under our wing

SAN DIEGO AUDUBON
ANNUAL REPORT
JUNE 1, 2016 - MAY 31, 2017

WESTERN GREBE by KRISZTINA SCHEEFF, © KS NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY
How San Diego Audubon is protecting the nature we cherish

Record-breaking hurricanes and wildfires have recently wreaked havoc on communities throughout our nation. These disasters, made worse by the effects of a warming planet, have been alarming and heart-wrenching. With climate change hotly debated for political, not scientific, reasons, it seems Mother Earth is giving us a collective sharp tap on the shoulder.

What can a small conservation non-profit like San Diego Audubon possibly do? The answer is familiar, yet both simple and profound: think globally, act locally.

We’re helping San Diegans respond to the impacts of climate change by advocating at City Hall and across the region for science-based land use and transportation planning, water conservation, and habitat protections geared at addressing local threats from a changing climate.

This report details two additional strategies: mitigating the threat of sea level rise through restoration of wetlands as living shorelines, and preparing the next generation of conservationists to be ready to tackle climate change threats sure to challenge the quality of life in San Diego in their lifetimes and beyond.

Let’s not succumb to a siege mentality. We’re rolling up our sleeves. Join us!

Chris Redfern
Executive Director, San Diego Audubon
“We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost’s familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy; a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lays disaster. The other fork of the road — the one less traveled by — offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth.”

Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, 1962
Under our wing: protecting and restoring San Diego’s wetlands...

Forty acres. That’s all that’s left of a once thriving, 4,000-acre wetland complex formerly called Bahia Falsa, and known today as Mission Bay Park. These 40 acres, protected as part of the Kendall-Frost Marsh Reserve, are struggling. Waves and boat wakes erode the front edge of the marsh. Rose Creek, once a source of vital fresh water and sediment, is now channelized and disconnected from this unique habitat. Hemmed in on three sides by development and on the fourth by a rising sea, impacts from climate change threaten to drown the marsh in the coming decades. There is no upslope habitat to allow for marsh migration.

Yet wildlife persists at the remnant wetlands. A population of endangered Light-footed Ridgway’s Rails, dependent on the cord grass of the marsh for hunting and nesting, eke out an existence here. Endangered Belding’s Savannah Sparrows are regularly seen foraging in the pickleweed. Ducks, cormorants, herons, hawks, plovers, and hummingbirds, over 144 species of birds in total, feed on a bounty of fish, crabs, snails, beetles, flies, and other food that the marsh supports.

Will we stand by and let this endangered habitat, and the native San Diego wildlife that depend on it, slowly disappear under rising waters?
...with ReWild Mission Bay – a bold vision for habitat restoration resilient to climate change.

San Diego Audubon is leading the charge to ensure that Mission Bay’s wetlands are restored and protected. Even as wetlands can be vulnerable to sea level rise, they’re also one of our best tools to combat this impact of climate change.

Coastal wetlands are living shorelines. When connected to watersheds that provide sediment, they naturally rebuild and combat coastal erosion. They act as living “sponges” that can absorb storm surges and high tides, protecting our coastal communities from flooding. Wetlands are also giant filters, creating cleaner water for San Diegans to fish, swim, and play in.

To enjoy these benefits, and to protect existing wetlands from sea level rise, we need to think big. To have a long term, sustainable wetland system in Mission Bay, we need to restore at least 200 acres of wetland habitat today. ReWild Mission Bay is showing us the way forward.

ReWild has ignited the passion of several hundred San Diegans who have come out to advocate for wetlands protection and provide community input at four public workshops hosted by San Diego Audubon over the past year. ReWild has also garnered significant media attention for our chapter, helping to educate and inform the general public about the value of wetlands to our region.
CLIMATE SCIENCE IN SAN DIEGO AUDUBON EDUCATION

Under our wing: Lessons bring home the effect of climate change on local birds

Climate change isn’t only the challenge of our lifetime. It’s the environmental challenge of generations to come. One way we are preparing students to meet this challenge is by integrating climate science lessons into our education programs.

Birds have long been viewed as indicators of environmental health. They also represent wildlife that humans notice, and enjoy, in our environment every day. Engaging students in the study of how climate change affects birds provides a venue for us to tackle this topic in a way that is relatable to their everyday lives.

The Black-headed Grosbeak’s flashy black, white, and cinnamon color and rich, lilting song make them easy for young students to identify and observe at our Anstine-Audubon Nature Preserve and Silverwood Wildlife Sanctuary, where they nest every year.

K. ROTH-NELSON
The Black-headed Grosbeak is a climate-change ambassador, telling the story of how climate change affects birds

**Phenology Mismatch Game** demonstrates to school children that climate change affects birds in many ways. As habitats expand, contract, and shift geographically, birds respond by changing migration routes and expanding migration ranges. However, sometimes changes in the external environment throw birds a curveball. For example, birds may arrive at a migration stop, only to find their normal food source already depleted or missing altogether. This is called a “phenology mismatch.”

**Why the Black-headed Grosbeak?** The climate change nexus with Black-headed Grosbeaks is a unique one. While the species’ habitat range is not expected to dramatically shift or shrink in the decades to come, they do depend on a climate-threatened insect as a food source – the Monarch Butterfly.

**How is the Monarch climate-threatened?** The temperature acts as a biological trigger for Monarchs, letting them know when to migrate south. But in recent years, their migration has been delayed by as much as six weeks due to warmer-than-normal temperatures. By the time the temperature cools enough to trigger the migration, it’s been too cold along their journey and many Monarchs die on their trip south. The Monarch population has declined **95 percent in the last 20 years.**

**Fate intertwined:** Black-headed Grosbeaks summer throughout much of the western United States and can typically be seen in San Diego County from March through August. In winter, they head south to central Mexico, including to Monarch overwintering sites, where they rely on these glorious insects as an important food source.

**How can I help?** As long-distance migrants, Black-headed Grosbeaks experience many obstacles along their route. By supporting our wildlife sanctuaries and reducing our carbon footprints, we can help ensure a safer and more successful annual migration for many migratory birds.

**Another tip:** Plant some milkweed for the Monarchs!
FINANCIALS

Revenues (dollar amounts)

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<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<td>Contributions &amp; Memberships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
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<td>Program Fee Income</td>
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$1,343,082

Expenses

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$951,528

Net Assets

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<td>End of FYE 2017</td>
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<td>Change</td>
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Where money comes from (Revenues)
- Grants 34%
- Contributions & memberships 29%
- Investment income 26%
- Program fees 10%
- Other 1%

Where money goes (Expenses)
- Conservation, sanctuary & education programs 80%
- Management and administration 10%
- Fundraising 10%

Teams of volunteers provide hundreds of hours in Mission Bay for maintaining the native habitat required by California Least Terns and other species.

Anstine-Audubon and Silverwood sanctuaries provide incomparable nature classrooms for hundreds of students each year, and places of solace to refresh their connection to nature.

Under the climate change threat, our sanctuaries continue to provide high-quality habitat for birds (such as this Lark Sparrow) and other wildlife.
DONORS Gifts received from June 1, 2016 through May 31, 2017 Thank you! Your generous contributions power the work of San Diego Audubon.
We strive to recognize every gift. If for any reason your gift hasn’t been properly acknowledged, contact us at (858) 273-7800.

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