



Signal Smoke

The Newsletter of Travis Audubon * VOL. 70, NO. 3 May/June 2022



A Note

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hello Travis Audubon friends and members,

March and April feel like the finest time to be alive in Central Texas. This year's spring wakeup has seemed a little slower than usual, but like clockwork our faithful Golden-cheeked warblers have returned to sing on their breeding grounds at Baker Sanctuary, and many migrants have started to move through our skies at night. My backyard oaks have been lousy with Nashville Warblers, in particular, and a Carolina Wren family has produced a very noisy baby in one of my patio pots.

We have been honored by the presence of some top notch researchers and educators this spring—both Lisa O'Donnell and George Archibald shared their expertise on historical ecology and Whooping Cranes, respectively. I now notice how big mature Ashe Junipers can get and wonder what changes they've seen in the Hill Country, and I hope with crossed fingers (and toes) to catch a Whooper honking overhead this month.

Spring can also be a good time to wake up a little more ourselves. Perhaps it can give us an excuse to notice and take pleasure in the seasonal delights it offers—blooms, busy pollinators, nestlings. Spring is the time when we celebrate Travis Audubon's founding anniversary, and this year was a big one: 70 years and going strong. Thanks to everyone who added to our enjoyment of this season by joining us and donating to our 70th birthday events. We have loved welcoming new friends and remembering old ones as we celebrate.

As we head towards the peak of migration, I invite you to turn out your lights every night and get outside every morning to see and hear which friends have dropped in. Wild birds are those guests who never overstay their welcome, bring delight to their hosts, and even provide a benefit or two for us humans. Let's roll out the proverbial red carpet in their honor this spring!

Happy birding,

Nicole

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Netherton', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Nicole Netherton
Executive Director

People

AT TRAVIS AUDUBON

Staff

Executive Director
Land Manager and Educator
Program Manager
Development Manager
Finance and Operations Manager
Design Director & Website Producer

Nicole Netherton
Chris Murray
Caley Zuzula
Cheyenne Moore
Judith Allen
Nora Chovanec

Committees

Adult Education
Advocacy
Baker Team
Blair Woods Core Team
Chaetura Canyon Management

Chimney Swifts
Commons Ford

Field Trip
Hornsby Bend
*Inclusion, Diversity, Equity,
and Access (IDEA)*
Memberships and Outreach
Purple Martins
Youth

Jeanette Larson
John Bloomfield
Chris Murray
Mark Wilson
Paul Kyle
Georgan Kyle
Paul Kyle
Ellen Filtness
Michael Sims
Celeste Treadway
Eric Stager

Lino Mendiola
Jane Tillman
Shelia Hargis
Mary Kay Sexton

Board of Directors

President Eric Stager
Vice President Karen Bartoletti
Treasurer Celeste Treadway
Secretary Chris Gunter
Directors Jason Garcia
Suzanne Kho
Richard Kostecke
Julia Marsden
Lino Mendiola
Dennis Palafox
Flo Rice
Virginia Rose
Vidhya Sundar
Mark Wilson

Advisory Council

J. David Bamberger
Valarie Bristol
Frances Cerbins
Victor Emanuel
Sam Fason
Shelia Hargis
Bryan Hale
Karen Huber
Mary Kelly
Clifton Ladd
Susan Rieff
Andrew Sansom
Carter Smith

Upcoming Events

WITH TRAVIS AUDUBON

02 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS, BIRDATHON

Birdathon: Hershey Ranch (FULL)

03 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS

Boggy Creek Greenbelt Walk

1114 Nile St, Austin, TX 78702, USA

06 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS, BIRDATHON

Birdathon: McKinney Falls State Park

07 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS

Beginners' Bird Walk: Champion Park

3830 Brushy Creek Rd, Cedar Park, TX 78613, USA

07 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS

Cemetery Birding: Evergreen Cemetery

3304 E 12th St, Austin, TX 78721, USA

07 MAY, 22

YOUTH & FAMILY, SANCTUARY EVENTS

Baker Nature Day

12221 Lime Creek Rd, Leander, TX 78641, USA

08 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS, SANCTUARY EVENTS, BIRDATHON

Birdathon: Commons Ford (FULL)

614 N Commons Ford Rd, Austin, TX 78733, USA

14 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS, SANCTUARY EVENTS

Morning Canyon Crawl at Chaetura Canyon

14 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS

World Migratory Bird Day at Hornsby Bend

2210 FM973, Austin, TX 78725, USA

15 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS, SANCTUARY EVENTS

Baker Sanctuary Bird Walk (FULL)

