A Note
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Travis Audubon Members and Friends,

Every April for the last decade, I have led a Travis Audubon field trip to the Upper Texas Coast for spring migration. Over that decade I have birded all over Texas and made international birding trips almost every year, but nothing compares to April in my favorite birding spots -- High Island, Sabine Woods, Bolivar Flats, and the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge.

In the early 1980s, I was a teenage birder growing up in suburban Houston, a two-hour drive to High Island. Boy Scout Woods and Smith Oaks were private property then, but birders were welcome to walk the trails. (I would drop $2 in the mailbox at Smith Oaks!) Nearly 40 years later, I still have vivid memories of those spring days spent peering into the tall oaks looking for warblers and other migrants. I can still remember my excitement at seeing my first Swallow-tailed Kite soaring over Boy Scout Woods, and my lifer Cape May Warbler in the parking area at Smith Oaks. The sense of those places has remained indelible as the years have passed. A highlight of every year since then has been bringing a new group of Travis Audubon members to those familiar stomping grounds to see what April has in store.

This will be the first spring that I have not been able to make that trip, due to the covid-19 epidemic that has upended all of our lives. Birding is a fine solitary activity, and can be a great mental health break during these days of social distancing. As I've grown older, however, I really appreciate sharing birding experiences with others, and nothing beats bringing a group to my favorite birding spots.

Despite the circumstances, we can all look for ways to stay connected while we're not able to go birding together. Like many organizations, Travis Audubon has moved to more virtual events. Laurie Foss transitioned her ever-popular Intro to Birding class to the Zoom platform, and the reviews were positive! Following suit, Jeff Patterson's new Be a Better Birder class debuted this month on Zoom, and includes homework exercises along with a Facebook discussion group to keep students engaged between lecture sessions.

A big test came on April 19, as our Executive Director Nicole Netherton successfully hosted our Speaker Series with Audubon Texas' Romney Swanson and 100 live participants on Zoom. One advantage to the online format is that you can view a recording of the event if you were not able to join live. Another successful event was our Birding Together in Spirit backyard bird count. I encourage our membership to continue to engage online until we can meet again on the trail!

I have been getting at least a small dose of High Island magic by watching the live video that Houston Audubon has been streaming on Facebook in the afternoons from the drip at Boy Scout Woods. I was even able to pick out a Philadelphia Vireo among the numerous Tennessee Warblers at the drip. For now, I'll take it!

Good birding and be safe!

Eric Stager
President
**People**

**AT TRAVIS AUDUBON**

**Staff**
- Executive Director: Nicole Netherton
- Land Manager and Educator: Chris Murray
- Development Manager: Kelsey McKenna
- Education and Program Coordinator: Caley Zuzula
- Operations Coordinator: Judith Allen
- Design Director & Website Producer: Nora Chovanec

**Board of Directors**
- President: Eric Stager
- Vice President: Karen Bartoletti
- Treasurer: Carol Ray
- Secretary: Sharon Richardson
- Directors: Christy Esmahan, Suzanne Kho, Clif Ladd, Julia Marsden, Lino Mendiola, Dennis Palafox, Virginia Rose, Jo Wilson, Mark Wilson

**Committees**
- Advocacy: Christy Esmahan, Clif Ladd, Chris Murray
- Blair Woods Management: Mark Wilson, Shelia Hargis, Ellen Filtness
- Commons Ford: Paul Kyle, Georgean Kyle, Mark Wilson
- Chaetura Canyon Management: Byron Stone, Cheryl McGrath
- Adult Education: Dennis Palafox, Eric Stager
- Field Trip: Jane Tillman, Cindy Sperry
- Hornsby Bend: Virginia Rose, Mary Kay Sexton
- Outreach/Member Meetings: J. David Bamberger, Valarie Bristol, Frances Cerbins, Victor Emanuel, Sam Fason, Shelia Hargis, Bryan Hale, Karen Huber, Mary Kelly, Susan Rieff, Andrew Sansom, Carter Smith
- Youth: Virginia Rose, Mary Kay Sexton
Here’s to the ‘Bird Man’ of Travis Country

Have you ever wondered how all those bird nest-boxes you see at the TC Community Garden, Carrington’s Prairie, and other neighborhood common areas got there? The person largely responsible for these wonderful bird B & Bs—there are 37 of them in the neighborhood if you’re counting—is TC resident Glen Novinger.

