

Video Participant's Bios – Houston Audubon History Project

Jim Blackburn

Jim Blackburn is a practicing environmental lawyer and planner and a Professor in the Practice in Environmental Law in the Civil and Environmental Engineering Department at Rice University where he also is a Faculty Scholar at the Baker Institute and co-director of the Severe Storm Prevention, Education and Evacuation from Disaster (SSPEED) Center. Blackburn has established a new soil carbon storage standard called BCarbon and is implementing the Galveston Bay Park Plan through SSPEED Center and is privately working on a flooding equity plan for Northeast Houston/Harris County. Blackburn and his friend, the artist Isabelle Scurry Chapman, have just published a new book called Earth Church and Blackburn has written The Book of Texas Bays and A Texan Plan for the Texas Coast, both published by Texas A&M Press. Blackburn has received many honors and awards over the years including being named a Rice University alumni laureate in 2018 and receiving the Good Egg Award from the International Crane Foundation in 2015. He currently serves as Chair and CEO of BCarbon, as well as being President of the Bayou City Initiative, the Matagorda Bay Foundation, the Texas Coastal Exchange, and the Trinity Edwards Springs Protection Association.

2021

Fred Collins

Education:

Graduated Stephen F. Austin High School, Houston Texas 1967
Graduated Texas A&M University, B.S. Wildlife Sciences, 1971
Graduate School Texas A&M University 1971-73
Welder Wildlife Foundation Fellow 1971-73
Automotive Warehouse Distributors University 1982-88
United Way Management Assistant program courses 1994-2002

Professional Memberships:

Texas Ornithological Societies (since 1972)
Southwest Association of Naturalist (since 1972)
Texas State Historical Association (since 2018)
Formerly, most discontinued about 2010:
American Ornithologist Union (since 1973)
Wilson Ornithological Society (since 1980)
Cooper Ornithological Society (since 1980)
Association of Field Ornithologist (since 1989)
Informal Science Education Association (since 1999)
North American Association of Environmental Educators (since 2000)
National Association for Interpretation (since 2003)

Community Service

Advisory Board of the Houston Audubon Society
Advisory Board of the Katy Prairie Conservancy

Work Experience:

- Park Regional Manager, Pct 3 Harris County August 2002-August 2022
 - Kleb Woods Nature Preserve
 - Cypress Top Historic Park
 - John Paul Landing Environmental Education Center
- Director, Nature Discovery Center July 1994-2002
- Aviculturist 1993-current

- Endangered Species Consultant 1993-2012
- Wildlife biologist, Fermata Inc. January 1992-May 1993
- General Manager/Secretary/Treasurer Freds Inc. 1988-1991
- Vice President, Central Parts Warehouse 1973-88
- President, Independent Warehouse Distributor Association 1985-1986
- Wildlife technician and graduate student 1968-1973
- Wildlife technician 1969

President and Board Member, Houston Audubon Society:

President of the Board, 1982-1985

Board Member, 1977-1989 and 2005-2007

Advisory Board, 2008 to present

Laughing Gull Banding project, 1973-1982

NASA Earth Resources project, 1974-75

Miscellaneous projects, 1973-1989

- Regional Director for the Texas Colonial Waterbird Survey from 1973-77 and compiler for the upper coast from 1973-80
- Instrumental in completing the purchase of Louis B. Smith Boy Scout Wood Bird Sanctuary at High Island
- Worked with developer, Malcolm Damuth, on his 614-acre donation of Damuth Bird Sanctuary near Cleveland, Texas

Awards:

- 1980 - Houston Audubon's Audubon Medallion
- 1982 - Outdoor Nature Club's Green Belt Award
- 1986 - Houston Audubon's Outstanding President's Award
- 1996 - Houston Sierra Club's Conservation Award for preserving/conserving the Katy Prairie
- 2002 - Nature Discovery Center's President's Award
- 2016 - Houston Audubon's Lucie Wray Todd Education Award

Teaching Experience:

- 1972 - Ornithology and Mammalogy instructor for the fall class of Texas Game Wardens
- Summer 1972 - nature counselor at Friday Mountain Boys Camp
- 1973-current - adult and children education classes (ornithology/ecology/conservation/ history) for Kleb Woods Nature Center, Cypress Top Historic Park, Nature Discovery Center, Houston Community College, Memorial Drive United Methodist Church, the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center and Houston Audubon
- 1997 to current - journal keeping classes for the Education Department at U of H at Clear Lake and for Spring Branch ISD

2022

Gary Clark

Gary Clark is the weekly nature columnist for the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News. He also publishes feature articles in state and national magazines and has written four books: "Texas Wildlife Portfolio," "Texas Gulf Coast Impressions," "Backroads of the Texas Hill Country" and "Enjoying Big Bend National Park." Gary is also a contributing author in the book, "Pride of Place: A Contemporary Anthology of Texas Nature Writing."

