

Dear Central Flyway-South Chapter Leaders,

What a great experience the Audubon Convention turned out to be! So many excellent workshops and sessions, inspiring people to meet and learn from, beautiful scenery, perfect weather, and goodwill flowing in all directions. Many thanks to the chapters from the Central Flyway-South who sent representatives, and many thanks to each of you who were there to represent your chapters. I was delighted to have the opportunity to visit with you face-to-face and get to know you a little better, and I hope you had as much fun as I did.



*Courtesy of Alan Dolan*

The Convention, held July 12-15 at the Skamania Lodge in the spectacularly beautiful Columbia River Valley in Oregon, was kicked off with an opening reception on Friday evening that included a performance of traditional Native American dance by members of the Yakama Nation and a heartfelt welcome from Holt Thrasher, Chair of the Audubon Board of Directors. Then on Saturday morning David Yarnold, President of National Audubon, gave the opening plenary to a packed conference hall. Highlighting the accomplishments of Audubon and the great work of Audubon chapters and centers, he focused on the theme and title of the Convention, "Taking Flight Together." In closing he said that he hoped everyone heard the underlying message of his presentation which was "thank you for the work that you do."



*Courtesy of Sue Mackey*

On Saturday and Sunday there were five categories of concurrent sessions that ran 90 minutes each. Convention attendees could pick from a wide selection of topics that ranged from nuts-and-bolts sessions on topics such as social media and GIS mapping, to conservation strategies under the Audubon strategic plan initiatives. I attended sessions about use of social media by chapters, wind energy issues, international alliances, and large-scale land conservation alliances, among others, all with a focus on how those issues affect chapters. All the sessions I attended were excellent, and the informal feedback I got from chapter representatives was that they were having similarly positive experiences.

On Saturday morning I had the pleasure of having breakfast with a group of chapter leaders and from Arizona and Tice Supplee of Audubon Arizona. Informal conversations like that were one of the best things about the Convention, and I learned much from each of them.

With 18 representatives from five Texas chapters and 3 from Audubon Texas staff, Texas had a total of 21 people at the Convention, enough to warrant a Texas Reception hosted by Audubon Texas with David

Yarnold in attendance. Houston Audubon had the largest Texas delegation with 8 attending, but Bexar County Audubon was also there in force.

At the Saturday evening dinner, a short movie was shown about Chandler Robbins who co-authored *A Guide to Field Identification of the Birds of North America*, commonly known as the Golden Guide. He also initiated the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Now 90 years old, Robbins is one of the great contributors to bird conservation and science of our time. The movie was followed by awards to Helen Engle who was given an Audubon Lifetime Achievement Award; Lowell Young, who received the Volunteer Callison Award; and Walker Golder of North Carolina, who received the Professional Callison Award. Finally rounding out the evening was a presentation about North American owls by Paul Bannick featuring his wonderful photography (<http://www.paulbannick.com/>).



*Helen Engle with Leigh Altadonna  
Courtesy of Alan Dolan*

The Sunday morning plenary was titled Diversifying the Audubon Community, a powerful panel discussion about how to engage the large segments of our population that haven't traditionally been birders or members of Audubon.



*Courtesy of Hugh Simmons*

The final concurrent session on Sunday was a meeting of each flyway. A terrific crowd of about 50 chapter representatives and 18 Audubon staff members attended the Central Flyway session, and it was an honor for me to welcome the group and help host it. After self-introductions from all in the audience, Peg Olsen, Chief Conservation Officer, introduced program managers from the Central Flyway who gave brief summaries of the exciting conservation initiatives they're heading up in the Central Flyway and how chapters can play a part in them -- Karyn Stockdale (Western Rivers Initiative); Brian Rutledge (Sagebrush Ecosystem); Marian Langan and Marshall Thompson (Central Migration Corridor); Justin Pepper (Prairie Bird/Grasslands

Initiative); Brian Trusty of Audubon Texas (Urban Conservation in Texas). Then our own Central Flyway-North Regional Director, Connie Holsinger, spoke with great passion and commitment about the Habitat Heroes program she's been instrumental in developing. Each speaker spoke 3-5 minutes, accepting questions from the floor afterward, and attendees were invited to be in touch afterward with speakers for more information. The rest of the session was devoted to getting feedback from attendees about their experiences at the Convention, addressing questions such as "What have you learned that can support your chapter's work and help move it forward?"; "What opportunities do you see for collaboration between chapters and National Audubon for greater impact?"; and "What concerns do you have?" The responses were many, with most participants offering comments that were consistently positive and constructive, and I hope attendees came away as pleased as I was with the conversation.

The grand finale of the Central Flyway Session was presentation of the **William Dutcher Award** (a historic Audubon award that recognizes individuals who've made outstanding contributions to conservation and engagement in their chapter, center, state, region, or flyway), to two very deserving recipients in the Central Flyway: **Patsy Inglet** from Bexar County Audubon Society for her outstanding work as a volunteer environmental educator for Audubon Texas and Bexar County Audubon, and **Jo Evans**, Water Chair for Audubon Rockies, who has a long history of volunteer service to Audubon on water issues and is author of the recently published *Audubon Rockies Water Handbook*. Unfortunately, Jo couldn't attend the Convention, so it was presented in absentia by Brian Rutledge, who asked that a standing ovation be photographed for her.



***Patsy Inglet**, volunteer environmental educator for Audubon Texas and Bexar County Audubon Society, receives William Dutcher Award presented by Brian Trusty, Executive Director of Audubon Texas and Susan Albert, Director of Mitchell Lake Audubon Center.*



*Standing ovation for **Jo Evans**, recipient of William Dutcher Award, for her work with Audubon Rockies on water issues, presented in absentia by Brian Rutledge, VP Audubon Rockies.*

In addition to all the concurrent sessions and plenaries, there were off-site field trips on Friday and Monday and birdwalks at 6:30am on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Every evening there were live birds of prey presentations, and Saturday night there was a dance party dubbed "Rock'n The Rookery". Most meals were served on the lawn outside the lodge with sunset views of the surrounding mountains. A relaxed Sunday evening Salmon Bake on the lawn was the perfect ending after the final plenary session.

Good-byes began the next morning and continued throughout the day and into the next morning as people headed back home. Much was learned, new friends were made, and I think most left inspired by what they'd learned and the people they'd met. I certainly did, and I'm already looking forward to the next Audubon Convention.

Again, many thanks to those of you who attended. It was a great pleasure to see old friends and to get to meet others of you for the first time. I'll be in touch again soon when we get our next Central Flyway telephone conference call scheduled. Till then, always feel free to contact me about anything Audubon.



Joy Hester  
Regional Director  
Central Flyway-South  
[jhester@audubon.org](mailto:jhester@audubon.org)