

# We Need Nature

Annual Report  
2020



FRIENDS OF THE FORT WORTH  
NATURE CENTER  
& REFUGE



“

Nothing can befall me  
in life. . .which nature  
cannot repair.

\_\_\_\_\_ Ralph Waldo Emerson

## A Message from the Executive Director & President

2020 was a year like no other. While in the midst of implementing our ever-growing plans to support the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge, COVID-19 entered the picture and turned our world upside down. In March, the City of Fort Worth closed the Nature Center to visitors, partially reopening in June to a limited number of daily visitors and requiring reservations to help maintain a capacity that would safeguard the health and well-being of guests and staff.

Throughout the year, the Friends' work to benefit the Nature Center continued. The Friends planned programs and events in a virtual format, managed ongoing capital projects and fundraising to support future endeavors, and directly supported important daily work such as caring for the bison and animal ambassadors through ongoing financial funding.

Let's celebrate our accomplishments! We look forward to welcoming you during your visits in 2021 to experience the projects completed in 2020. Here are some highlights:

- The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department awarded a \$1.5 million grant to complete the restoration of the Lotus Marsh Boardwalk and improve visitor amenities. The Friends contributed \$300,000 through an extremely generous gift from Facebook.
- The Friends received a \$25,000 grant from the North Texas Community Foundation's Anita Berry Martin Memorial Fund to conduct a comprehensive research study and remove invasive species within the bison pastures.
- Construction of the new Lotus Marsh Pavilion continued during 2020 and is ready to be presented to the public. This project was funded by the Sid W. Richardson Foundation, H-E-B, Architect Norman D. Ward, and the Friends.
- The visitor improvements at Greer Island were completed in 2020. This project was made possible through a \$200,000 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Recreational Trails grant along with matching grant funds of more than \$150,000 raised by the Friends.

Thanks to you, we made it through this unprecedented time. Your outpouring of support, patience, and generosity propelled the Friends into continued growth despite the challenges COVID-19 brought to our community and beyond. YOU have made it possible for the Friends to continue its mission to preserve and protect the Nature Center for future generations. That is truly priceless. Thank you.



*Haily Summerford*  
Haily Summerford  
Executive Director



*Lynda Gearheart*  
Lynda Gearheart  
President



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# CONSERVE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

## Conserve for Future Generations

# BOARDWALK RESTORATION



*View of Collapsed Boardwalk by FWNC&R Staff*

## Restoration at a Glance

- Replace original collapsed boardwalk, extend concrete trail, restore native vegetation/habitat, install furnishings/signage, construct new restroom, and rehabilitate parking area
- Funding:
  - \$1.5 million grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
  - \$1.2 million City of Fort Worth matching funds
  - \$300,000 Facebook donation
- Construction to begin in 2022

In September 2020, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department awarded a \$1.5 million Urban Outdoor Recreation Grant to complete the restoration of the Lotus Marsh Boardwalk at the Nature Center. The City of Fort Worth matched the grant with \$1.2 million in City funds, and the Friends contributed \$300,000 through a very generous donation from Facebook. Facebook has been an integral part of the Fort Worth community since opening a data center in 2017.

The boardwalk provides visitors with the opportunity to explore the middle of a marsh, allowing them to see the variety of wildlife and plants the marsh supports. Improvements will include replacing the original collapsed wooden boardwalk, extending accessible concrete trail, restoring native vegetation and habitat, installing site furnishings and interpretive signage, constructing a solar-powered restroom, and rehabilitating the existing parking area.

Fort Worth was awarded 36% of the total statewide allocation from 2020 Urban Outdoor Recreation Grant funds, which are financed by a portion of the state sales tax on sporting goods. The \$300,000 Facebook donation is the largest gift the Friends have ever received, and this project is the largest funded capital project to occur at the Nature Center in the past 50 years.

WATCH US GROW



Watch Us Grow

# BISON HERD

## History of the Herd

On November 9, 1973, three bison were obtained from the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge herd to establish a bison herd at the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. The first Nature Center bison birth occurred on May 21, 1974. It was a girl.

Mother's Day 2020 was a very happy day at the Nature Center. The first (and only) calf of the 2020 calving season was born on May 10—Mother's Day. During the past year, the bison afforded homebound folks a desperately needed opportunity to enjoy nature up close. Once the Nature Center reopened in June, visitorship surged, even with restrictions in place.