He has won eight Lone Star College writing awards and is the recipient of the Houston Audubon Society 2004 Excellence in Media Award and the Citizens' Environmental Coalition 2010 Synergy Media Award for Environmental Reporting.

Gary is professor of business and developmental studies at Lone Star College--North Harris. In 32 years at the college, Gary has served as vice president of instruction; dean of Business, Social and Behavioral Sciences; associate dean of Natural Sciences; professor of marketing; professor of developmental writing; and Faculty Senate president. He is a recipient of the Teacher Excellence Award.

Gary has been active in the birding community for more than 30 years. He founded the Piney Woods Wildlife Society in 1982 and the Texas Coast Rare Bird Alert in 1983. He served as president of the Houston Audubon Society 1989-1991 and purchased the North American Rare Bird Alert for Houston Audubon in 1990. He was vice president of the Board of Directors for the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory 2001-2008. He currently sits on the Board of Advisors for the Houston Audubon Society and Gulf Coast Bird Observatory. He is also a member of the American Mensa Society.

Additional Information:

- Weekly nature columnist for the Houston Chronicle 1999 - present
- Feature articles in state and national magazines
- Books include:
 - Book of Texas Birds
 - Texas Wildlife Portfolio
 - Backroads of the Texas
 - Texas Gulf Coast Impressions
 - Enjoying Big Bend National Park
 - Portrait of Houston
 - Contributing author, Pride of Place: A Contemporary Anthology of Texas Nature Writing
- Writing awards include:
 - Excellence in Media Award from Houston Audubon Society
 - Synergy Media Award for Environmental Reporting from Houston Citizens' Environmental Coalition
- Founded Piney Woods Wildlife Society, 1982
- Began Texas Rare Bird Alert, 1983
- Began North American Rare Bird Alert, 1990
- Former President of Houston Audubon Society, 1989-1991
- Former Vice-President for Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, 2000-2006
- Currently on Board of Advisors for Houston Audubon Society and Gulf Coast Bird Observatory
- Participates in Texas birding festivals by leading tours and presenting workshops on bird identification
- Speaker for birding clubs and community organizations throughout Texas
- Co-leads with wife Kathy birdwatching and bird photography tours in Central and South America, Iceland, and Africa
- 42-year tenure at Lone Star College
- Currently Professor in Department of Business
- Former Vice-president of instruction
- Former Dean of Instruction
- Former Chair of Dean's Council
- Former Faculty Senate President
- Winner of Teacher Excellence Award, 1987
- Winner of the National League for Innovation's John & Suanne Roueche Excellence Award for teaching, 2019
- Lifelong member of American Mensa Society

Stephen E. Gast

Steve Gast worked for Phillips Petroleum/ConocoPhillips for 37 years. Starting in 1974 as a geologist in west Texas, he retired in 2011 as General Manager of the company's operations in Peru. He was involved in environmental philanthropies, stakeholder relations and conservation projects with his company throughout the last 15 years of his employment.

After being transferred to Houston Texas in 1985 he has served in various capacities on both the HAS Board of directors (11 years) and the Board of Advisors (21 years). While a member of the board in 1989 through 1996, he was a key figure in the High Island Initiative which took HAS from 4 acres of owned land, a partial interest in 11 acres at High Island, and \$37,000 in debt to more than 250 acres owned and directed the raising of contributions worth a combined value of \$2.2M over 7 years. As a product of this effort Steve was also a founding director for the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory which continues to receive an annual \$60,000 challenge grant from Phillips Petroleum Company.

In addition to Houston Audubon, Steve has been involved in projects with ABC, GCBO, BirdLife International, TNC, International Crane Foundation, The National Audubon Society and the Katy Prairie Conservancy (now Coastal Prairie Conservancy). He continues to serve as an Advisory Board member to Texas State Audubon, the Coastal Prairie Conservancy, Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, and Houston Audubon.

May 11, 2022

Stennie Meadours

Stennie Meadours was President of the Houston Audubon Board of Directors from 2005-2007. She served on the board from 1982-1984; 1987-1991; 2002-2009. From 2014 to the present, she is on the HAS Board of Alumni Council. During her tenure, she spearheaded and completed many bird conservation projects on behalf of Houston Audubon.

In 1984 while Stennie was the HAS VP of Sanctuaries, she appeared before the Galveston County Commissioner's Court and asked them to restrict vehicular traffic from the tip of Bolivar Flats. The Commissioners held a public meeting for community input, then passed an order, and put up a sign to restrict vehicular traffic. The sign alone was not effective. In 1986, Stennie returned to Galveston Commissioners Court and requested a bollard barrier be placed at the point where vehicular traffic was prohibited. In 1987, the County Commissioner's Court deliberated and approved the placement of bollards to prevent vehicles from entering Bolivar Flats. A barrier was then erected and remains to this day. In 1986, Stennie surveyed the Flats and counted 10,781 shorebirds feeding and roosting in the protected area.

