Hello Travis Audubon friends and members,

What a long, hot summer it has been! The recent rains give us hope for great birding during fall migration, which started this month and will only gain strength as the days get shorter and cooler. Peak migration is in late September and October, so please put out your Lights Out yard signs (or ask us if you need one) and share with neighbors how they can help migrating birds by turning off non-essential lights.

Speaking of magical migrations, thanks to the more than 1,000 of you who joined us at this year’s Purple Martin Parties at Capital Plaza. We loved being with you again at our hottest event of the year (literally!). Until next year – here’s to another tornado of beautiful birds.

Travis Audubon staff have been keeping busy even in these punishing temperatures. We are especially proud of having hosted our inaugural Youth Birding Camp in June, as well as multiple ATX Kids Club field trips at Blair Woods. These youth programs served children ranging from ages 6-12 and included bird walks, games, and a live birds of prey show for the Camp. We hope to provide even more fun experiences for kids in nature this coming school year.

Finally, we want to thank you for your membership and support. We have been excited to see that our membership numbers have gone up and remained strong as the pandemic has started to wane. We hope we can continue to grow our reach in the Austin community. Invite your friends to join you on your next TAS bird walk!

Happy birding,

Nicole Netherton
Executive Director
People
AT TRAVIS AUDUBON

Staff
Executive Director
Nicole Netherton
Land Manager and Educator
Chris Murray
Program Manager
Caley Zuzula
Development Manager
Cheyenne Moore
Operations and Finance Coordinator
Annemarie Read
Program Coordinator
Teresa Johnson
Design Director & Website Producer
Nora Chovanec

Committees
Advocacy
John Bloomfield
Baker Team
Chris Murray
Blair Woods Core Team
Mark Wilson
Chaetura Canyon Management
Georgean Kyle
Chimney Swifts
Paul Kyle
Commons Ford
Ellen Filtness
Field Trip
Paul Kyle
Hornsby Bend
Michael Sims
Inclusion, Diversity, Equity,
Celeste Treadway
and Access (IDEA)
Eric Stager
Memberships and Outreach
(open)
Purple Martins
Jane Tillman
Youth
Shelia Hargis
Mary Kay Sexton

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Victor Emanuel
Sam Fason
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Karen Huber
Mary Kelly
Clifton Ladd
Susan Rieff
Andrew Sansom
Carter Smith
### Upcoming Events

**WITH TRAVIS AUDUBON**

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Thank You
TO OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS
Updates
FROM THE SIGNAL SMOKE BLOG

Birding in Allandale

POSTED ON JULY 11, 2022

By Steve Oleson

I have always been fascinated with the flora and fauna of Texas. As a fifth generation Texan, I come from people who lived close to nature. As a kid, I could always count on my mother to answer my questions about the natural world. I would ask “What kind of tree is that?” or “What kind of bird is that?” She always knew the answer, because to her forebears, knowing about the natural world could make the difference between life and death. Her familiarity with wildlife was a boon to me. She helped me to understand how to care for my lizards, ground squirrels, and eventually my hawks. A good falconer must understand the relationship between raptors, their prey, their environment, and how the changing seasons affect everything. Walking down the street with my mom, I pointed out an anole in the ivy on the front of a neighbor’s house. She asked: “How did you see that?” I could only say: “I just did.” Eventually, I became a professional photographer, which enhanced my sharp eye and awareness of my surroundings. I notice when White-winged Doves explode out of a tree, and look for the Cooper’s Hawk, which must surely follow. When a band of Blue Jays are raising a ruckus, I stop to see what they are warning the neighborhood about: a hawk, an owl, a cat, or a mystery?

We moved from south Austin to Allandale in 1989. Being an avid bicyclist, I move slowly enough through the neighborhood and see a lot of wildlife. It is hard to miss the Red-shouldered Hawks. They make so much noise! They are avian exhibitionists!

It is fascinating how wildlife is learning to adapt to living alongside people. In the 1960s, Cooper’s Hawks were rarely seen.
By the 1980s, their populations had recovered. Meanwhile, White-winged Doves had expanded their range and were found in great numbers in the city. Cooper’s Hawks exploited this resource and now nest in many Texas cities. I once saw a Cooper’s Hawk catch another newcomer to Austin: Monk Parakeet!

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron juvenile. Photo by Steve Oleson.

Red-tailed Hawks have also moved into the city. They use MOPAC as a hunting ground. It is not unusual to see six of them in the five miles between Allandale and downtown Austin. They nest in trees and man-made structures. I know of three nests within one mile of my home in Allandale.

Living close to Shoal Creek, I frequently see egrets, herons, and Wood Ducks. I monitored a small rookery of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons for a couple of years. They are very approachable and easily photographed.

I have become more aware of woodpeckers, recently. Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers nest near my home.

Screech Owls. Photo by Steve Oleson.

Allandale has Great-horned Owls, Barred Owls, and Screech Owls nesting in the neighborhood. Screech Owls are a favorite of mine. I really enjoy getting them to come to me when I mimic their call.

