



Announcing the Formation of Coalition of Sustainable Urban Rookeries

Bexar County is facing a myriad of urban-avian conflicts caused by a growing population of urban and suburban colonial waterbirds and decreased habitat availability. A coalition of science-based organizations - *Audubon Texas, San Antonio Zoo, The Nature Conservancy in Texas, Bexar Audubon Society, and San Antonio River Authority* - are joining together to build community-inclusive strategies to address these urban-avian conflicts in Bexar County. Our organizations are fundamentally based in conservation and habitat preservation with different skill sets regarding the environment. Together we seek to offer interdisciplinary guidance on how to protect the environment as well as preserve the cultural fabric of our community.

Urban bird rookeries consist of species of birds referred to as colonial waterbirds, birds that gather in large groups or colonies during nesting season. Species found in urban rookeries can include seabirds (gulls, terns, cormorants, pelicans) and wading birds (herons, egrets, ibises). Urban rookery species common to San Antonio include Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Double-crested Cormorant, and the Neotropic Cormorant. Urban rookery species common to San Antonio may include Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Double-crested Cormorant, and the Neotropic Cormorant. But by far, the most common species is the Cattle Egret, a bird originally from Africa whose range has expanded enormously in the last 50 years.

In urban environments bird populations and humans can live in close proximity. Enjoying birds in urban environments creates opportunities for understanding nature, supports environmental stewardship, and also drives economic benefits for the communities they co-exist in. When natural habitats that support colonies of breeding birds in rural areas are lost to development and land use change, bird colonies may move to urban and suburban habitats such as parks or residential neighborhoods. When this happens urban-avian conflicts can arise.

The urban-avian conflict in Bexar County has come to a head most recently in Brackenridge Park with a Cattle Egret rookery. The impacts have been stark — current locations of urban rookeries have negatively impacted water quality in the San Antonio River, caused the closure of playgrounds and structures at the park, and are competing with native bird species for food and nesting resources. This conflict has also impacted the San Antonio Zoo, forcing a nine-month

closure of the Kronkosky's Tiny Tot Nature Spot, creating areas unusable by guests/staff due to feces, and threatening endangered species which are cared for by the zoo with transferable diseases.

This is not a short-term problem and it is not unique to San Antonio. Prior attempts to mitigate rapid urban rookery growth have not had sustained success. Other metropolitan areas in Texas like Dallas and Houston have experienced overpopulated Cattle Egret rookeries in residential areas. In San Antonio the rookeries are currently located in parks, but as their population grows, urban rookeries may expand to neighborhoods and along the Riverwalk.

Our coalition is seeking a balance between the wellbeing and habitat availability of local wildlife populations, as well as our river's water quality, and the community's public health and quality of life.

Long-term solutions are only attainable if all stakeholders are at the table. We are developing a process to build science-based solutions and community-inclusive strategies for a sustainable urban rookery management plan that benefits people *and* nature. **We invite the community to share their questions, ideas, or concerns on this new public platform (urbanrookeries.org) as we work together to address the urban-avian conflict in Bexar County.**

We, the undersigned, stand committed to building community-inclusive strategies to address the urban-avian conflicts in Bexar County for the benefit of nature and people.

—

