

COPY



January 22, 2018

Dr. Juan Sánchez Muñoz  
President  
University of Houston Downtown  
One Main Building, Suite S990  
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Dr. Muñoz:

In January, National Geographic joined with the National Audubon Society, BirdLife International, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in declaring 2018 the Year of the Bird, celebrating the centennial anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and asking for new types of action that could slow the rate at which birds are disappearing from our landscapes. I am writing this letter to ask you to consider having your faculty and students take action, mitigating some portion of the consequences of the removal of the bird-rich, tallgrass/prairie habitat in the area where the new science building, parking lot and soccer field are being added to the UHD campus.

Birds matter, serving as indicator species of environmental degradation, with substantial, ongoing losses in bird populations tracking consequences of habitat loss, pesticide use, pollution and climate change. Birds also represent (in the words of novelist Jonathan Franzen) “our last, best connection to a natural world that is otherwise receding.” I came to this realization somewhat late in life, having previously managed to be unaware of the beauty and diversity present in the environs close to downtown Houston, despite having spent many hours walking my dogs along the White Oak Bayou.

My outlook began to change following a chance encounter with a Bald Eagle almost in the shadow of downtown, and I began to study birds and document the species I saw within a two-mile stretch of the White Oak Bayou Greenway from the Taylor/Sawyer St. Bridge to the UHD campus. What I found surprised and delighted me. Since January 2015, I and other birders have recorded the presence of 143 species of birds along this two-mile section of the Greenway, representing 40% of the 354 species found within the 1,777 square miles of Harris County during the same three-year period. To me, this two-mile species count of 143 is remarkable and should be celebrated, given the limited amount of habitat along the bayou and the contrast with the extent of the wetland and tallgrass/prairie habitats in Harris County outside of the Beltway. I have documented almost all of the 143 species sighted with photographs, entering more than 500 checklists for this two-mile section of the Greenway into eBird, an international database of bird sightings. I have attached a list of these species, along with photos of a few of the many birds I have spotted in the tallgrass/prairie habitat on the UHD property, which may not be found there again.

I had always looked forward to seeing what birds might turn up along the final section of the White Oak Bayou Greenway, southwest of UHD’s Daly Street Parking Lot. I would see species there I could not commonly find along other sections of the Greenway, which feature groomed parks and riparian habitats. You can imagine my sorrow when many acres of this tallgrass/prairie habitat were mowed down in November and December 2017 to make room for the new parking lot and soccer field. In a matter of

weeks, this area of the UHD campus became almost barren, except of course for the ubiquitous pigeons, grackles, doves and starlings. I am aware that much more habitat will soon be lost with the relocation of the I-45 and I-10 freeway lanes in the area between UHD and the Union Pacific rail line.

The loss of this habitat prompts me to ask what UHD faculty and students might do to support other segments of the White Oak Bayou Greenway, including perhaps the nearby sections of White Oak Park that are the focus of a riparian restoration project of the Houston Parks and Recreation Department and Houston Audubon. I make this request from the perspective of one who is dismayed by the widespread belief that nature can only be found at the end of a lengthy car ride. I am doing my part by creating a series of kid-friendly field guides used to introduce families to 100+ species of birds that can be found inside the 610 Loop along the Bayou Greenway trails and in neighborhood parks. These Bayou City Birding Zines (a “zine” is a miniature/foldable magazine) are available for download free of charge on the website of the White Oak Bayou Association at [WhiteOakBayou.org/resources-and-zines](http://WhiteOakBayou.org/resources-and-zines), with copies handed out at events and during walks along the bayou. I also send a weekly email to 60+ friends and neighbors, sharing descriptions and photos of the birds they can find along the bayou. I direct my efforts to families with young children, believing that children must be taught to love nature early in life if they are to take steps to nurture and protect the environment in future years.

