

Houston Audubon Society

Board of Directors Action Regarding an Organizational Name Change

(September 18, 2024)

Over the past few years, the birding community has been grappling with the complicated legacy of John James Audubon and the impact of the Audubon name. Earlier this year, the Executive Committee of the Houston Audubon Society commenced a thorough assessment of the potential benefits and consequences of retaining Audubon in the name of our organization. It was a challenging process to consider the immense contributions that Audubon made to the field of ornithology while also recognizing his role as not just an enslaver, but as a vocal advocate for slavery.

While the national conversation around the Audubon name was the initial reason for undertaking this assessment, we quickly came to realize that our current name is neither well recognized nor descriptive of our mission.

We have thoroughly examined how the Audubon name affects our mission, values, and work. We weighed the impact of the name on our conservation, engagement, and advocacy goals. We considered complex factors including brand recognition; our partnerships and credibility; alignment with our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging; and the time and cost involved in a name change.

All of our research and discussions have led us to believe that the Audubon name is only recognized by those who are already aware of our work. Conversely, the Audubon name is not at all recognized or associated with birds beyond those communities we already reach. At a time when birds are threatened by climate change, habitat loss, and the risks of built infrastructure in urban environments, it is vital to enlist support from all the communities in the Greater Houston/Galveston region. The more people who hear our message and help us save bird populations, the better.

With that in mind, we undertook a tremendous amount of research, talked to many of our key constituents, conducted surveys of our membership, donors, supporters, and partners and looked carefully at the work done by National Audubon Society and other Audubon Chapters. A survey of a random sampling of our members and stakeholders indicated that they are split in their opinion of whether we should drop Audubon from our name. However, the majority indicated strongly that they would continue to support our work regardless of our decision. We also spoke to many of our largest funders who understood and appreciated our need to consider a name change and indicated that they had confidence that the Board of Directors would make a thoughtful and appropriate decision. They iterated that their support is based on our mission and our record of effective stewardship.

We personally interviewed leadership from 12 Audubon chapters who have also considered a name change. They are – Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, Detroit Bird Alliance, Bird Alliance of

Central New Mexico, Tahoma Bird Alliance, Oregon Bird Alliance, Birds Georgia, Birds Connect Sacramento, Northern Virginia Bird Alliance, DC Bird Alliance, Tucson Audubon Society, Golden State Bird Alliance, Sarasota Audubon Society. All but Sarasota ultimately decided to a change that removed, or will remove, Audubon from their organization's name. We also considered the rationale provided by the National Audubon Society for their decision to not make a change at this time.

Based upon this research and thorough assessment, the Board of Directors unanimously agreed to undertake a process to create a new name and broader brand image that will allow us to most effectively pursue our mission. The Board of Directors believe that doing so would better describe and promote our vital work, positioning our organization to grow, expand and engage all individuals and communities.

At this time, we anticipate that this process will commence upon the hiring of our new CEO. We will work diligently to keep our constituents and stakeholders informed of our progress.

Respectfully submitted,

Houston Audubon Society Board of Directors