Hello Travis Audubon friends and members,

Finally, 2020 has come to an end, and we look forward to brighter days in 2021. With a COVID vaccine rolling out, we can only hope that this year will see a gradual return to normality. I am very much looking forward to travelling again, and seeing my birding friends out on the trail.

As challenging as the last year has been, for our birding community there were moments of brightness. Birding became a way for many to find peaceful relaxation outdoors at a time when most recreation was curtailed. Numerous articles in the mainstream press touted birding as a way to stay sane and connected during the doldrums of quarantine.

Despite missing our normal in-person programs, classes, and field trips, Travis Audubon found new ways to engage with our members online, and we added many new members to our family in 2020. Thanks to our staff’s creative efforts, we kept busy with new classes, lunchtime speakers, and virtual field trips. Our recent Virtual Travel Week was a big success, as were our classes, including Val Bugh’s very popular sessions on pollinators. I expect that we will continue to host these virtual programs, while hoping that we can gradually begin adding back in-person events later in 2021.

Again, I want to thank our fantastic staff for their hard work last year. And thanks to all of you for your continued support of Travis Audubon. Happy New Year and good birding!

Eric

Eric Stager
President
# People

## AT TRAVIS AUDUBON

### Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>Nicole Netherton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Manager and Educator</td>
<td>Chris Murray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Manager</td>
<td>Kelsey McKenna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and Program Coordinator</td>
<td>Caley Zazula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations Coordinator</td>
<td>Judith Allen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design Director &amp; Website Producer</td>
<td>Nora Chovanec</td>
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### Committees

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<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Chair</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Education</td>
<td>Jeanette Larson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Christy Esmahan</td>
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<td>Clif Ladd</td>
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<td>Baker Team</td>
<td>Clif Ladd</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Carol Ray</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blair Woods Core Team</td>
<td>Mark Wilson</td>
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<td>Chaetura Canyon Management</td>
<td>Paul Kyle</td>
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<td>Chimney Swifts</td>
<td>Paul Kyle</td>
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<td>Commons Ford</td>
<td>Ellen Filtness</td>
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<td>Michael Sims</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field Trip</td>
<td>Dennis Palafox</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hornsby Bend</td>
<td>Eric Stager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA)</td>
<td>Lino Mendiola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships and Outreach</td>
<td>Jane Tillman</td>
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<td>Chris Gunter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purple Martins</td>
<td>Shelia Hargis</td>
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<td>Youth</td>
<td>Mary Kay Sexton</td>
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### Board of Directors

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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>Eric Stager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Karen Bartoletti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Carol Ray</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Chris Gunter</td>
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<td>Directors</td>
<td>Christy Esmahan</td>
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<td>Suzanne Kho</td>
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<td>Virginia Rose</td>
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<td>Celeste Treadway</td>
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<td>Mark Wilson</td>
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### Advisory Council

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>J. David Bamberger</td>
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<td>Valarie Bristol</td>
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<td>Frances Cerbins</td>
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<td>Victor Emanuel</td>
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<td>Sam Fason</td>
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<td>Shelia Hargis</td>
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<td>Bryan Hale</td>
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<td>Karen Huber</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Kelly</td>
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<td>Susan Rieff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrew Sansom</td>
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<td>Carter Smith</td>
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### Upcoming Events

**WITH TRAVIS AUDUBON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>09 Jan, 21</td>
<td>Birdability Virtual Field Trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Jan, 21</td>
<td>Classes: Virtual Class: Spanish for Birders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Jan, 21</td>
<td>Classes: Class: Virtual Sparrow Class 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Jan, 21</td>
<td>Virtual Birding in Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Jan, 21</td>
<td>Classes: Class: Virtual Beginning Backyard Birding</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 Jan, 21</td>
<td>Virtual Speaker Series: Mitigating Bird-Building Collisions with Dr. Tania Homayoun</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Feb, 21</td>
<td>Virtual Speaker Series: The Secret Lives of Dinosaurs with Julia Clarke</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Mar, 21</td>
<td>Classes: Virtual Speaker Series: All About Hummingbirds with Susan Heath</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 Mar, 21</td>
<td>Classes: Class: Empid Intensive 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Apr, 21</td>
<td>Classes: Class: Flycatchers 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Thank You