As you can tell, I get a lot of enjoyment from urban wildlife. As a longtime resident of Austin, I have seen the city grow and seen how the variety and numbers of wildlife change annually. This year, I am seeing more Western Kingbirds and Mockingbirds than usual. There are fewer Cliff Swallows. The Red-shouldered Hawks and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons have moved their nests from previously favored trees. I do not know why they did, but I’ll keep looking, observing, and enjoying birding in Allandale.

Featured image above: Downy Woodpecker by Steve Oleson.
Youth Birding at Richard Moya Park

POSTED ON JULY 18, 2022

By Terry Banks and Mary Kay Sexton

Earlier this month, we joined three campers from the recent Youth Birding Camp, Auden, Emmet, and Geo, and their fathers (John, Chad, and Ben) for a morning of birding. Ben not only brought his scope for closer viewing, but a surprise guest – Victor Emanuel. What a treat!

From the minute we arrived at the park, the birds were active, especially for this time of year. We all think it is too hot to go out birding in the heat of summer, but we saw some exciting birds. One of our first sightings was that of Eastern Bluebirds flying around the large pecan trees. We could all see these beautiful blue birds and hear their pleasant song. Geo’s Dad quickly got the scope on these birds so everyone could get a quick look. Western Kingbirds were also in good numbers, and we got a chance to see several. Emmet spotted a Yellow-billed Cuckoo skulking in a tree – we couldn’t get a good scope view but we saw it working its way along the branches. One surprising bird was a Green Heron that flew into a pecan tree – we were all able to see it. A quick flyover of 6 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks was a treat, as well. Overall, we had 29 species of birds – some of them were as common as Great-tailed Grackles and Mourning Doves, others not as common, like Summer Tanagers, Yellow-billed Cuckoos, and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks.

The campers were so enthusiastic! We were thrilled to learn that Auden actually started birding during the Youth Birding Camp in June and was inspired to come back. Geo, with the amazing experiences he has with his dad who is a professional birder, has probably been birding since he was a baby. Emmet has been studying the birds in his neighborhood and reading all the bird books he can find.

Along the way, a variety of nature’s wonders were spotted, such as the cocoon of a polyphemus moth, sensitive-briar, a three-dimensional spider web with the spider hiding in its trash line, an abandoned bird nest on the bridge, and an ant-mimic bug.

It was wonderful to see the campers again. Their enthusiasm for birding, as well as their spotting and identification skills, were impressive. What nice birds, what a great group of birders and nature lovers, and what a great place to go birding!

See the eBird report for this field trip here.
Thank You, Eric, Julia, and Lino!

POSTED ON JULY 20, 2022

This month we extend a heartfelt thanks and farewell to three members of our Board of Directors. We also take this opportunity to welcome three outstanding new members to the board. Travis Audubon could not function without the selfless contributions of time, experience, and knowledge that our volunteer board members give to this organization.

Eric Stager (pictured above with Nicole Netherton, Executive Director) has served on the board for five years—three years as Vice-President and the past two years as President. Eric also chairs the Hornsby Bend Committee and is one of Travis Audubon’s most popular class instructors and field trip leaders. He and his wife, Debbie, have also been our de facto IT department, always available whenever tech issues arise.

Julia Marsden has served on the board for nine years. Her work on the Finance, Blair Woods and IDEA Committees has been invaluable, but it has been Julia’s passion for our conservation mission that has been so amazing. Her longtime love and support of Chaetura Canyon and Blair Woods has helped to assure that these sanctuaries have strong futures. Julia has always been quick with a compliment or to share a kindness, and her positive and cheerful attitude will be missed on the board.

Lino Mendiola joined the board in 2019. He served on Travis Audubon’s Field Trip Committee and chaired the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Committee, taking the lead in creating our first IDEA statement. Lino brought a keen legal mind to the board and his insights and ideas will be missed.

Thank you, Eric, Julia, and Lino for jobs well done! You’ll be missed, and although we are sorry to see you leave the board, we look forward to you continuing to play important roles with Travis Audubon through your committee work, teaching, and field trip activities.
We are excited to welcome our three new incoming board members. Nitakuwa Barrett Orsak is a Program Manager in the Department of Population at the Dell Medical School. With her background in public health, we’re looking forward to conversations with Nitakuwa about the role Travis Audubon can play in addressing health challenges and needs in our community through birding.

Chris Garza is an ecologist with Siglo Group providing environmental assessments and natural area management for clients. Chris brings to our board experience working on environmental issues with various government agencies on the local, state and federal levels. Some of you might have met Chris this past fall when he led a mushroom and insect walk at Blair Woods.

John Bloomfield has been very active in Travis Audubon, including chairing our Advocacy Committee and leading bird walks. John is a communications specialist who brings to the board a passion for conservation advocacy. Many of you may be familiar with John from the excellent articles he’s authored for Travis Audubon’s website.

We are truly fortunate to have Nitakuwa, Chris and John joining our board. You can learn more about them here. Please welcome them when you get a chance.

