Margaret Parker, the Fort Worth Audubon Society, & the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge: A Symbiotic History

The Fort Worth Chapter of the Audubon Society recently celebrated its 75th anniversary. Among the chapter’s most notable contributions to the city of Fort Worth, Tarrant County, and North Central Texas was the founding of the Greer Island Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge in 1964.
In 1964, chapter member Margaret Parker was instrumental in rallying a sizable group of influential, like-minded area nature enthusiasts and conservationists to readdress a denied 1963 request of the then-Park Recreation Board. It succeeded, and in February 1964, the Fort Worth City Council agreed to set aside and dedicate an initial parcel of property on upper Lake Worth that would become the community nature refuge we know today as the greatly expanded Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. On March 10 of that year, Margaret and renowned area ornithologist Warren M. Pulich collaborated in personally marking the first nature trail on Greer Island. It is only fitting that the Audubon Society would use this anniversary year to honor the late Margaret Parker for her devoted work to establish and sustain the Nature Center by naming the Greer Island trail system the Margaret Parker Memorial Trail.

The Audubon Society met on the rainy Friday morning of October 14 in the Hardwicke Interpretive Center’s Murray A. James Auditorium to dedicate the trail in Margaret’s memory. The storm necessitated an indoor photographic presentation of the large rain-diverting kiosk housing the beautifully created interpretive history sign that sits at the trail’s first major fork.

The well-attended meeting of Audubon Society and Nature Center members, staff, and Parker relatives was opened with welcoming remarks by Nature Center Manager Rob Denkhau, who also acknowledged the exceptional work of Refuge Service Center Technicians Nic Martinez and Nicholas Griffin, who created the new trail sign structure. Audubon President Michael Francis followed with introductions and commentary regarding the historical concerns raised by Audubon Society members and others that resulted in the founding of the Greer Island Nature Center. He included a presentation of early photos taken during birding trips to the newly established Nature Center. Margaret Parker’s family included Michelle Martinez, one of two of Margaret’s nieces in attendance, who confirmed her aunt’s dynamic personality and take-charge nature. Bill Richerson presented an insightful reflection on his own teenage experiences with Margaret as a Junior Audubon Society member. Also in attendance were other members of the family: Michelle’s sister and brother, Carolyn and James Parker; great-niece Elizabeth Howard; Michelle’s daughter; and great-great-nephew Dominic Henson, Elizabeth’s son. It was especially nice to see so many family members taking part in this dedication in memory of their beloved aunt. Representing the City of Fort Worth were Mayor Betsy Price and District 7 Council Member Dennis Shingleton, both of whom made laudatory comments regarding the Fort Worth Audubon Society, the Nature Center, and its hardworking staff. Closing the program, Council Member Shingleton presented Michael Francis with a proclamation by the City of Fort Worth recognizing the dedication of the Margaret Parker Memorial Trail.

Articles presenting more detailed discussions of the founding of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge may be found in 2014’s 1st, 2nd, and 3rd-quarter editions of the Bluestem News building up to the Gala Celebration of its 50th anniversary in April 2014.

*Rick Shepherd, Friends of the Nature Center Board Member*