Novinger’s been building these houses for wild, nesting birds for 30 years. He began building them for TC’s feathered friends since 2014, when the TC Bird Nest-Box Project officially began.

“I initially started building boxes and installing them around my house in TC. Then one day (current TCCSA Board President) Cynthia Wilcox asked me if I would be interested in installing them in the common areas of TC,” Novinger said. “That led to the TC Board approving the installations, and I expanded the number of boxes with at least one box in nearly every common area of the subdivision.”

Novinger, who constructs the aviary inns in his garage, notes that the nest-boxes aren’t for all types of birds. “The birds that nest in nest-boxes are ‘cavity nesters’—that is, they are species that nest in natural cavities in the wild. So only those birds will nest in a nest-box, which is an artificial cavity. It would be impossible to try to build these for all species, because birds are very specific as to their nesting needs and preferences, and we have in excess of 650 different species of birds occurring throughout Texas. Of course, there are fewer than 650 species occurring in Austin.”

Novinger’s nest-boxes, which come in five sizes with varying sizes of entry holes, are located at the TC Community Garden, Blue Valley, Carrington’s Prairie, Hilltop Pool area, the Wildflower Center, the common area and detention pond area on Sendero Drive, and the common area north of Magdelena Drive.

“Although I have identified over 100 species of birds in Travis Country over the years, the birds that we routinely have had in the boxes over the years, listed in order of size, are the Eastern Screech Owl, Black Crested Titmouse, Bewick’s Wren, and Carolina Chickadee,” Novinger said. “We have been trying to attract
Eastern Bluebirds to the three nest-boxes in the Wildflower Preserve, but so far we haven’t had any bluebirds nest in our boxes. But in Sunset Valley, less than three miles away, there are bluebirds each spring and summer.”

The TC nest-boxes are monitored from March through June, the wild birds’ nesting season. Though egg incubation periods and fledgling growth vary by species, generally the larger the bird the longer the incubation and fledging period, Novinger explained. “Eastern Screech Owls take approximately 26 days on average for the eggs to hatch and 27 days for the young to leave the nest, so most screech owl broods are hatching as the leaves are unfolding on the trees in late April,” Novinger said. “Titmice and Bewick’s Wrens take about 13 to 14 days to incubate and 14 to 18 days to fly away.”

Novinger noted that “we don’t feed the birds, just provide an available nest cavity. With increasing human population, urbanization, and reduction of the habitat, cavity nesters have an increasing problem finding adequate nesting cavities. The nest-boxes provide a small replacement for the enormous reduction in cavities.

Novinger and his wife, Tracy, who moved to TC in 1999, have been avid “birders” for three decades. Novinger led the TC Bird Walks for years, before Lucy Flanagan, a member of the Travis County Audubon Society, took over the walks last year.

“Birding has been a great pleasure for me and my wife, Tracy, for over 30 years. We have bided throughout Texas, Kansas, Colorado, and Arizona and have bided on special trips in Romania, Hungary, France, Scotland, Italy, Croatia, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Brazil and Canada,’ he said. Also a shutterbug, Novinger has photographed nature around the world. Samples of his remarkable photos are on his website at https://NovingerPhoto.com/.

The time and manual dexterity required of maintaining TC’s three dozen nest-boxes have taken their toll on Novinger through the years, however. As of February 8, he passed along the responsibilities of the TC Bird Nest-Box Project to TC resident Becca Young Brim, a biology research fellow with The University of Texas at Austin.

“She is very well-qualified to carry on the nest-box program, and I am sure the residents of TC will enjoy getting to know her,” Novinger said.

For more information, contact Becca Young Brim at 520.360.2866 or rybrim@gmail.com.

Commons Ford Walk with Council Member Jimmy Flannigan

POSTED ON MARCH 16, 2020 CATEGORIES: SANCTUARY NEWS, SIGNAL SMOKE HOME

By Judith Allen, TAS Staff

Commons Ford Metropolitan Park, a much-loved oasis for birds and people alike, lies within District 6. We were delighted to host Council Member Jimmy Flannigan and two members of his staff for a blue-skies morning birdwalk at the beloved Commons Ford on Thursday, March 5. We started off the walk in awe as we gazed upon three majestic Great Blue Herons roosting in their nests along the river.
Members of the Commons Ford Prairie Restoration Committee talked about the restoration efforts to encourage native plants, birds, and other wildlife at the prairie throughout the years. More information on the details of what this restoration has entailed can be found in the Commons Ford Prairie Restoration document. We are so grateful for the efforts that have gone into restoring native species to this land, the birds and wildlife that have benefitted from these efforts, and the people who get to enjoy the fruits of what this conservation project has produced.