Leander, TX 78641, USA

18 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS, SANCTUARY EVENTS

Commons Ford Bird Walk

614 N Commons Ford Rd, Austin, TX 78733, USA

19 MAY, 22

Speaker Series: "From illegal bird poaching to professional bird guiding: How Birding Changed My Life" with Juan Diego Vargas

21 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS, YOUTH & FAMILY

Young Birders Club: Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Metropolitan Park

400 Grove Blvd, Austin, TX 78741, USA

21 MAY, 22

SANCTUARY EVENTS

Blair Woods Restoration Day

5401 E Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Austin, TX 78721, USA

21 MAY, 22

Purple Martin Colony Visit

22 MAY, 22

FIELD TRIPS, SANCTUARY EVENTS, LET'S GO BIRDING TOGETHER

Let's Go Birding Together: Commons Ford

614 N Commons Ford Rd, Austin, TX 78733

26 MAY, 22

Bird Trivia Night at Oskar Blues

28 MAY, 22

SANCTUARY EVENTS

Plirding at Blair Woods

5401 E Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Austin, TX 78721, USA

01 JUN, 22

FIELD TRIPS

Texas State Park Field Trip Series: Colorado Bend State Park (FULL)

Colorado Bend State Park, 2236 Park Hill Dr, Bend, TX 76824, USA

04 JUN, 22

FIELD TRIPS

Beginners' Bird Walk

05 JUN, 22

FIELD TRIPS, SANCTUARY EVENTS

Commons Ford Bird Walk

614 N Commons Ford Rd, Austin, TX 78733, USA

08 JUN, 22

YOUTH & FAMILY

Youth Birding Camp

09 JUN, 22

FIELD TRIPS

Migratory Birds in the Landscape - Bird Walk at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

4801 La Crosse Ave, Austin, TX 78739, USA

Thank You

TO OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS



Thank You

TO OUR 2021 VICTOR EMANUEL
CONSERVATION AWARD CELEBRATION SPONSORS

Golden-cheeked Warbler Sponsors

Chuck and Mary Kay Sexton

Crested Caracara Sponsors

Julia Marsden

Shield Ranch

Peggy & Matt Winkler

Ferruginous Hawk Sponsors

Austin Water

Paula & Ernest Smith

Jo Wilson & Carol Bennett

Food Sponsors

Antonelli's Cheese

Kellie's Baking Co.

Painted Bunting Sponsors

Austin Parks Foundation

Judith Bailey

Karen Bartoletti

Frances & Oskar Cerbins

Shannon Davies

Alice & Chris Gunter

Chris Harte

Carol Ray

Nona & Dr. Andrew Sansom

Eric Stager & Friends

Texas Ornithological Society

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours

Thank You

TO OUR 2021 VICTOR EMANUEL
CONSERVATION AWARD CELEBRATION SPONSORS

Swallow-tailed Kite Sponsor



Crested Caracara Sponsor



Ferruginous Hawk Sponsor



Updates

FROM THE SIGNAL SMOKE BLOG

Volunteer Spotlight: Amy Sugeno

POSTED ON MARCH 10, 2022 CATEGORIES: SIGNAL SMOKE HOME



By Alexis Puchek

Amy grew up in the Dallas area in Arlington on the edge of town, running around the fields and the prairie. She's always loved nature and the critters that live in it, knowing from an early age that she wanted to become a wildlife biologist. Her time at A&M for college and her master's degree centered her focus on waterfowl, bats, songbirds, and endangered species. Though, as much as Amy appreciated wildlife, she struggled with the effects that humans have on nature and habitat and eventually left the field after sixteen years of working throughout Texas, New Mexico, and Tennessee.

After a break from her career as a wildlife biologist, she went back to school to become a mental health therapist and found ways to bring nature into the conversation. Through Amy's journey, she's helped articulate and lead people through healing with nature to improve mental health. She focuses on how strengthening your relationship with nature can infuse mindfulness and ease the struggles we have. After ten years as an ecotherapist, Amy changed career courses again and is now writing a memoir about being adopted, exploring her evolving identity, and finding healing in nature.

Through our conversation, Amy exuded enthusiasm and empathy through her learned experiences with wildlife education, to the connections she strives to bring for individuals in their relationships with

nature, and the community that can be fostered for individuals sharing space and interests.

