storms alone, but we can do something about the lights. So, Galveston does have a Lights Out Program, it's a public relations program. There are no regulations in place, but this one building. And what's interesting and wonderful, I can see the building from my house in San Leon, so I can check and make sure those lights are out. On March 15th I will be checking.

So that was a good result of a very bad and sad event that would not have turned out without help from Houston Audubon.

Currently Houston Audubon is helping with a presentation to the Texas City Library that initially was scheduled for 2019. However, Covid intervened and I did a presentation there as a representative of Houston Audubon. And also, the monthly surveys two weeks ago. And the response from the small group was we want more, we want to do a survey, so hopefully we will get that going. And the library was absolutely wonderful in their setup and they've agreed to let us do monthly programs there. So, we will be doing that. And I hope to involve Kathy Sweezey with that project.

Mentioning Kathy Sweezey, Kathy Sweezey is also helping us with our Blooms and Birds Fest at Bayside Regional Park (2022). Bayside Regional Park is in Bacliff and the Master Naturalists have established an area of one acre for a native plant garden.

The Park right now has no amenities except a small playground and a community center. It's 64 acres. So, the master naturalists had put in a wonderful native pollinator plant garden and a prairie area. That's just the beginning. But in October we plan on having a grand opening or nature fest of some sort there and Houston Audubon has agreed to be our partner. Kathy Sweezey is working with me on the program and Mary Anne Weber will be there with her birds, so we are really looking forward to that.

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