**TO OUR BIRDS AND BUSINESS PARTNERS**

- Wild Bird Centers
- GE Ranch
- Parmer Lane Pet Hospital
- Solluna Design Build Consult
- Panamazing Tours
- Montemayor Britton Bender, P.C. Certified Public Accountants
Thank You
TO OUR 2020 VICTOR EMANUEL
CONSERVATION AWARD CELEBRATION SPONSORS

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
Shield Ranch

Golden-cheeked Warbler
Austin Subaru
Julia Marsden
Winkler Family Foundation

Canyon Wren
Austin Water

Food Sponsors
Antonelli’s Cheese
Russell’s Bakery

Golden-fronted Woodpecker Sponsors
Austin Parks Foundation
Judith Bailey
The Bamberger Foundation
Karen Bartoletti
The Bristol-Scott Family
Frances & Oskar Cerbins
Chris Harte
Wendy Harte
Laura Legett & Joseph Doherty
Carol Ray
Nona & Dr. Andrew Sansom
Paula & Ernest Smith
Eric Stager & Friends
Texas Ornithological Society
Travis Audubon’s Commons Ford Prairie Committee
Victor Emanuel Nature Tours
Jo Wilson & Carol Bennett
Brentwood Chimney Swifts

One July evening at dusk, I took my son out for one of his first birding experiences: watching hundreds of chimney swifts funnel into an old chimney at Brentwood Elementary School. In summer, the swifts' twinkling calls can be heard throughout Brentwood Park, along with the chirps of Purple Martins and peent calls of Nighthawks, as they all swoop through the air catching insects on the wing. Brentwood’s swifts roost inside an unused scratch brick chimney that is part of the 1950s-era school building in Central Austin. Bird lovers have been monitoring the swifts there for at least ten years, according to the Chimney Swift Conservation Association in Driftwood, Texas. eBird shows a high count of over 700 swifts at the site in 2018. Swifts gather in these impressive flocks between the end of nesting season and the start of migration, and the sight of hundreds of the tiny streamlined birds descending in a tornado-like formation is a dramatic sight.

Naturally, when the plan was drawn up to modernize Brentwood Elementary and the chimney was set to be demolished, people were concerned about the future of the swift colony. Fortunately, a group composed of AISD staff, along with members of Friends of Brentwood Park and local residents, came together to advocate for the construction of a new tower. AISD contacted the Chimney Swift Conservation Association, who provided design plans for a new tower to be built adjacent to the school. Their design includes coarsely textured inside walls that the swifts need to cling and attach nests.

Thanks to the efforts of bird-loving individuals, the new tower was constructed this summer by the company in charge of the Brentwood renovation. Its appearance may have sparked new interest in the swifts, with curious residents asking neighbors about its purpose. It could take a few years for the swifts to move into the new structure, if they select it at all, said the Chimney Swift Conservation Association. When the birds return in summer and find their old roosting site gone, they will search the area, before moving on to find a new site. With luck, they will choose the tower that area bird lovers came together to build, and their nightly flights will continue to be a welcome summer spectacle in the park.

Birdathon 2020: The Results Are In!
Thank you to everyone who participated in Birdathon this year! Despite the unusual circumstances, eight teams participated in a safe and socially distanced Birdathon that will go down in history as the first to occur with the (sort of) changing leaves of fall.