We'll learn more about Amy's personal journey and what that means for the ways in which she shows up authentically to build community and a love for nature.

What got you into birding?

Amy remembers the clunky pair of binoculars and field guide her mom had when she was a kid at home. Her mom always had feeders up around the property, and she can remember fondly when she was 11 or 12, sitting in the backyard trying to use the field guide to identify the birds. At that time, it was a fun hobby, with no knowledge that people could go out into the world, to new places, and identify species through birding.

When Amy was in college, her initial path started her down Herpetology, studying snakes and amphibians. She quickly found it was difficult to be a wildlife biologist as a female in a male-dominated world, and that it was even more of a struggle to fit in with a field like Herpetology. Around this time, she found an empathetic, caring, and open professor who "took her under his wing," and introduced her to waterfowl and wintering geese in the Texas rice prairies. She fell in love with the work and the sense of belonging she felt in this field.

During the pandemic in the last two years, Amy attended an online panel discussion centered around 'queering nature' through [Vermont Audubon](#) during [Pride Month](#). Amy's mind was "blown apart" when she learned how limiting biologists tend to construe nature: centering it around males and females, and what that means for reproduction. She also began to see how these narrow perspectives affect wildlife conservation and management and, ultimately, can lead biologists to make inaccurate assumptions and decisions. She remembers that as a kid, when she was confused or troubled, she could look to nature and build a broader understanding of the world around her. The realization of how heteronormative biology and how many of the spaces we all participate in, can be limiting, helped her confront and come to terms with her own queer identity.

What is Let's Go Birding Together?

It's a fairly recent program started by [National Audubon](#) across many chapters of Audubon in the United States, including Travis Audubon. Let's Go Birding Together (LGBT) is specifically created as an opportunity for people who identify as LGBTQ and allies to enjoy birding field trips in an inclusive and welcoming environment.

Depending on where you are outdoors, it can be very scary for some people because it doesn't feel safe. A big part of creating the LGBT program was to [create a safe space](#) for people who do not always feel safe outdoors. Travis Audubon hosts Let's Go Birding Together field trips the last Sunday of every month. As Amy began to explore her own identity, she started seeking out an LGBT community where she could fit in, which really stemmed her interest in being a part of this program.

How can someone get involved with Let's Go Birding Together?

Everybody is welcome, whether you identify as queer or not, and you don't have to be 'out.' We don't ask you to divulge your identity or your pronouns, your participation in that disclosure is as much as you feel comfortable. [Travis Audubon](#) has created an easy way to sign up for the monthly field trip, and know that you'll be in a safe, welcoming, and queer-friendly environment. We should all be able to celebrate and enjoy the outdoors together.

Why do you think it's important to have LGBT field trips?

"It breaks my heart that anybody would feel like they can't go and be outdoors, because the outdoors and nature can be so therapeutic. It's so important to me because it's such an important relationship in my life. It breaks my heart that that anybody would feel like they cannot have that in their lives because of fear of physical safety due to other people.

Being in a group that is explicitly safe where you don't have to worry about who you are, how you look, and what you say or identify about yourself is so important. It is incredibly freeing to be able to show up and just be yourself, and it's a great way to find connections to others who are likeminded."

What would you say to individuals who might be hesitant in attending?

"Know that this is a no-pressure environment. If you sign up and change your mind because you're nervous, or plans change, that's ok. You won't take a spot from anyone else, and we would encourage you to sign up even if you're still unsure about it."

Amy also wants you to know that she is open and more than happy to have a conversation with you prior to attending. If you need to talk or ask questions, her [email is available on the Travis Audubon LGBT events page](#), and she understands how vulnerable new experiences might leave you. No matter how big or small your worries may be, she's there to help.

It was my absolute pleasure speaking with Amy, and I applaud her in being able to talk openly about her journey and where she is on it. We all have different lived experiences that put us on our own unique paths – we celebrate your intersectionalities and identities – and we hope to see you on an LGBT walk when you're ready.

Soaring at 70: Reflections by Frances Cerbins

POSTED ON MARCH 21, 2022 CATEGORIES: [SIGNAL SMOKE HOME](#)



In this monthly feature, our members and friends have been invited to reflect on and celebrate Travis Audubon's 70 years.

