



FOCUS ON DIVERSITY



CHANGING the FACE of
AMERICAN BIRDING
Conference Summary
Nov. 4 - 6, 2013
McAllen, TX



Focus on Diversity: Changing the Face of American Birding

November 4 - 6, 2013

McAllen Convention and Visitors Bureau, Quinta Mazatlan,
and The Creative Incubator in McAllen, TX
Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission, TX
Edinburg Scenic Wetlands in Edinburg, TX
Santa Ana NWR in Alamo, TX

A collaborative effort between:



Sponsored by:



Whooping Crane Partnership

Audubon

Wendy Paulson

Bald Eagles



SPORT OPTICS



Kaufman
Field
Guides



Canada Geese



CLEMSON
UNIVERSITY



STACKPOLE BOOKS

Northern Flickers

[Black Swamp
Bird Observatory](#)

Antoinette
Dendtler

[Mark Garland](#)

The Doug and Leshon Gray
Conservation Initiative

[Wild Birds Unlimited](#)

Thank you to the following individuals whose generosity of time, expertise, patience, guidance, and willingness to help were invaluable to the conference's success:

Paul Baich, Marci Fuller, Mary Gustafson, Drew Lanham, Roy Rodriguez, Marisa Oliva, Dudley Edmondson, Doug Gray, Jennifer Owen-White, Colleen Hook, Jean Magpiong, Amanda Magpiong, Gisela Chapa, Javier DeLeon, Christine Donald, and Kyle O'Haver

A very special thank you to **Nancy Millar** and the staff at McAllen Convention and Visitors Bureau for their incredibly gracious role as advisors, hosts, and friends of the birding community!

Summary of the Focus on Diversity Conference

"Birding, after all, is just game. Going beyond that is what is important." - Roger Tory Peterson

This **Focus on Diversity: Changing the Face of American Birding Conference** brought together dedicated bird educators, conservationists, and nature enthusiasts of all levels in McAllen, TX, on November 4 - 6, 2013.

The mission of this conference series has been:

**"to facilitate innovative bird education and outreach efforts
which will more effectively engage new, diverse, and under-represented audiences
in birding/nature activities and promote broader conservation awareness and action"**

The Focus on Diversity Conference centered around panel presentations and group discussions regarding the

- low participation rates of "minorities" in bird study,
- the significance to bird conservation,
- reasons for the lack of participation among diverse communities,
- general considerations to make birding more accessible to everyone, and
- success stories of specific programs which have proven effective in this mission.

The FOD conference then challenged participants to set a realistic diversity in birding outreach goal.

Conference panelists and experienced bird educators assisted the participants in developing suitable action plans to work towards and be successful in achieving their respective goals.

FOD3 also included additional events to provide participants with a more memorable and, therefore, effective experience. There was a social gathering at the McAllen Creative Incubator to help build a community spirit among the participants prior to the more profound conversation the following day. A South Texas BBQ Banquet also allowed participants to unwind and network with new acquaintances and potential partners.

For the first time, the FOD conference extended into a third day of activities that included practical birding field experiences at the nearby World Birding Center sites of Quinta Mazatlan, Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, and Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park, as well as Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.

Besides seeing some Rio Grande Valley bird specialties, FOD participants met at these sites to discuss specific outreach and conservation topics. These field experiences are where FOD3 goals and action plans were developed.



Green Jay courtesy of Marty DeAngelo

FOD3 by the numbers

- 91+ registrants and attendees
- participants came from 21 US states
- 4 other countries (Mexico, UK, Uganda, Germany)
- participants age range: 19 - "retired for a long time"
- representing over 55 organizations, gov. agencies, nature-related businesses, & other entities
- over 20 hours of conversation and networking
- **a record 31 action plans developed!!!**

Conference Panel and Presenters:



The Future of Birding and Bird Conservation in America

Drew Lanham of Clemson University, **Mary Gustafson** of Rio Grande Joint Venture and **Roy Rodriguez** of Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park. Moderator **David Ringer**, National Audubon Society



Considerations for Engaging Non-Traditional Birding Audiences

Marisa Oliva-Rodriguez of Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, **Doug Gray** of Indiana Audubon, **Paul Baich** of Birding Community E-Bulletin. Moderator: **Nancy Millar** of McAllen CVB.