Here are the results of this year’s competition:

- Most bird species (half day): Phoebe Friends (86 species)
- Most bird species (full day): Gone Pishing (107 species)
- Most Funds Raised: Gone Pishing ($3,576)
- Reveling in Raptors: Gone Pishing (14 species)
- Neatest Non-bird: Hershey Ranch Birders (Axis Deer)
- Rarest Bird: Fisher Hollow Goldies (Spotted Towhee)
- Most Mockingbirds: County Vagrants (42)
- Best Story: Phoebe Friends (Team Member Virginia saw a Cooper’s Hawk with a White-winged Dove in its talons!)
- Most Creative Team Name: Prairie Chicks
- Rookie of the Year: Falcon Junior
- Coolest Mask: Fabulous Baker Birders Team Member Beverly with her bee mask.

Regardless of the competition outcomes, everyone who competed, donated, or supported our strange little Birdathon this year are winners. The Travis Audubon team is grateful for you all!

Featured Image: Gone Pishing (East group)

Attract Birds to Your Backyard

By Laura Hopkins, Travis Audubon Master Birder

These past few months have forced a lot of us to slow down and spend more time at home. And that has introduced a lot of folks to what some of us have known for a while – the joy in watching the birds that visit our backyards.

There are a multitude of reasons for creating an inviting backyard haven for our feathered friends. They keep bug populations in check, many species are pollinators, they are endlessly entertaining, it can be educational for kids and parents, and they can use a little helping hand due to loss of native habitat are just a few that I can think of off the top of my head.

Getting into backyard birding need not be an expensive or complicated activity. Birds have the same basic needs that we do, shelter, water, and food. Our native birds, bugs, and plants all evolved together, so providing native plants is an easy way to provide the shelter and food birds need.

Some birds prefer to nest in bushes and trees so dense shrubs such as Texas Mountain Laurel, Yaupon, and Agarita as well as trees such as our Live Oaks, Ashe Juniper (aka Cedar Trees), and Cedar Elms can provide excellent nesting sites. Other birds are cavity nesters and will easily take to nest boxes. Plants provide roosting sites for when the birds are not nesting. Plants also support bugs like butterflies and caterpillars and some have berries for food sources. Just to maintain their populations, Chickadees require a site that is 70% native planting (Audubon, 2018).

Nest boxes can be provided for our cavity nesting songbirds – Chickadees, Carolina and Bewick’s Wrens, Titmouses, Eastern Screech Owls, Eastern Bluebirds, and some flycatchers. These birds all have slightly different requirements in terms of nest box placement, dimensions, and size of the holes.
Protecting the nest box from predators is important and can be done using baffles, hardware cloth, or netting. Nestwatch.org is an excellent source of information on species preferences. As with everything backyard birding, cleanliness is important. Nest boxes need to be cleaned out and washed between each brood.

Water is also essential, especially here in Central Texas. Providing water can be as easy as keeping a shallow dish filled with water to more complex water features and fountains. birds are particularly vulnerable when their feathers are wet, so it is essential to have your water feature near shelter. We have had success with placing our bird baths under tree canopies or near shrubs, but not so close that predators can lay in waiting and create problems. It is also important to make sure the water is fresh and whatever you use to hold it, is clean.

Augmenting native food sources benefits both the birds and us! Sites with bird feeders attract more birds over time than those without feeders (that’s good for us!). Birds with access to feeders are in overall better health that birds without feeders, including lower stress levels and better body condition. Birds that have regular access to feeders produce more young and their survival rates are 38% higher in areas where bird feeders are present (Millikin University, 2011 – 2013).