We are so grateful to Council Member Jimmy Flannigan, Lizzy Carol, and Frankie for taking the time to experience the feathered residents, conservation efforts, and crisp morning air at Commons Ford with us. Such a beautiful “bluebird morning” never fails to inspire the human heart about the importance of conservation of the natural world!

We spent some time at “Rusty’s Perch,” the bird blind just off the trail. We also introduced our guests to a dear resident of Commons Ford, a Great Horned Owl nesting in one of the massive pecan trees along the trail.
Bird Art

POSTED ON MARCH 23, 2020. CATEGORIES: SIGNAL SMOKE HOME

By Christy Esmahan, TAS Board Member

Things I had planned to do this spring:

• Attend my son’s wedding.
• Sell my house.
• Move to Spain.

Things I’m actually doing this spring:

• Hosting my son and his fiancé indefinitely since they fled from Boston.
• Living in a house with half of my things packed, but which is no longer on the market.
• Keeping in touch with friends and colleagues who are sheltering in place as a nation in Spain while their number of Covid-19 cases spirals up.
• Taking an art class.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Drawing by Christy Esmahan. But not just any art class. This is a pre-recorded on-line class recently offered by the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology: a drawing and watercolor painting class, with an emphasis on birds. The class is called Nature Journaling and Field Sketching, and a few weeks ago, when I started getting stressed out about the coronavirus situation, I happened upon the class. I ordered the recommended supplies on-line and got started.

Not only is the teacher really sweet and encouraging and optimistic, but it was fun to post my “homework” assignments as I took the class at my own pace, and then scroll down and see what other people had done and shared in the last few months.
Now, besides taking every opportunity to do backyard birding or maybe sneak out to a local park, I spend 30 to 40 minutes a day focusing on my drawings and paintings, which has brought me some much-needed peace of mind.

My son’s wedding has been re-scheduled to October. I’ve no idea if we’ll be able to sell the house or move this year. And, like everyone else, I’m really worried. I’m keeping up my vitamins and keeping my hands washed. But, in the meantime, I’m learning so much about different birds and finding surprising joy in doing so!

Want to listen to and learn about nature without having to leave home? Join Field Trip Leader Amy Sugeno on a short bird and plant walk around her home in Round Mountain. Video taken the morning of March 26, 2020.

Amy Sugeno was a wildlife biologist for over 16 years before changing careers to become a social worker and trauma therapist. She spent most of her biology career working with bats, songbirds and waterfowl, and rare species with TPWD, The Nature Conservancy, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Amy has always loved teaching people about nature, especially birds and bats, and she now regularly leads birding walks with TAS and the Balcones Songbird Festival. She has also recently led birding and nature walks with Westcave, El Ranchito, Dripping Springs Birding Club, and Friends of Balcones NWR. Amy now primarily works as an ecotherapist, leading mindfulness in nature walks and retreats and teaching clinical ecotherapy to other therapists throughout Texas as well as out-of-state.
Meet the 2020 Board Nominees

Learn more about the 2020 Board Nominees by reading their bios below! Election will take place at the virtual May Member Meeting—more details for that meeting coming soon. In addition to board elections, members will be voting on changes to the organization bylaws—see the revisions to the bylaws here.

**Chris Gunter**

Chris is a native Austinite and has been birding since he got out of law school 40 years ago. He has been a member of Travis Audubon for over 25 years. He is a Master Birder as well as a Master Naturalist, and has been leading the monthly bird walk at Commons Ford Ranch for Travis Audubon since September 2019. Chris has also led walks at Wild Basin for several years, and served for a few years on the board of the Hill Country Conservancy. The goals of Travis Audubon, including land conservation, environmental education, and conservation advocacy have been passions of his for many years. Now that he is about to retire, he would like to devote more of his time to doing what he can to further those goals. Chris has been nominated for a two-year term to fill an existing vacancy on Travis Audubon’s Board of Directors.