2020 Bison Calf by FWNC&R Staff

1

Bull

13

Cows

1

Calf

15

5'x5'  
Bales  
of Hay

36

50-lb  
Bags of  
Feed Cubes

Watch Us Grow

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# MEMBERSHIP

Despite the closure of the Nature Center for three months due to COVID, we still managed to grow our membership!



**951**  
Members  
Fiscal Year 2018

**1,007**  
Members  
Fiscal Year 2019

**1,034**  
Members  
Fiscal Year 2020

*Oak Seedlings*

Watch Us Grow

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# MEMBER EVENTS

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## PARKING LOT BIRDING VIRTUAL EVENT

with author Jennifer Bristol



### Parking Lot Birding

Like everyone else in 2020, the Friends were forced to adapt to a new world shaped by a pandemic. We had to cancel all of the member events we had planned for the year. But like most everyone else, we adjusted and went virtual, hosting our first-ever Zoom event on October 3.

Jennifer Bristol, author of *Parking Lot Birding* (and daughter of our own board member George Bristol), helped members explore some popular birding hotspots—including the Nature Center—that were open to the public

and accessible regardless of ability or mobility. The event allowed experts and novices alike to learn which birds can easily be found at the Nature Center, where to experience nature across Texas while remaining ON the beaten path, and which birding locations in the state have easy access and don't require an arduous hike or degree in ornithology.

With more than 30 attending, the event proved to be so popular that the Friends have (and will) continue hosting these types of virtual events into 2021.

# FOR LOVE OF THE NATURE CENTER



For Love of the Nature Center

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# PROGRAMS/ CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

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In a year in which nature proved to be important to all of us, a silver lining was the dedication and support of our donors, both large and small. Multiple projects were either initiated or completed throughout the challenging year. Following are some of the highlights.

## 01 Education

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The Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation has awarded the Friends a \$4,500 grant to purchase virtual learning equipment for future education programs. In addition, the grant will help purchase iPads to allow the Friends to modernize the gift shop at the Hardwicke Interpretive Center and more easily collect membership data and revenue from those who want to join the Friends while visiting the Nature Center.



## 02 Research

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When non-native species such as Chinese privet invade an area, they can negatively impact native flora and fauna. By controlling these invaders, native species can rebound and thrive. The North Texas Community Foundation's Anita Berry Martin Memorial Fund has awarded a \$25,000 grant to the Friends to research and remove invasive species at the Nature Center. In partnership with Texas Christian University and Nature Center natural resource management staff, the Friends will conduct a study within select bison pastures of the best invasive brush management practices to retain the native landscape throughout the Refuge. After removal of invasive species, the study will monitor a series of treatment methods that will help keep the invasives from regenerating.



## 03 Visitor Experience

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The new Lotus Marsh Pavilion is complete! Funded by \$90,000 from the Sid W. Richardson Foundation and H-E-B and a donation of time from architect Norman D. Ward, the Pavilion (formerly known as the Amphitheater) will expand educational opportunities at the Nature Center due to close proximity to the wetlands at the Lotus Marsh Boardwalk. It will also provide a covered space for programming and field trips, connecting more children and families to nature. Norman Ward won the AIA Fort Worth Chapter's 2020 AIA Fort Worth Studio Award for his architectural renderings of the project. The award noted how "the simple structure aims to provide a gathering place while also complementing the natural setting."

## 04 Visitor Experience

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The closure of the Nature Center in the first part of 2020 allowed improvements at Greer Island to be completed ahead of schedule. Funded by a \$200,000 Recreational Trails Grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and ultimately made possible by more than \$150,000 in required matching funds raised by the Friends, the project expanded and improved the parking lot at the Greer Island trailhead, installed new restroom facilities, upgraded the trail leading to Greer Island, and stabilized portions of the banks along the trail that had experienced significant erosion. Engineering firm Weaver Consultants Group, LLC donated time for permitting and design. The improvements are allowing visitors to enjoy this part of the Refuge even more.