Happy 70th Birthday, Travis Audubon! What a joyous 70 years it has been. It all started with a few avid birders in Travis County who shared a passion for birds. They volunteered to lead the new organization with classes, bird walks, social events, and of course, fun birding. Classes have been a part of Travis Audubon since it was organized, spreading the world of birding to people like me who were eager to learn.

My interest in birding preceded my move to Austin in 2006, but when I finished unpacking my first task was to find a beginning birding class to learn Central Texas birds. I luckily found Jean Martin! What a find. I took her class on Tuesday afternoons with a field trip on Thursdays for four weeks—perfect timing for me. In fact, I enjoyed it so much, I took the same class three times along with her Waterfowl class. Jean offered some out-of-town field trips for the people who had taken her classes: the Rio Grande Valley, Corpus Christi, High Island, East Texas Piney Woods, and even New Mexico. It was a great introduction to the wonders of birding in Texas and a great opportunity to make new friends of fellow birders and share much fun. Jean even introduced me to Christmas Bird Counts. She gave me the gift of loving birding for which I am grateful.

Jean was one of a long list of Travis Audubon instructors through the years: Ed Kutac, Lee Hoy, Shelia Hargis, Laurie Foss, Byron Stone, Jane Tillman, Jeff Patterson, Eric Stager, Doug Booher, Amy Bishop, Mark Klim, Martha Renfro, Cathy Reeves, Robert Reeves, Bill Reimer, Val Bugh, John Abbott, Diane Sherrill, and Christy Esmahan—to name a few. I have benefited from many of these people as have many of you. We are lucky to have them as a part of Travis Audubon.

The sharing of one's passion for birding through instruction is a long tradition of Travis Audubon and I'm so happy it continues to live on. I hope you will take a [Travis Audubon class](#) and enjoy it as much as I do!

Frances Cerbins

Friend and Former Board Member

2022 Greg Lasley Photography Contest

POSTED ON MARCH 23, 2022 CATEGORIES: SIGNAL SMOKE HOME



© Greg Lasley

Burrowing Owls by Greg Lasley.

Do you enjoy birding through a camera lens as much as through binoculars? Show off your birding finesse AND your photography skills while supporting Travis Audubon!

Travis Audubon's Birdathon Contest is now the Greg Lasley Photography Contest to honor our late friend and legendary wildlife photographer. First place in this contest will receive the Greg Lasley Award for Photographic Excellence.

There are some **guidelines** for the photos that can be submitted. Photos should:

- contain birds (and no people!)
- be taken between April 1 and May 8, 2022 (you know, Birdathon dates!)
- be taken in Texas
- be submitted by the photographer (or guardian if the photographer is a minor)

Since this is a fundraiser, entry into the contest is \$5 per photo.

Photos do not need to be taken during an official Birdathon excursion. If you have a great photo op while drinking coffee on your back porch, then that's great!

What's in it for the winners? The top five photos will be featured on Travis Audubon's social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) with photographer recognition. The first place photo winner who receives the Greg Lasley Award for Photographic Excellence will be featured in our Signal Smoke blog and will have their photo included in our Annual Report.

Note: This year, photographers can only place once. So, the top five photos will be from five different photographers.

Who is judging the photos? We are in the process of securing judges. We will let you know as soon as we know!

Submit your photos by sending them to birdathonphoto@yahoo.com. You will receive a reply that asks you a few easy questions and provides a link to pay the entry fee. **The deadline to submit is Tuesday, May 10, 11:59 PM CT.**

Birdathon Photography Contest Renamed to Honor Greg Lasley

POSTED ON MARCH 23, 2022 CATEGORIES: [SIGNAL SMOKE HOME](#)



Travis Audubon has long held a photography contest as a part of our Birdathon celebration every spring. The winners of this contest capture the magic of birds and also help support our mission—the contest is a part of our fundraising during spring migration.



Ted Eubanks giving remarks about his dear friend Greg Lasley.

At our Drive-in event on March 22, 2022, Ted Eubanks, a naturalist and photographer himself, gave another tribute to Greg Lasley, our Victor Emanuel Conservation Awardee from 2021. Ted talked about his friend Greg's unparalleled photographic skills and true commitment to being a naturalist and observer of the species around him. Ted praised Greg as a pillar of the Central Texas conservation community and beyond. Together they photographed countless birds, but also insects, dragonflies, damselflies, and all manner of other organisms throughout their almost forty-year friendship.

Ted then announced that in 2022 and henceforth, the Board of Travis Audubon have renamed this contest in honor of Greg. "The Greg Lasley Award for Photographic Excellence" will be awarded annually to a photographer whose work celebrates the joy and beauty of birds, just like Greg's work did and still does.