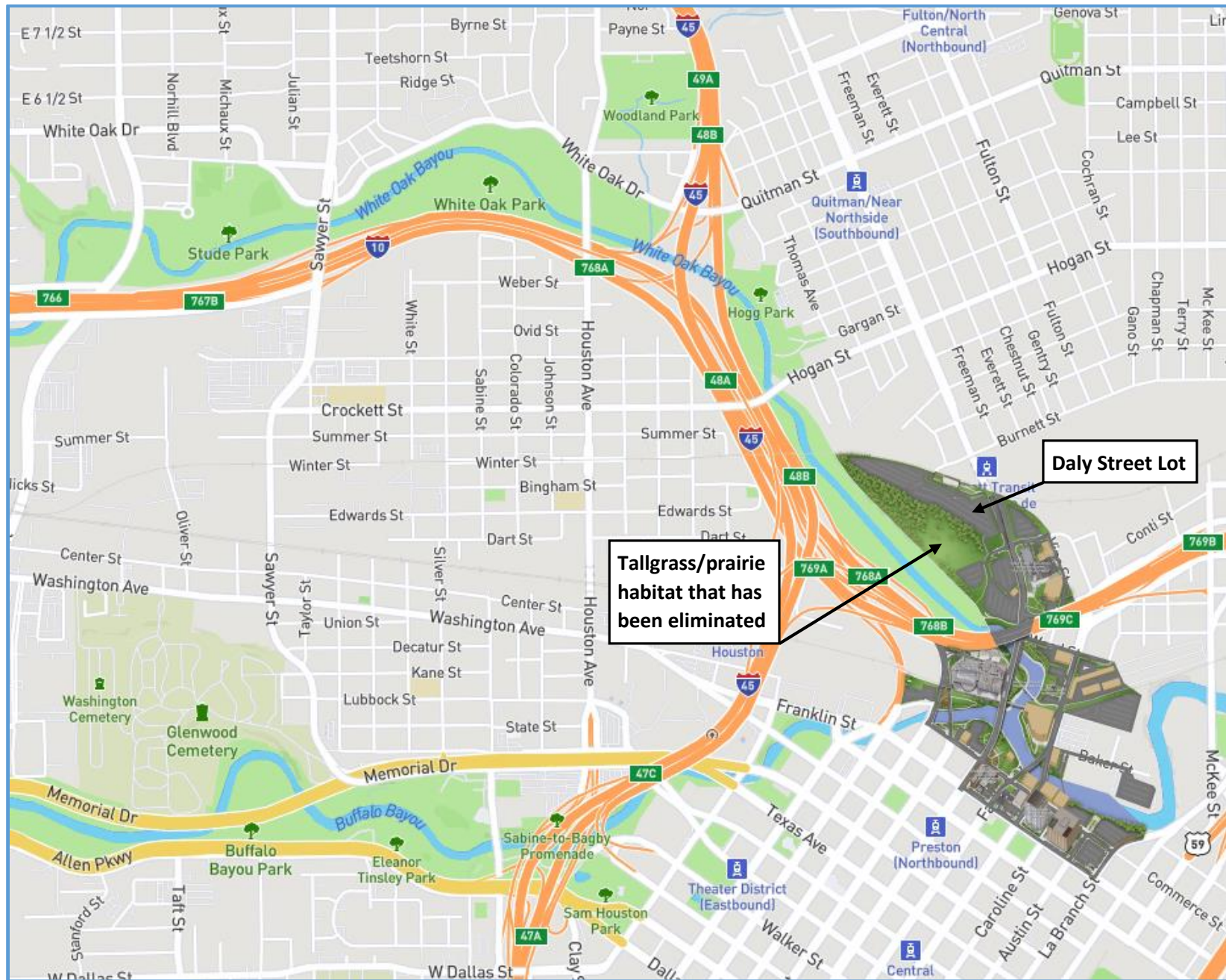
With the resources of your Department of Natural Sciences and the engagement of students earning degrees in Environmental Biosciences, I am hopeful that UHD will shape plans to make positive impacts on the habitat that borders the White Oak Bayou Greenway, mitigating to some extent impacts of campus expansion and freeway relocation. Work could potentially include members of your Department of Urban Education and the Environmental Club, and possibly expand the analysis of birding records performed within the Department of Mathematics and Statistics by students of Lecturer Susan Beane. Should you have questions about my efforts or wish to learn more about the birds of the White Oak Bayou, please reach me at [wawhope@gmail.com](mailto:wawhope@gmail.com). Thank you in advance for anything you may be able to do to improve the health of the habitats along the White Oak Bayou Greenway.

Sincerely,

Wendy Wright  
Wildlife Habitat Committee Chair  
White Oak Bayou Association

C: Dean J. Akif Uzman, UHD  
Department Chair Philip Lyons, UHD  
Assistant Professor Michael Tobin, UHD  
Department Chair Ronald Beebe, UHD  
Lecturer Susan Beane, UHD  
Kelli Ondracek, Park Naturalist, Natural Resources Management Program, City of Houston  
Mary Anne Weber, Education Director, Houston Audubon  
Sarah Flournoy, Bird-friendly Communities Program Manager, Houston Audubon  
Ben Hulsey, President (2013-15) and Board of Advisors Member, Houston Audubon  
Stanford and Drew Alexander Families, sponsors of the White Oak Bayou Greenway at UHD  
Glenn Laird, Environmental Chief, Harris County Flood Control District  
Robert Rayburn, President, Bayou Preservation Association  
Becky Houston, President, Friends of Woodland Park  
Bob Lee, Vice President, White Oak Bayou Association