## 05 Research

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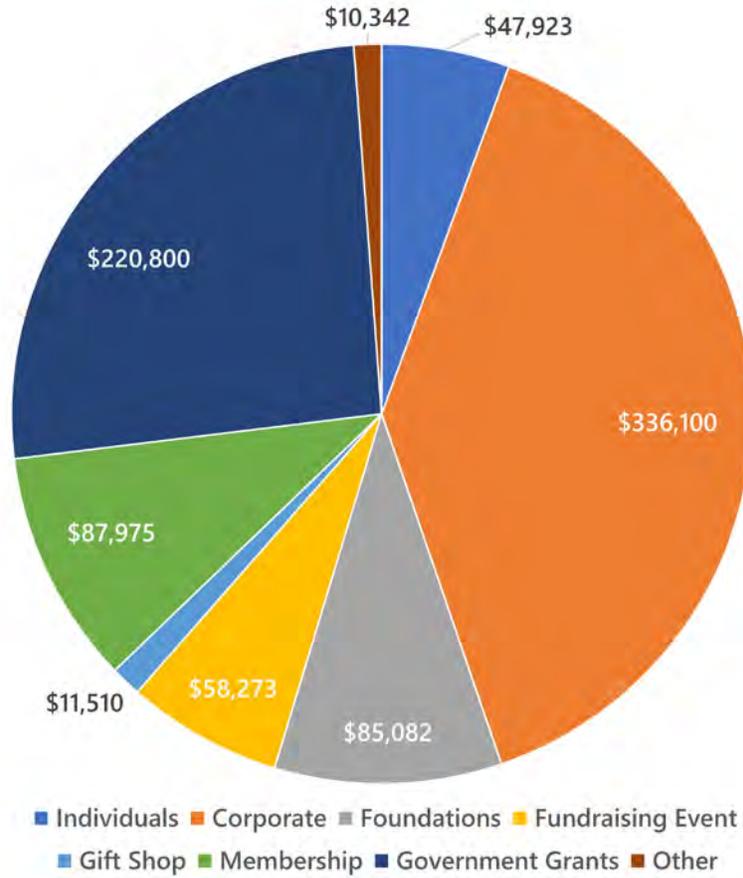
The year also brought the Trail Counter Program to a conclusion. An infrared trail counter system was installed in strategic locations along the Nature Center's more than 20 miles of trails and is providing much-needed data and research to help Nature Center staff manage and maintain the Refuge's walking and hiking trails. The data has been helping identify the areas that receive the greatest use and most impact, allowing trail management efforts to be directed to those areas to help lessen or mitigate the impacts. Visitors will ultimately reap the benefits through a more positive experience on the trails. The project was made possible by the Anita Berry Martin Memorial Fund, Friends funding, and Nature Center staff.