We at Travis Audubon hope this tribute will continue to celebrate Greg's conservation legacy and highlight his unparalleled photographic skills for many years to come. And we hope everyone inspired by Greg's photography will participate in the contest this year!

We thank Greg for his contributions to nature photography, and to Ted for the moving tribute. We celebrate their photography and this year's award! Here's to the continued enjoyment of birds through a lens.

[Learn more about the contest guidelines and how to enter.](#)

Featured Image: Greg Lasley taking photos at Bosque del Apache NWR.

Meet the 2022 Board Nominees

POSTED ON APRIL 5, 2022 CATEGORIES: [SIGNAL SMOKE HOME](#)



Learn more about the 2022 Board Nominees by reading their bios below! Election will take place at the virtual May Member Meeting- more details for that meeting coming soon.

Nitakuwa Barrett Orsak



Nitakuwa has been an environmental enthusiast since childhood. She found her love for nature on family camping trips, and made a career as a naturalist working in Hawaii, Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, and Mexico. Nitakuwa now works in the Department of Population Health at the Dell Medical School, launching community-driven projects and initiatives. Nitakuwa collaborated with Travis Audubon to help activate the Blair Woods Sanctuary, supporting research on public perception, trail use, and afterschool programming. Nitakuwa is currently working on her Master Naturalist certification, and is excited to join the board and help amplify the connections between nature and health outcomes.

John Bloomfield



John moved to Texas in January 2021 and has a long history of volunteering with Audubon organizations. He was Secretary and Communications Chair of New Jersey Audubon in his native state, and later served as President of Hilton Head Audubon in South Carolina, where he was also a member of the Audubon SC Board of Advisors. John was part of the 2021 Master Birder program and currently leads field trips, blogs, and serves as Travis Audubon's Advocacy Committee Chair. In his professional life, John spent more than three decades as a global healthcare communications executive. He now serves as the communications leader for the Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition, a group of 45 organizations, including National Audubon and the National Wildlife Federation, dedicated to preserving the American Horseshoe Crab and the shorebirds who depend on them.

Chris Garza



Chris is a Certified Ecologist, ISA Certified Arborist, and Certified Ecosystem Restoration Practitioner in Training. He also holds a GIS certificate from Texas A&M University where he received a M.S. in Forestry and has a B.S. in Biology from St. Edward's University. Chris currently works as an ecologist with Siglo Group, providing environmental assessments and natural area management guidelines for several projects in Central Texas. Prior to his time with Siglo Group, Chris worked as an environmental scientist and GIS specialist for over 2.5 years at Hollaway Environmental in Houston, Texas. Chris also worked as an applied ecologist for over 3.5 years at the Houston Arboretum & Nature Center during the design and implementation phases of their master plan. Chris has experience in wetland delineation, threatened & endangered species surveys, phase I environmental site assessments, wetland mitigation/restoration, ecosystem restoration, tree surveys, land/ecosystem management, invasive plant removal, herbicide application, and other biological surveys. Some of Chris' other interests include botany, entomology, mycology, foraging, and rock climbing.

Birding Brawl 2022 Results

POSTED ON APRIL 15, 2022 CATEGORIES: SIGNAL SMOKE HOME



Thank you to everyone who supported our 2021 Birding Brawl. You helped us raise over \$5,600 that will go towards this year's Birdathon total!

Get the full scoop on their day of birding on April 3rd from the competitors:

Caleb Helsel and River Ahlquist – 1st Place **(135 species)**

For the Birding Brawl, our strategy was to go birding at relatively central areas in the count circle that we knew would have the most species, with Hornsby Bend as our primary birding spot. We started our birding before dawn with a quick stop at the spillway of the Pleasant Valley dam to see Black-crowned Night-Herons and Rough-winged Swallows that aren't abundant at Hornsby Bend. We continued east to reach Platt Lane by dawn, and birded the Hornsby Bend property for the next 6.5 hours. The strategy I use most weeks to survey Hornsby is to spend the most active part of the morning birding the riparian forests around Platt Lane to hear species that are less active in the afternoon, then quickly walk across the fields to check the ponds while there is still some morning activity, after which I usually survey the rest of the river trail during the slow hours of the day. We took this route and turned up surprises like Yellow-throated Warbler, Winter Wren, and Eastern Towhee along with 105 other species that were new for our day list. After a lunch of tacos from Pueblo Viejo, we turned our attention westward and headed to Reimers Ranch. At 2:40, the heat of the day was upon us as we slowly picked out the western species that inhabit the western edges of the county. Despite our efforts though, we could not find Canyon Towhee, Common Ground Dove, or the Zone-tailed Hawk we had staked out the previous day. However, we were fortunate enough to find a Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler, as well as a Bald Eagle that River spotted soaring in the distance. As the afternoon wore down, we drove eastward again and ate some dinner at a Mediterranean food truck along Hamilton Pool Rd. Once refueled, we arrived at Commons Ford for some evening birding. In the last few hours of sunlight, we