# UHD property and its location along the White Oak Bayou Greenway

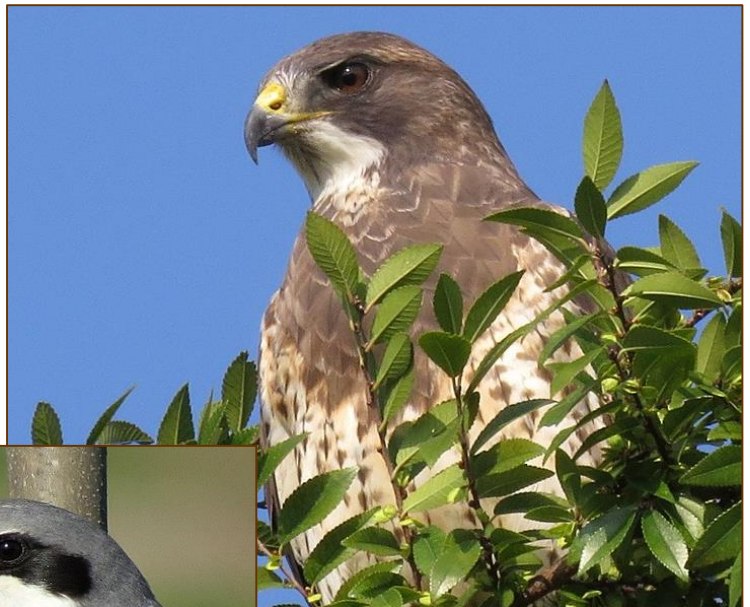


## 143 species reported since 2015 along the 2-mile stretch of the White Oak Bayou Greenway

### Taylor/Sawyer St. Bridge to UHD

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	White-winged Dove	Gray Catbird
Snow Goose	Mourning Dove	Brown Thrasher
Muscovy Duck	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Northern Mockingbird
Mallard	Eastern Screech Owl	European Starling
Northern Pintail	Barred Owl	Cedar Waxwing
Pied-billed Grebe	Common Nighthawk	Black-and-white Warbler
Wood Stork	Chimney Swift	Prothonotary Warbler
Neotropic Cormorant	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Tennessee Warbler
Double-crested Cormorant	Belted Kingfisher	Orange-crowned Warbler
Anhinga	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Nashville Warbler
American White Pelican	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Common Yellowthroat
Brown Pelican	Downy Woodpecker	Hooded Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Northern Flicker	American Redstart
Great Egret	Crested Caracara	Yellow Warbler
Snowy Egret	American Kestrel	Pine Warbler
Little Blue Heron	Peregrine Falcon	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Tricolored Heron	Monk Parakeet	Black-throated Gray Warbler
Cattle Egret	Olive-sided Flycatcher	Black-throated Green Warbler
Green Heron	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Canada Warbler
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Eastern Phoebe	Wilson's Warbler
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	Great Crested Flycatcher	Chipping Sparrow
White Ibis	Couch's Kingbird	Field Sparrow
White-faced Ibis	Western Kingbird	White-crowned Sparrow
Roseate Spoonbill	Eastern Kingbird	White-throated Sparrow
Black Vulture	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	Savannah Sparrow
Turkey Vulture	Loggerhead Shrike	Song Sparrow
Osprey	White-eyed Vireo	Lincoln's Sparrow
White-tailed Kite	Blue-headed Vireo	Swamp Sparrow
Mississippi Kite	Red-eyed Vireo	Summer Tanager
Northern Harrier	Blue Jay	Northern Cardinal
Sharp-shinned Hawk	American Crow	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Cooper's Hawk	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Blue Grosbeak
Bald Eagle	Purple Martin	Indigo Bunting
Red-shouldered Hawk	Tree Swallow	Painted Bunting
Broad-winged Hawk	Barn Swallow	Dickcissel
Swainson's Hawk	Cliff Swallow	Eastern Meadowlark
Red-tailed Hawk	Cave Swallow	Orchard Oriole
American Coot	Carolina Chickadee	Baltimore Oriole
American Avocet	Tufted Titmouse	Red-winged Blackbird
Killdeer	House Wren	Bronzed Cowbird
Least Sandpiper	Winter Wren	Common Grackle
Spotted Sandpiper	Sedge Wren	Great-tailed Grackle
Solitary Sandpiper	Carolina Wren	House Finch
Laughing Gull	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	American Goldfinch
Ring-billed Gull	Red-vented Bulbul	House Sparrow
Rock Pigeon	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Northern Red Bishop
Eurasian Collared-Dove	Hermit Thrush	Scaly-breasted Munia
Inca Dove	American Robin	





Birds perched amid tallgrass habitat at UHD. Clockwise from top left: American Kestrel, Swainson's Hawk, Northern Red Bishop, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Savannah Sparrow. Center from top down: Loggerhead Shrike, Western Kingbird