# BY THE NUMBERS



## By the Numbers

# FY20 INCOME – \$858,005

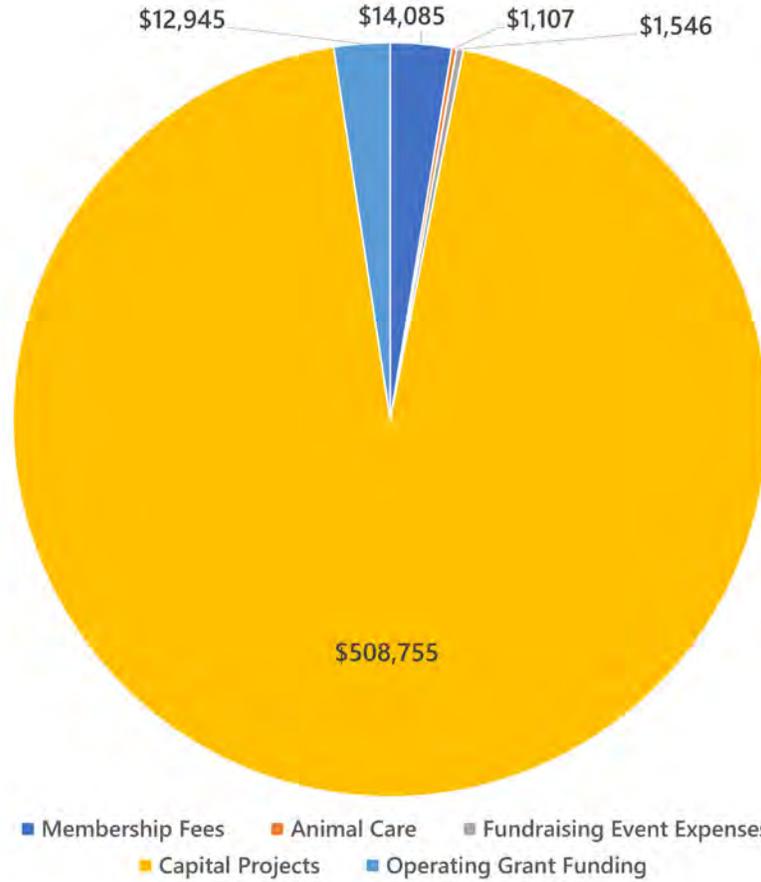


# 3Y INCOME COMPARISON

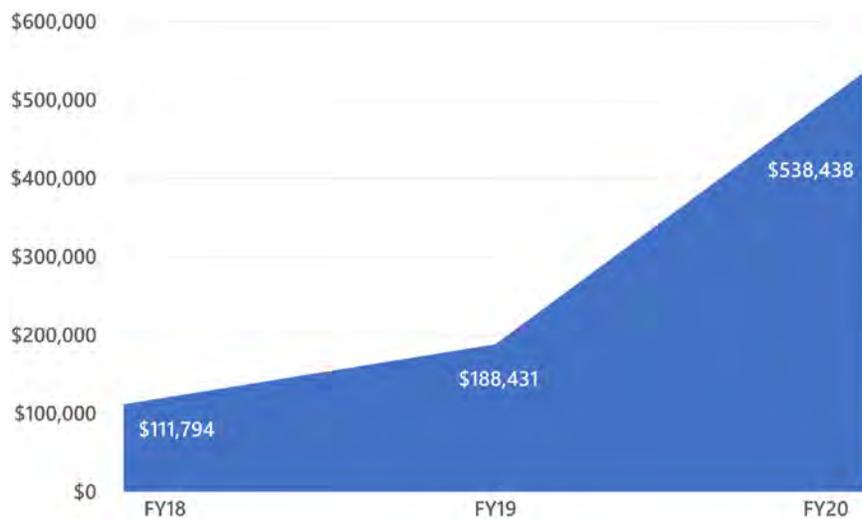


By the Numbers

# FY20 NATURE CENTER SUPPORT – \$538,438



## 3Y COMPARISON OF NATURE CENTER SUPPORT



# 2020 LEADERSHIP



## 2020 Leadership

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# NEW BOARD MEMBERS

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At the end of the fiscal year, the Friends' Board of Directors welcomed seven new members, bringing the current total to 20.



### **Christie Eckler**

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Christie is a certified fundraising professional with more than 20 years of nonprofit experience. She is keenly interested in organizations with missions that align nature conservation and education. She has served on numerous nonprofit boards, committees, and taskforces.



### **Michael Fouraker**

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Michael is the executive director of the Fort Worth Zoo. An avid hunter, fisherman, and outdoorsman, he has more than 30 years of experience in animal, exhibitory, and zoo management. One of his major goals is to build partnerships that support global conservation efforts.



### **Joanna Gant**

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Joanna is the business manager and serves on the finance and human resources committees at Hill School in Fort Worth, a private school that provides progressive educational services for students who learn differently. She has spent 12 years in corporate accounting and six in nonprofit accounting.

# 2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## PRESIDENT

Lynda Gearheart

## VICE PRESIDENT/ PRESIDENT-ELECT

Catherine Mueller

## PAST-PRESIDENT

Chris Smith

## TREASURER

Pete McKone

## SECRETARY

Kristy Odom

## DIRECTORS

Tom Armstrong

George Bristol

Dr. Ellen Browning

Lon Burnam

Linda Christie

Greg Fitzgerald

Joe Gearheart

Cassie King

Marty Leonard

Sally McCoy

Katie Owens

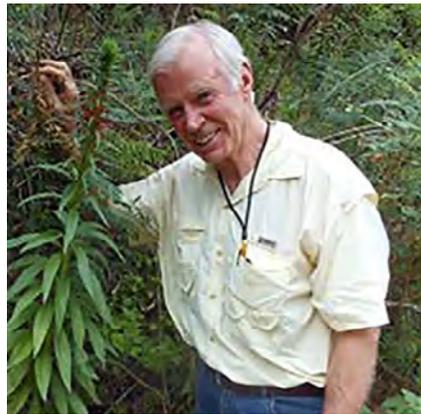
Vernon Rew

William O. Rodgers

Lydia Saldaña

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Haily Summerford, MBA



### Bob O'Kennon

Bob previously served on the Friends' board and is the resident research associate at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas. A veteran field researcher, he is an acclaimed author and has served on the boards of several organizations involved in ecology and conservation.



### Mary Margaret Richter

Mary Margaret is a lifelong outdoorsperson and lover of nature. The Nature Center is close to her heart since she spent much of her life on the Edwards Ranch next to the Refuge. She has served on the board of the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo for the past 10 years.