saw the nesting Great Horned Owls, and heard a Sedge Wren calling softly from the prairie. As twilight approached, Poorwills began singing from the canyon hillside, and their songs were joined briefly by an eastern Whip-poor-will! Our last species of the day was a pair of Eastern Screech Owls duetting from a dark stand of sycamores by the parking lot. This big day was a super fun adventure that wouldn't have been possible without the the help and expertise of my friend River, and also both of my parents for all the driving. I'm glad I could participate in this fundraiser for Travis Audubon!

Rich Kostecke and Romey Swanson – 2nd Place **(100 species)**



Rich (left) and Romey during their Big Day.

So, we decided to do something a bit different for the Birding Brawl. Given my Williamson County roots and the assumption that most of the other teams would be visiting the same Austin/Travis County hotspots (like Hornsby Bend), we decided to focus on the Granger Lake area and its diversity of habitats. When the birds are hopping out there, they can be really hopping! However, come the day of the Birding Brawl, Williamson County did not give up its birds easily!

We started early, well before dawn, out at Granger Lake's Willis Creek Wildlife Management Area; potentially a good place for nocturnal birds. We did ok on owls, but the nightjars apparently have not arrived yet. We then proceeded to bird the Granger Lake area's ag lands for prairie birds, and we got some nice ones like American Golden-plover, Upland Sandpiper, Merlin, and Say's Phoebe among the the usual suspects (meadowlarks, shrikes, etc.). We scoped the lake from various points, but there was little activity. We made our big time commitment to Comanche Bluff Trail, which is along the San Gabriel River where it enters Granger Lake. We hiked a 6-mile loop through mixed habitats which usually produces really nice diversity and numbers of birds. However, during our big day, the birding was slower than expected. In general, migrants were just about non-existent and some of the early arriving breeders (Great Crested Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Prothonotary Warbler, etc) were just not in.

The birding was so slow, I even allowed Romey to look for snakes! 😊 We had no luck there either! Feeling a bit beat after our big hike, we had lunch and a rest at the Granger Lake Dam Overlook – great view on a nice day but still not much bird activity on the lake. Still, we were feeling pretty good about the 85 species we had tallied at that point and we were still optimistic that the birding might pick up. After lunch we then proceeded to bird the marsh below the Granger Lake Dam, which can be a great place for rails, wrens, sparrows, and the like – but not that day. At that point, we started looking at the clock and the pressure really began to set in. We needed about a dozen more species to hit the century mark, but given how challenging the birding had been, the easiest way to get those species was a big question. We did some strategizing, and then headed west. We stopped at Murphy Park in Taylor to check out the rookery, which was not super active yet. We picked a few new waterbirds at Paloma Lake. We then went to Berry Springs Park where we managed to add some more songbirds to our list. Now, we were sitting at 98 species, but adding more species at Berry Springs seemed like a tall order. So, with only a limited amount of time until sunset, we sprinted over to Booty's Road Park and the Lake Georgetown Dam where Canyon and Rock wrens are resident – the 2 species we would need to reach 100 species. Well, the wrens decided to be shy. Eventually we got Canyon Wren, but no Rock Wren. Luckily we were also able to add House Finch and Cave Swallow as well to get us over the century mark to a final of 101 species. Whew! A lot of work for fewer species than we expected. Still, it was a fun day with several nice species, Romey and I barely bickered at all, and most importantly we were able to raise a good chunk of money for TAS to further their excellent education, conservation, and advocacy work! Thanks to everyone who supported Team Kostecke-Romey!

Jason Garcia and Suzanne Kho – 3rd Place
(93 species)



Jason and Suzanne.

Suzanne and I came up with a plan weeks before to make an east-west trek across the city, starting at Hornsby Bend and ending at Commons Ford.