**Flo Rice**

Flo caught the birding bug in 2012 after an amazing warbler fallout at High Island. Since that time, she has taken many Travis Audubon classes and participated in numerous field trips. Flo has grown to treasure the amazing community of birders that we have here in Austin and is inspired by their tireless efforts. She retired from AISD in 2018 where she had worked for 13 years as an architect/project manager in the Construction Management Department. Since retiring, she completed the Capital Area Master Naturalist training program in 2019. Her volunteer work associated with CAMN includes Christmas Bird Counts and Hornsby Bend Bird surveys, as well as work with the COA Wildlands at Vireo Preserve and seed collection on Onion Creek. Flo has worked with the Kyles and Travis Audubon to develop a group of Chimney Swift Tower ambassadors. She has been a gardener at Deep Eddy Community Garden since 2004 and served as site coordinator there for 6 years. She has two young grandchildren that live in Austin and is doing her best to make sure they have a strong connection to the natural world. Flo has been
Celeste Treadway

Celeste is a small animal veterinarian, mostly retired. She was sole owner of a relatively large, fast-paced veterinary hospital which she sold in 2017. Prior to that, she served as medical director of a local emergency clinic for 6 years, started up and was part-owner of an animal blood bank, and also helped her husband run a tropical plant nursery for several years. Celeste has been involved with TAS for several years. She has held an annual Birdathon event on her property in Leander since 2015, helped last year with the Baker Sanctuary Birdathon, and this year will be leading three Birdathon events. She has participated extensively in Golden-cheeked Warbler re-sighting surveys at Baker Sanctuary and has completed the Master Birder Class among other TAS classes. Celeste brings enthusiasm, energy, and cheerfulness, and is a good organizer and communicator. She absolutely loves TAS and is always looking for ways to contribute and be of service. Celeste has been nominated for a three-year term on Travis Audubon’s Board of Directors.

Eric Stager

Eric grew up in the Houston suburbs, and camping trips with his family instilled a love of nature at an early age. After forays into collecting insects and catching snakes in the backyard, Eric was bitten by the birding bug in 1981 at age 13. Encouraged by his father and other kind mentors, his birding obsession was fueled by growing up in one of North America’s top birding destinations. While still in high school, Eric was leading field trips for his local birding club, compiling a Christmas Bird Count, and even operating the Texas Coast Rare Bird Alert (in the days of cassette tape answering machines). Since moving to Austin to attend college, Eric has continued to bird Texas extensively and expanded his sights (and life list) with international trips in South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia. He is now leading birding trips in Central and South America. Eric has been a long-time field trip leader for Travis Audubon and teaches birding classes, including the perennially-popular shorebird class. He is the coordinator for the monthly Hornsby Bend field trip. Eric received a B.A. from UT-Austin and is a graduate of the Plan II Honors Program. He works as an Environmental Policy Manager for Austin Energy. Eric is currently a member of the Board and has been nominated for re-election for a three-year term.
Mark Wilson

Mark is a native Texan who worked his entire career in emergency care, with a MSN from UT Austin. He served as Chief Flight Nurse for Austin’s STARFlight in the 80s, Director of Emergency/Trauma Services in the 90s, and finished his career as a Nurse Practitioner in the same ED, retiring in 2016. Mark has been active in the Austin community, as a founding member of the Capital Area Trauma Regional Advisory Committee, and adjunct faculty at the UT School of Nursing. Most recently, he served as President of the Capital Area Master Naturalists.

Mark developed a strong interest in the outdoors while hunting and fishing with his father throughout Texas. He has volunteered with a number of conservation organizations, including the Nature Conservancy and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. He has learned that conservation is best promoted through broad coalitions of birders, naturalists, anglers, and hunters. Mark and his wife are avid travelers, and enjoy wildlife photography. As a Master Naturalist, he has participated in trail building, leading guided hikes on Austin Wildlands properties, and workdays in local sanctuaries. His work with Travis Audubon has focused on the Sanctuary and Advocacy Committees. He is a member of the Chaetura Canyon Management Committee and Chair of the Blair Woods Core Team.

Mark is currently a member of the Board and has been nominated for re-election for a three-year term.
Thank You
TO OUR 2019-2020 VOLUNTEERS FOR ALL YOU DO TO INSPIRE CONSERVATION
IN THE HEARTS OF CENTRAL TEXANS!