There is a wide variety of seed that will attract birds to your yard. Black Oil Sunflower seed is the gold standard wild bird feed, one that nearly all the visitors to your feeders will enjoy. It has a high oil/fat content and lots of protein that the birds need for energy and a relatively thin shell that even small birds can handle. Using a seed blend can attract a greater variety of birds, but we generally recommend that if you are going to do so, it’s a better value to get one from a specialty shop instead of a big box or grocery store. Inexpensive blends are often loaded with filler that songbirds won’t eat. This filler seed ends up kicked out of the feeder while the birds search for the more desired seeds. What ends up on the ground can attract the critters you probably don’t want in your yard. Besides Black Oil Sunflower, here are some seeds that work well for Central Texas:

- **Millet** for buntings, grosbeaks, and migratory sparrows.
- **Shelled peanuts** for Jays, wrens, woodpeckers, chickadees and even cardinals on occasion. Whole peanuts (in the shell) are also a favorite with Blue Jays, Woodhouse’s Scrub Jays, and American Crows.
- **Safflower** is a favorite of the cardinals and is also well-liked by chickadees, titmouses, and finches. And perhaps the best part of feeding Safflower is that squirrels do not like it.

- **Nyjer** is a favorite with our Lesser Goldfinches and American Goldfinches and Pine Siskins join them on Nyjer feeders in winter.

Suet is a good option to provide in winter through early summer. Some have luck feeding it all year, but the birds in our yard give up on it during the heat of the summer.

There are a variety of feeders that you can use but providing songbirds with feed can also be as easy as spreading enough quality seed for the day on the ground. As with providing water, keeping your feeders clean is key to preventing the spread of disease. Here are some of the different types of feeders to consider using:

- **Mixed seed tube feeders** – these are easily used by the smaller songbirds and if you are having dove problems, it’s difficult for them to use a tube feeder.
- **Hopper feeders** – this type of feeder generally has a larger seed capacity. Seed is gravity fed down onto a small feeding platform. This type is popular with nearly all songbirds and Northern Cardinals can easily feed on these.
- **Tray feeders** – birds love tray feeders; they are similar to feeding on the ground. Tray feeders are versatile, you can use seed in them, whole peanuts, fruit (Northern Cardinals in our yard are eating grapes), suet, pretty much anything a bird will eat.
- **Nyjer feeders** – these are specially designed for Nyjer seed. They can either be a tube feeder with small portals they can be mesh.
- **Squirrel proof feeders** – yes, such a thing exists. They are available as hopper feeders and tube feeders.

Regardless of how you choose to entice birds to your backyard, you will find a little calm, a little peace and a whole lot of joy as you watch them your yard.

Photos by Laura Hopkins. Featured image is of Lesser Goldfinches at a bird bath.
At Travis Audubon, our mission is to inspire conservation through birding. The events of the past year have made it clearer than ever that racism, discrimination, and inequality threaten this mission, cause harm, and put lives at risk.

As leaders of a 68-year old organization that aims to better communities through conservation and education, we feel a responsibility to engage in humble inquiry about our contributions to systems that uphold injustice and perpetuate inequality, especially when it comes to access to nature. We are committed to examining our own biases and to creating policies and strategies that prioritize inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA). We also recognize that we must partner with and amplify the voices of those in vulnerable and underserved communities as they seek to connect with nature.

The TAS Board started work in June on the statement you see below. Represented here are hours of sharing, disagreement, examination, and vulnerability. We know that it’s not perfect, but we hope that it is a good start to communicate the goals we mean to achieve and the processes we’ll implement for accountability.

This is important work, and we understand that it will take time. We are sincere in our desire to show that birding is for everyone, and that every person from every background is welcome in Travis Audubon. We hope you’ll join us in achieving these goals.

Sincerely,

Eric Stager, President, Travis Audubon Board of Directors

Nicole Netherton, Executive Director, Travis Audubon
nicole@travisaudubon.org

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Birding is for everyone.

Travis Audubon is committed to ensuring that all people—Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, LGBTQ+, people of all abilities, ages, and socioeconomic status—are welcome in our organization and feel safe and invited to enjoy birds and nature.

Inclusion, diversity, equity and access are not tangential to the protection of birds and bird habitat. They are essential to achieving these aims. To succeed in our mission to inspire conservation through birding, we must increase access, opportunity, and enjoyment of birds for everyone, especially for those communities and individuals who have been underserved.