At the last minute I switched our strategy, opting instead to start at Reimers Ranch. Reimers was hopping in the AM, with many birds announcing their presence with songs and calls. We were able to log over 40 species, including nearly all expected sparrow species, in a couple of hours. Highlights here were a Northern Parula and a distant Swainson's Hawk that I was just able to make out above a flock of circling vultures. From there we grabbed a quick bite to eat and changed into more comfortable clothes before heading to our favorite neighborhood haunt, Nicholas Dawson. It was here that we were able to add the nesting Broad-winged Hawks and various warblers including the Black-throated Green. After that, we moved to the overlook at Roy G. Guerrero Park, adding some herons, swallows and a random Barred Owl that called out of nowhere from across the river. Circle Acres was next, where we picked up Black-and-white Warbler (a good location for them) and a Cooper's Hawk that appeared right after Suzanne remarked "we need Cooper's Hawk". ? Our last major location was Hornsby Bend and Platt Lane, where we added an additional 20+ species before going back to check West Bouldin Creek one more time for a Louisiana Waterthrush. To our surprise, not only was there a waterthrush in the creek when we arrived, but we observed an additional waterthrush come in while we were watching the first one! By that time we were pretty beat, so we decided to call it a day. With 93 species seen and heard, we felt that we more than held our own in the Birding Brawl!

Amy Sugeno and Sheila Anderson – 4th Place
(80 species)

Soaring at 70: Reflections by Chuck Sexton

POSTED ON APRIL 18, 2022 CATEGORIES: [SIGNAL](#), [SMOKE](#), [HOME](#)



In this monthly feature, our members and friends have been invited to reflect on and celebrate Travis Audubon's 70 years.



It feels a little weird to say it, but I'm proud that my Travis Audubon membership dates to the last century—heck, it dates to the last millennium! I had been an active member of the Sea & Sage Audubon Society in my college years in Orange County, California, before I relocated to Texas for graduate school in 1974. The next year (1975) I joined Travis Audubon and began to explore the great birding in Central Texas.

As for many of us whose membership dates to the 70s, 80s, or 90s, I quickly came under the spell of such luminaries as Fred and Marie Webster, Red and Marjorie Adams, and Ed Kutac. Not only was much of my introduction to local haunts hosted by Ed, but when he travelled to farther flung locations, I began to discover other birding hotspots around the state.

For several years Ed would lead what was known as a "President's Day Field Trip" on a three- or four-day weekend to a variety of destinations in mid-February. I recall such a journey to Padre Island National Seashore and the Coastal Bend.

We saw massive flocks of waterfowl, close-ups of Sandhill Cranes, and studied a brilliant male Vermilion Flycatcher on a fence post at one of the old corrals at Padre. On another such trip, Greg and Becky Lasley and I acted as "scouts" for Ed's President's Day field trip to the Lower Rio Grande Valley. We stayed just an hour or two ahead of Ed and some 30 or 40 eager souls, trying to pin down rarities for the group.



Ed Kutac in the field (1982).

Long before eBird made such record keeping so much easier, many a happy evening was spent at Ed's home for the monthly Bird Checklist Committee meetings. We would all gather to write down our bird sightings (by date and number of birds), then divvy up all the slips of paper and record the results in an ongoing notebook that became the grist for the next edition of the superb "Birds of the Austin, Texas Region" seasonal checklist—one of the best documented and best maintained regional lists in all of Texas. If you're curious, the first edition of that list was compiled by Edgar B. Kincaid and Fred S. Webster and published in March 1954. It could be purchased from Travis Audubon Society for 10 cents. (p.s. I have scanned electronic versions of all the editions if anyone is interested).

But that's all fun and games. I am most proud of the active role Travis Audubon has played as a vanguard in conservation efforts in Central Texas. Leading by example, the acquisition and expansion of the Baker Sanctuary set the tone for the larger conservation efforts which the community would undertake in the 90s and 2000s.

Through birding trips, checklist committees, general meetings, and all the rest, I've made many long-time friends in this organization and continue to make more. Clearly TAS is my kind of people!

Interested in your own 65th anniversary seasonal checklist? Support Travis Audubon by [purchasing a copy today!](#)

Chuck Sexton
Biologist and longtime member

Featured image above: Chuck Sexton, Victor Emanuel, Kurt Huffman, Becky Lasley, and Greg Lasley (left to right) at Hornsby Bend in the late 1970s.