In 1990 on behalf of Houston Audubon as Vice President of Sanctuaries, Stennie and President Ted Eubanks submitted a request to General Land Office for a 99-year lease for the 1.72 acres as a Wildlife Refuge which was approved. In 1992, Houston Audubon held a dedication ceremony for their new Houston Audubon Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary. Bolivar Flats is a Globally Important Bird Area, the highest designation, and an International Site in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.

Stennie established and participated in monthly Bolivar Flats bird surveys from 2002 until 2007. Her love for bird watching started over 30 years ago and she still leads youth bird surveys, teaches birding classes to youth, and sponsors a school's birding club. In addition, she just achieved over 5,000 hours of volunteer community service with Texas Master Naturalist. She devotes much of her time to educational youth outreach, monofilament recycling, shoreline bird monitoring, and wildlife rescue.

Editor's note: The process for producing a biographical profile was more difficult than normal for Stennie. All her personal records were lost when Hurricane IKE washed away her home in 1980. So, she developed a timeline of events from articles found in the Galveston Daily News. It was no doubt a toilsome task. Dates and activities have been extracted from that timeline to produce the above bio.

Updated 5/7/2024

Winnie Burkett

Winnie Burkett has been involved in Houston Audubon since 1991. She started as a sanctuary volunteer, became HAS Vice President for Sanctuaries from 1993- 1997 and was hired as Sanctuary Manager from 1997- 2011. During this time, she oversaw the acquisition of Houston Audubon's 1100-acre Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary, 650 Acre Horseshoe Marsh Bird Sanctuary, 368-acre Mundy Marsh and 10-acre Eubanks Woods. Winnie helped facilitate the AMOCO donation of 197.92 acres to Houston Audubon's High Island sanctuaries and supervised more than \$150,000 worth of habitat and access improvements to those sanctuaries. Winnie worked with many dedicated hard-working volunteers to maintain the sanctuaries and welcome thousands of visitors to the world-famous sanctuaries in High Island.

Winnie led Houston Audubon's involvement in the project to improve High Island's wastewater treatment facilities so the school could expand and improve their facilities. This involved a donation by Houston Audubon of three acres to the High Island school district for created wetlands wastewater treatment ponds.

In her role as Sanctuary Manager for Houston Audubon, and as Colonial Waterbird Steward for Texas Audubon from 1998-2002, she worked to insure the productivity of Galveston Bay's colonial waterbirds through various projects, the largest of which was the *Protection and Restoration of North Deer Island* - a \$3.2 million project which brought together a large and diverse partnership including Audubon Texas, EcoNRG, EPA Gulf of Mexico Program, Houston Audubon Society, Harris & Eliza Kempner Fund, Meadows Foundation, Reliant Energy, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Shell Marine Habitat Program, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality - Galveston Bay Estuary Program, Texas General Land Office, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 2008 this partnership received the "Gulf Guardian Award" in the Partnership Category which was bestowed by the EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program.

Winnie was actively involved in the formation of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory and spent two years on its Board of Directors.

Another of Winnie's ongoing commitments was to the Smith Point Hawk Watch where she worked as co-compiler and compiler from 1992-1999, during which time she also organized hawk watchers, helped raise funds for the first full time hawk watcher supplied by HawkWatch International, and coordinated the building of the hawk watch tower.

Winnie received several awards recognizing her accomplishments:

- In the mid 1990's, the Bolivar Peninsula Chamber of Commerce named her the "Honorary Citizen of the Year" in appreciation for her work on the Bolivar Peninsula.
- In 1996, she received the "Special Recognition Award" from the National Audubon Society recognizing her efforts to protect migratory and colonial waterbirds on the Texas Coast.
- In 1997, she received the CEC's "Army and Sarah Emmott Synergy Award" recognizing her ability to work with diverse partnerships including government agencies, other non-profits, corporate entities, and volunteers
- In March 2009, Winnie was one of the recipients of Houston Audubon's "Coastal Conservation Award".
- In October 2021, The High Island Lead Volunteer Team (Winnie Burkett, Joanna Friesen, Julia Garrett and Barbara Tilton) was one of the recipients of Houston Audubon's "Coastal Conservation Award".
- In 2022, Winnie was recognized as Houston Audubon's Volunteer of the Year.

Since retiring from her job with Houston Audubon Winnie has continued her support for the organization by volunteering at High Island and Bolivar Flats.