### Robin Sanders

Robin's people skills and organizational abilities have served her well as a travel advisor who founded a luxury travel agency—Sanders Travel Centre in Fort Worth. Among her areas of focus is the exploration of unique lands such as Rwanda, Uganda, Mongolia, and Bhutan.



### Laura Wood

Laura is passionate about the Nature Center and has worked in the field of conservation her entire career. She previously served as the Friends' part-time executive director, helping merge two non-profit organizations and build a board of directors.

# THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS



## Our Supporters

# THANK YOU

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the following donors who generously gave \$500 or more between July 1, 2019, and September 30, 2020. In what proved to be a challenging year, these supporters helped us continue our mission to preserve and protect this healing place for the next generation.

<b>CORPORATE &amp; FOUNDATION</b>	<b>\$50,000 – \$99,999</b>	Gearheart Construction	<b>\$1,000 – \$2,499</b>
	Amon G. Carter Foundation	Norman D. Ward, Architect	Greater Kansas City
	Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation	Weaver Consultants Group, LLC	Community Foundation
	Sid W. Richardson Foundation	<b>\$5,000 – \$9,999</b>	Medtronic Foundation
	<b>\$25,000 – \$49,999</b>	Communities Foundation of Texas	Volunteer Grant Program
	North Texas Community Foundation	Mary Potishman Lard Trust	Textron Inc.
<b>\$10,000 – \$24,999</b>	<b>\$2,500 – \$4,999</b>	Covey Gant Foundation	<b>\$500 – \$999</b>
The Alcon Foundation, Inc.			The Kroger Company
			Russell Feed & Supply

<b>INDIVIDUAL</b>	<b>\$25,000 – \$49,999</b>	<b>\$1,000 – \$2,499</b>	<b>\$500 – \$999</b>
	Marty Leonard	Jacqueline Buechley	Joani & Robert Benda
	<b>\$10,000 – \$24,999</b>	Linda Christie	Jill & Doug Black
	Gretchen Denny & George Bristol	Lynda Gearheart	Ellen & Benjamin Browning
	Bob O’Kennon	Michael & Ryan Honkomp	Alex Denny
	<b>\$5,000 – \$9,999</b>	Sharon & Pete McKone	Tracy Rector & Greg Fitzgerald
Ramona & Lee Bass	Marsha McLaughlin	Sue & John Harvison	
<b>\$2,500 – \$4,999</b>	Patricia & Bill Meadows	Joann Karges	
Kathryn & Tom Armstrong	Cathy & James Mueller	Sally McCoy	
Emily & Vernon Rew	Kristy & Rob Odom	Gail Rawl	
	Janie Rector	Carol Reynolds	
	Lydia Saldaña & Bill Orcutt	Karen & Rick Shepherd	
	Suzanne & Steve Tuttle	Chris & Mark Smith	

## Our Supporters

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We asked some of our donors to tell us why they give to the Friends. Here's what they are saying.



### Holli Davies

*Community Development Regional Manager, Facebook*

Nature is vital to humanity. We are proud to support the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge and their beautiful new boardwalk—and all it will provide to Fort Worth residents, visitors, and the flora and fauna that reside there.



### Adelaide Leavens

*President, Meta Alice Keith Bratten Foundation*

Bison and bobcats, wetlands and warblers, flowers and foxes, trails and trees. That's why I support the Friends and the Nature Center. **Our** city park deserves the volunteer and financial support of friends who want this unique space to be enjoyed by our kiddos, friends, and, most importantly, those who don't know these places exist.



## Our Supporters

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### Richard McDonald

*Corporate Director of Environmental Affairs, H-E-B*

At H-E-B, we believe in supporting organizations that are passionate and have a great mission and vision to educate our children, adults, and the greater community about the wonders of nature. We believe the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge is a great example of those ideals and passion. H-E-B is very proud to be a supporting partner with this outstanding non-profit.



### Janie Rector

*Longtime Friends Supporter*

When we moved to the Fort Worth area in 1966, we chose to live in Lakeside so we could be surrounded by nature's beauty. Our four young children had daily access to our wooded, hilly neighborhood to explore and learn about the wildflowers, trees, insects, birds, and other animals that shared our home. Through my affiliation with The Junior League of Fort Worth, I soon learned about the Nature Center. I was intrigued with the many programs that were available for families and school children as well as the opportunity to become a docent, which included an extensive training course. What fun it would be to increase my knowledge and help other children who were not as fortunate as my own learn about and share the excitement of nature's many wonders! Being a Nature Center docent became one of my favorite volunteer commitments and made me a lifetime supporter of the Friends.





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