Sachin Aggarwal
Sandra Alba-Casarez
Barbara Anderson
Kevin Anderson
Mary Anderson
Wendy Anderson
Jacque Austin
Judith Bailey
Noreen Baker
Andrew Balinsky
Julia Balinsky
Terry Banks
Susan Barney
William Bartek
Karen Bartoletti
Theresa Bayoud
Kamryn Behee
Mikael Behrens
Amy Bishop
Ann Bishop
Lisa Boice
Doug Booher
Justin Bosler
Bridget Bradshaw
Michael Burns
Dan Callaway
Gus Cannon
Eric Carpenter
Sebastian Casarez
Frances Cerbins
Cecil Cole
David Cook
Ellen Cox
Cinda Crosley
Emily Curci
Denise Dailey
Jackie Davis
Melissa De Los Santos
Tom Delaney
Alan Denman
Anne Donovan
Clare Edileman-Heath
Carol Edwards
Victor Emanuel
Christy Esmanah

Elena Espinosa
Sarah Fekete
Andy Fitlness
Ellen Fitlness
Lucy Flanagan
Laurie Foss
Marc Frazier
Paulina Fricke
Pat Frost
Diana Gale
Cathleen Galley
Rachel Gibson
Chris Gunter
Steve Hannington
Shelia Hargis
Kirsti Harms
Elisabeth Harper
Laura Heartwood
Julia Heskett
Elizabeth Hingle
Ryan Husid
Sabina Ibarrola
Noah Israel
Ashley Jackson
Brad James
Michael Jewell
Adrian Johnson
Hannah Jordan
Alison Joseph
Barbara Keir
George Kerr
Suzanne Kho
Donna Kinney
Nick Komar
Rachel Konakci
Linda Lacy
Clif Ladd
Hans Landel
Shirley LaVergne
Eacine Lehman
Ellie Loggins
Sharon Lynch
Lori Malloy
Advait Marathe
Julia Marsden
Jeannine Marshall
Jean Martin
Suzie McCann
Beverly McClellan
Kathy McCormack
Cheryl McGrath
Skip Mencio
Lino Mendola
Jasime Mills
Laurie Miraglia
Carolyn Mixon
Anne Moore
Owen Moorhead
Al Morgan
Leslie Morris
Ciaran Mulkalky
Nora Noble-Christoff
Emily Novak
Glen Novinger
Janel Nye
Vincent O'Brien
Dennis Palafox
Marjorie Palmer
Avery Parmiter
Jeff Patterson
Jim Pauff
Colette Pearce
Ruth Pelphrey
Michael Pfel
Betsy Pfel
Walker Pickens
Daniel Puckett
Stephanie Putnam
Mary Helen Quinn
Nancy Rading
Akash Rajeev
Carol Ray
Becky Rayne
Leah Razuri
Rose Ann Reeser
Cinella Reyes
Amy Rice
Florence Rice
Sharon Richardson
Jeff Richardson
Mary Lou Rizzo
Mary Ann Robalino
Judy Roby
Virginia Rose
Kathrine Ross

Cynthia Roush
Sarah Ruiz
Rafael Ruiz
Nona Sansom
Felicia Sawyers
Brooke Schiebe
Mary Kay Sexton
Chuck Sexton
Terri Siegenthaler
Michael Sims
Patsy Slaybaugh
Shannon Slivinske
Janet Slover
Brooke Smith
Dan Smith
Ellen Smith
Cindy Sperry
Eric Stager
Ray Steelman
Ginny Steelman
Charles Stephens
Anne Stine
Byron Stone
Amy Sugeno
Judith Tasch
Toni Taylor
Tami Taylor
Jane Tillman
Katherine Tombs
Nancy Townsend
Celeste Treadway
Laura Tull
Heather Valey
Ricky Vega
Terry Virtue
Lee Wallace
Deb Wallace
Bob Warneke
Jean Warneke
Nancy Webber
Jennifer Whaley
Mark Wilson
Jo Wilson
Lauren Wojcik
Pat Yingst
Lauren Young
Thank You
TO OUR 2019 VICTOR EMANUEL CONSERVATION AWARD LUNCHEON
CANYON WREN LEVEL SPONSORS

Chris Harte

We were thrilled to honor Chris Harte for the 10th anniversary of the Victor Emanuel Conservation Award Luncheon for his conservation work at Spicewood Ranch.
Thank You
TO OUR BIRDS AND BUSINESS PARTNERS