We recognize that we have not adequately prioritized this work before now. We commit to these goals and actions:

1. Invite all people of Central Texas to enjoy birding and become members and friends of Travis Audubon. This includes Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, LGBTQ+, people of all abilities, ages, and socioeconomic status.

2. Extend a strong sense of welcome, hospitality, open access, and full inclusion to every person who wants to be involved with Travis Audubon, reflected in both our actions and communications.

3. Develop leadership opportunities and encourage participation within our organization by people who reflect the full diversity of Central Texas.

4. Engage and join with racially and culturally diverse communities and organizations to encourage interest in birding and conservation.

5. Cultivate better dialogue with our neighbors and community members near our Sanctuaries.

6. Encourage, amplify, and directly support efforts by Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and Asian birders, LGBTQ+ birders, and birders of all abilities in our programming and communication platforms.

7. Dedicate resources (both money and staff time) to removing physical and economic barriers to birding.
This includes providing scholarships, equipment, tools, and educational opportunities where and when we find an opportunity to create a more inclusive organization.

8. Dedicate resources and/or provide an annual donation to an organization working in racially and culturally diverse communities that is furthering birding, conservation, or other environmental/nature work.

9. Commit to continue learning and having conversations about racism and discrimination, and to critically examine our own biases and misconceptions.

10. Charge a standing committee to consistently assess, reflect upon, challenge, and report our progress towards these goals at least quarterly.

What’s Happening at Blair Woods?

Blair Woods, one of Travis Audubon’s Sanctuaries, is a true diamond in the rough. The ten-acre property on East MLK was gifted to the Society in 1985 by Dr. Frank and Fern Blair. Dr. Blair was a preeminent zoologist at UT, known for his studies of reptiles and amphibians, with much of his field work taking place on the property. We believe Fern was the birder and history buff in the family, and likely the inspiration for their gift.

As East Austin has grown over the past decades, it became clear to TAS that Blair Woods was well situated to be the center of our education programming. Over the last two years, Travis Audubon and its Board have worked through a master planning process for Blair Woods that will help us best steward the property and focus our efforts there even more towards outreach and education. At the outset, Board members made three important decisions: (1) Travis Audubon was committed to retaining Blair Woods and honoring the legacy of Frank and Fern Blair’s gift (2) the vast majority of the property (nine acres) would be maintained as a bird and nature sanctuary, guided by the Habitat Plan developed in 2013 (3) we would explore the possibility of building a new Travis Audubon office and learning center on the remaining acre. Along the way, supporting our Blair Woods neighbors and preserving the unique history of the property have been additional guiding principles.

The work of habitat management has been underway for many years, guided by the Blair Woods Core Team. For well over a decade, dedicated volunteers have worked hard to restore the land at Blair. Removal of invasives, native planting and seeding, building of a Chimney Swift tower, trails, and a pollinator garden – the nine acres that make up the sanctuary are being healed and a wonderful urban oasis is emerging.

The new “Blair Build” master planning process is focused on the one-acre area containing the Blair House and several historical outbuildings close to the home. During its 2019 annual retreat, the Board decided to begin the formal planning process and adopted the following goals: a new-construction office building that can accommodate future growth of TAS, an adjacent learning center and classroom space for adult and youth learners, adequate parking, and a reimagining of the Blair House to honor the legacy of their gift. Funds were approved at a subsequent business meeting to contract with architects Clayton & Little (now Clayton Korte) to consult on the planning process. A Blair Build subcommittee was appointed. Members include Executive Director Nicole Netherton, Past President Frances Cebins and Board members Karen Bartoletti, Julia Marsden, and Mark Wilson.