Learning from Effective Outreach Initiatives

Dudley Edmondson author of *Black and Brown Faces in America's Wild Places*, **Dan Kunkle** of Lehigh Gap Nature Center, **Brad Rumble** of Leo Politi Elementary School, and **Carrie Samis** of the Maryland Coastal Bays Program. Moderator: **Javier DeLeon** of Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park

Conference Discussions and Round Robin Presentations:



Eddie McKenna of Texas Parks and Wildlife



Josetta Hawthorne of Flying Wild/CEE



Steve Norris of Estero Llano Grande State Park



Rafael Galvez of Tropical Audubon /Fl. Keys Hawkwatch

Participants taking it all in at FOD3 in McAllen, TX on November 5, 2013



Conference Discussions and Round Robin Presentations:



Chip Clouse of Opticron USA



Laura Erickson, author of *101 Ways to Help Birds*



Roy Rodriguez being interviewed by Televisio



Tykee James of Cobbs Creek Nature Center

Some of the sisters and brothers of our growing **Focus on Diversity Family**.



This Focus on Diversity Family is working together to forge a stronger future for bird conservation!

Proposed Action Plans for Increasing Diversity in Birding and Bird Conservation:

The ultimate goal of the Focus on Diversity Conference is to promote a societal conservation ethic by proactively engaging new audiences with birding/nature activities. Conference participants have developed the following goals to begin working towards that end in their own area.

We encourage other bird educators, nature organization, and dedicated individual birders to employ similar approaches to increase bird conservation awareness in their own communities.

Expand relationship with two local schools to offer regular experiences to students

Houston, TX area

Engage camping families with birding activities at Breckenridge Park on holidays weekend

San Antonio, TX

Reestablish signage and trails at Cobbs Creek Nature Park to more effectively appeal to local citizens

Philadelphia, PA

Give repeated birding presentations at neighborhood meetings, and invite locals to visit nature center

Weslaco, TX

Develop birding and nature mentors in minority communities

Rochester, MN

Start a birding club for students at local high school

Laredo, TX

Connect children to nature at a young age with a special emphasis on diverse children

Houston, TX

Evaluate and adapt outreach programs to more successfully engage minority audiences in the Rio Grande Valley

Lower Rio Grande Valley, TX

Partner with the healthcare community to reach new audiences

Mission, TX

Promote teacher use of natural habitat and campus space by engaging with other school administrators

Los Angeles, CA (and beyond)

Create an interactive EE Program to be led by undergraduate in Applied Ecology program

Houghton, MI

Create a bilingual online newsletter to communicate conservation issues with our 1,000+ membership

Laguna, TX

Build capacity and create environmental education programs for specific target audiences

Weslaco, TX

Convert to native landscaping, and expose students to nature on their own school grounds

Pharr, San Juan, & Alamo, TX

Increase participation of African-American (children and adults) in nature activities

Seneca, SC

Proposed Action Plans for Increasing Diversity in Birding and Bird Conservation:

Create a Spanish-language newsletter to reach Latino community
Edinburg, TX

Include, educate, and involve more families from the wider community in school-sponsored nature activities
Boonville, CA

Train local teachers (1 elementary, 1 middle, 1 high school) on bird identification, binoculars use & Feeder Watch
San Antonio, TX

Provide new birding and nature experiences for Latino, Vietnamese, and low SES students at local schools
Baycliff, TX

Provide disabled veterans with a completed application for free annual pass for state park
and encourage these patients to visit the natural sites often
Seattle, WA

Produce a checklist, in 3 languages, of birds found in and near the college community
Madison, WI

Encourage meteorologists on local news to reference bird migration in spring and fall
Philadelphia, PA

Establish a new nature club to increase visitation of "new birders" at nature center
McAllen, TX

A few more general ideas:

Further integrate Focus on Diversity message into USFWS culture, with a focus on Region 2

Create a bilingual newcomers' guide to enjoying nature and birds for a nationally renowned birding hot spot

Investigate how environmental learning, conservation, and nature appreciation is incorporated into local school curriculum and graduation requirements. Try to get it implemented if not already being done.

Let's keep moving forward on the important mission of **Changing the Face of American Birding!**

As you work towards your Diversity in Birding goals, we welcome you to share your ideas, highlight your successes, and even seek advice from other bird educators. The Bird Education Network (BEN) listserv can be the perfect conduit to keep us all connected and motivated in our bird outreach efforts as it reaches approximately 500 bird educators throughout North America.

To subscribe to the BEN listserv, send e-mail to birdedlist-join@lists.flyingwild.org.

If you need any assistance in achieving your goal, feel free to email Dave@FledgingBirders.org