Chris Gunter
President, Travis Audubon Society

Travis Audubon Welcomes Two New Staff Members

POSTED ON AUGUST 10, 2022

This month we welcomed two new staff members, Annemarie Read and Teresa Johnson.

Annemarie joins us as our new Operations & Finance Coordinator. For her, things began with a birthday present a few years ago when she asked for a bird feeder. Her family built and purchased four different feeders in her backyard, then waited. First, a cardinal, then a blue jay, then a few more. Annemarie read and learned more about attracting birds to the backyard. She tried different seeds, added some native plants and a bird bath, and most recently, a pond. Now, she has attracted over 40 different species to her backyard!

She completed Travis Audubon’s Beginning Birder class in 2020. Most weekends, she can be found with her husband at local birding spots, learning as much as she can from those around her. Her newfound passion for birding has taken her all over Texas, the USA, and two different countries.

Born in Philadelphia, Annemarie moved to Austin 30 years ago to earn a degree in Finance from the University of Texas. Her professional background includes managing the finances for local nonprofits, and her most recent position was a Practice Manager for a local orthodontic practice. She is very excited to work with Travis Audubon, combining her experience in operations and finance with her passion for conservation and birding.

Annemarie enjoys spending time with her two college-aged sons, husband, and two Whippets.
In addition to birding, her hobbies include gardening, running, yoga, traveling, and scuba diving. She can be reached at finance@travisaudubon.org.

Teresa joins the team as the new Program Coordinator. Her involvement with Travis Audubon began as a volunteer in the fall of 2017 into the spring of 2018 when she assisted another staff member, Chris Murray, with surveys for Golden-cheeked Warblers at Baker Sanctuary. Teresa is a native Texan with multigenerational family roots in Austin who’s had a passionate interest in wildlife since childhood. Her lifelong goal has been to work to protect endangered species, like Austin’s beloved Golden-cheeked Warbler. She completed a bachelor’s degree in Wildlife Ecology & Conservation and a master’s degree in Environmental Management. She served with AmeriCorps twice and has held a variety of positions in the environmental field, from teaching elementary school students about natural resources, to conducting outreach for the local Save Barton Creek Association, as well as restoring native landscapes in the Austin area.

Teresa lives with her lovable Shar Pei, Moon, and her wonderful partner, Saul. They can often be found together on one of the many hiking trails in Austin or visiting Saul’s native Mexico. Teresa is thrilled to work with Travis Audubon and looks forward to connecting with both new and longtime members of the community. Get in touch with her at teresa@travisaudubon.org.

Wording Meets Birding

POSTED ON AUGUST 12, 2022

By Jaya Ramanathan

Birds that migrate through our area in spring have all left, so now we are thankful for our year-round buddies and migrants that stick around through the summer. I challenged myself to pick an adjective that best captures the personality of some of these birds that regularly visit my yard.

The conspicuous Blue Jay always calls out to announce its arrival, is typically the first to try out any new birding contraption, and enjoys a splashy, lengthy bath. The shy White-winged Dove, on the other hand, surprises us by perching camouflaged and quiet on our patio oak. The showy Northern Cardinal sports bright colors, the male’s red plume and the female’s orange beak. The majestic Red-shouldered Hawk perches, unperturbed by the ruckus of smaller birds or skirmishing Hummers, and its wing span is a beauty.
The **chatty** Carolina Chickadees never visit alone and party with a continuous chatter. The **clamorous** Black-crested Titmouse has a piccolo call, frequents our seed feeder, and the juveniles hassle Hummers at our nectar feeder.

The **observant** vultures circle the sky, rest on rooftops, congregate on electric towers, and scavenge together on prey.

The **playful** Carolina Wren checks out all the nooks in our bird bath, dodges a secondary shower from a splashing Northern Cardinal, chirps and dances to its own tune, and has many loud calls for its tiny size like an unhappy child’s tantrums.

The **captivating** Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers have unique vertical and sliding moves, a distinct colorful and striped plumage, and love electric poles.

The **boisterous** Northern Mockingbird impersonates many other birds in a long and tireless serenade.

The **territorial** Black-chinned Hummers fiercely fend off competitors at our nectar feeder, and sip from the many flowers of our Hummingbird Bush, Autumn Sage, Lantana camara, and Verbena, the male displaying its beautiful purple gorget.

The **menacing** looking Mississippi Kite, while mostly in the sky, sometimes perches on the electric wire and once munched its poor victim there.

The **carefree** flycatchers catch bugs with rapid, short flights, make a single-element call, and perch at a spot long enough to be easily photographed.

The **acrobatic** squirrels actively participate in our birding adventures. They compete for acorns and bird baths, even scare off American Crows, and gorge and deny birds seeds from our sunflowers and feeder; but I can’t deny I am charmed by their survival techniques, playful chases, and other cute behaviors including keeping warm in winter by using their tail as a jacket, relaxing on our gnarly oak’s curvy branches on a hot summer day, and perching on our patio chair to just stare at us!

I hope other birders have observed similar behavior and agree with my characterization of these birds.

*A special thanks to Sarita Yeola for her help on this article.*

*All photos provided by Jaya Ramanathan.*