Up front communications with City of Austin Development Services were seen as key, as the property requires some zoning modifications to allow for the educational and office building. After multiple meetings among principals, the Sunland Engineering group completed an initial Site Development Plan including Environmental Resources Inventory. This work has been folded into a overarching Master Plan by Clayton Korte, led by Nathan Quiring, AIA/Partner. The Master Plan has been reviewed by the Board and will be rolled out in January 2021. After that, the hard work of a capital campaign and zoning changes with the City of Austin can commence.

We will be sharing more about the master plan and its goals throughout 2021, including more about the history we’ve discovered about the Blairs and their property, about the habitat restoration efforts, and about the neighbors and communities around the property and our partnerships together. What a gift Blair Woods was and is to our organization, and how exciting it is to watch this diamond’s sparkle emerge!
Thank You

We are grateful to all of our members and donors who have supported Travis Audubon in any capacity in 2020. Special thanks to our Lifetime Members and Leadership Giving Circle.

Lifetime Members
Membership at $1,500

The Aeschbach Family
Ross Bee
Holly and Tom Brandt
Donna Brasher
Valarie Bristol
Sam Burnes
Frances and Oskar Cerbins
The Collins Family
Colin Corgan
Jackie Davis
Marilyn Davis
Stacia and Walt DeBill
The deVries Family
Joe Doherty and Laura Legett
Carol Edwards
The Fason Family
Sharon and Don Flournoy
Michael Gagarin and Donna Carter
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Wendy Harte
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Burgess Jackson
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Tasso Leventis
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The Sexton Family
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Catherine Sims
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Bryan and Cindy Sperry
Gregg Sparar and Kelley Cunny
Byron Stone
Patsy Turner and Tim Stuart
Stan VanSandt
Karen Verser
Paul Wade
The Wadehra Family
Isabel Welland
The Wheeler Family
Jo Wilson and Carol Bennett
John Wilson
The Yates Family

Leadership Giving Circle
These members support our critical efforts in education, conservation and advocacy. Members of this highest giving category set an example by making an annual gift of $1,500 or more – over and above membership.

Judith Bailey
Frances and Oskar Cerbins
Dawn M. Dickson
The Donovan Family
The Fason Family
Patricia Gallagher
Faye Harris and Lee Decker
Julia Marsden
Nancy Radding
Pam Smolen
Jo Wilson and Carol Bennett
Peggy and Matt Winkler
Thank You

We are grateful to all of our members and donors who have supported Travis Audubon in any capacity in 2020. Special thanks to our Wise Owl, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and Warbler Members.

Wise Owl
Sustaining Members
These members support Travis Audubon through a monthly donation of $10 or more.

Barbara Anderson
Judith Bailey
Melissa Bedrock
Valarie Bristol
The Bergman Carton
Family
Frances and Oskar Cerbins
Fred Dalbey and Sonia
Ralls
Jackie Davis
Carol Drennan
Christy Esmahan
Feagin Household
Vella Fink
Susan Galbreath
Donna Joan Herschleb
Mary Jo Kennard
Stephen Livingston
Julia Marsden
Ann McGinley
Trent Miller and Meta
Hunt
Owen Moorhead and Erica
Mendoza
Geruza Paiva
Jeff Patterson

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher Members
Annual membership of $500

Erica Clark
Alison Gallaway
Lauri Hoff
Carla Kenyon
The Watt Family
The Weston Family

Warbler Members
Annual membership of $250

Carol Bohumolski
Christel Erickson-Collins
Claire Field
The Hudson Family
The Diane and Bryan
Jones Family
The Donna and Kent Jones
Family
Lisa Jones
The Kerr Family
Adam Lindemuth
The McCann Family
Mary and Lynn Moak
Michael Murphy and Julie
De Wette
Allen Peck and Lidia
Agraz
Nancy Radding
Rose Ann Reeser
The Rizzo Family
Kim Soechting
The Swisher Family
Laura Tull
The Vinson Family
Judy Willcott and
Laurence Miller
The Cynthia and Lowell
Williams Family
Pat Yingst and Tony
Parchman