Updated 7/21/2022

Ben Hulsey

BOD Member – 10 years

BOD President – 2013-2015

Advisory Board Member – July 2017 to present

Special interests:

- Birding
- Nature photography
- Monthly Surveys
- High Island Workdays

Significant accomplishments:

- Recipient of the Laura Singleton Exceptional Award - 2016
- Served at one time or another on all of HAS's Board committees.
- Chaired ELM Masterplan Committee
- He and Mary Gwen have been longtime donors to HAS, facilitating in various ways, the purchase of a boat, truck, the Cottage, and Hulsey Coastal Operations Center at High Island.

5/7/2022

John Bartos

John Bartos, former President of Houston Audubon from 2015-2017, now BOA member; former Chair of Galveston Bay Foundation, former President of the Houston Canoe Club and a member of the Region H Water Planning Group since 1997. Chair Trinity, San Jacinto, Galveston Bay and Basin Stakeholders Committee. John is a practicing attorney in Houston, Texas.

2024

Morton "Mort" Voller

1999 - Met Jim Stevenson (a birding pro, living on the west end of Galveston and son of a renowned Florida birding expert) and went with others on Jim's first birding tour of Florida. From that point a latent deep interest in birding and nature evolved.

2002 - Joined newly formed Friends of Galveston Island State Park (FoGISP) and over next 4 plus years created, with help of others, birding blinds, an information kiosk, weekend birding walks for the public, a Birding by Kayak activity, coordination of Gulf of Mexico Foundation's Winter Prairie Bird Assay in the Park and a tallow tree removal activity. Started giving talks at venues when asked.

2003 - the FoGISP Board heard about an East End/City meeting led by Ted Eubanks. In that meeting they decided to hold an annual birding festival named FeatherFest (FF), starting in March 2003. Funding would be primarily from the Mitchell family and the Galveston Island (GI) State Park Board. I implemented a stand-alone event at the Park - Birding by Kayak.

Along with the FoGISP nature coordinator Mary Jean Hayden, invited to join the FF 2004 planning team led by Rene Adame of the City Park Board. Deeper relationships were formed with Galveston's established East End Birders, Dr. Dwight Peake (past Houston Audubon President), and Karla Klay and husband Kris Benson (Artist Boat founders).

2004 - Post FF - Led the charge of incorporating FF with HAS member Gordon Nunn. Three well respected persons (Dr. Alice Ann O'Donnell, Dr. Sammy Ray and Ms. O'Connor (then leader of the HAS Galveston group) were the signatories for a new not for profit entity called Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council (GINTC).

2004 to 2008 - As GINTC Board Chairman, convened a strategic planning meeting for the new board with interested parties (founder and coordinator of the Rio Grande Valley Birding festival Thomas "Father Tom" Pincelli, Ted Eubanks, and City Council member Jackie Cole). The City's newly acquired Coast Guard land on east end was seen as a future potential site for a Nature Center.

GINTC had a twin focus:

1. Continue, improve and grow Feather Fest and develop other public birding events
2. Promote and create an East End Lagoon Nature Tourism site project
 - Focus 1: FF events were expanded to appeal to those with nature photography interests; and the Breakfast with the Cranes event in the Fall was expanded.
 - Focus 2: I was the FF Board representative on the East End Lagoon (EEL) Committee led by Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas with the purpose of raising money and developing an East End Lagoon Nature Tourism plan with some facilities. A modified plan is still in place managed by the Park Board and supported by GINTC.

Post 2008 - On the Board of Artist Boat Inc., first working to expand the list of Key Supporters/Donors, leading the Governance Committee, and aiding Karla Klay in the quest to save land from being developed once approved for a dense development.

2009 - Joined the Lafitte's Cove Nature Society (LCNS) Board with the focus of maintaining and optimizing the development's mandated Preserves for nature (birds and other animal life and plants) and visitors. Built an information kiosk and had a habitat management plan created. Coordinated the clean-up after Hurricane Ike and created an irrigation system to leach the salt and save monument oak trees. On the LCNS Board for about 9 years. I attempted to find interest among regional entities (including HAS) in saving the west end of Galveston Island (Pointe West) from further development after Hurricane Ike when the prime developer was bankrupt. Some other developer bought it for pennies on the money, and the opportunity was gone. Also coordinated maintenance and beautification of the 2-acres with pond and tree on Stewart Road owned by the Sidney Sherman Chapter members of the Daughters of the Texas Republic. This property is on the Texas Great Birding Trail.

During retirement years, Brenda and Mort have been as generous as we could be with our financial support to a long list of effective organizations Globally, Nationally and Locally, which represented either the Disadvantaged or Nature and the Environment.

They contributed to the Trust for Public Land for an acquisition on Galveston Island and to Houston Audubon for Columbia Bottomlands west of Lake Jackson. They frequently supported all the galas in Galveston and Houston with money or gifts, even if not present.

7/19/2022
