

# The Watering Hole

*The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy Quarterly Newsletter*



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## A fresh start to spring

Welcome to the Spring 2021 newsletter! A new season is upon us, and many are eager to enjoy the beautiful weather, fields of bluebonnets, and a fresh start.

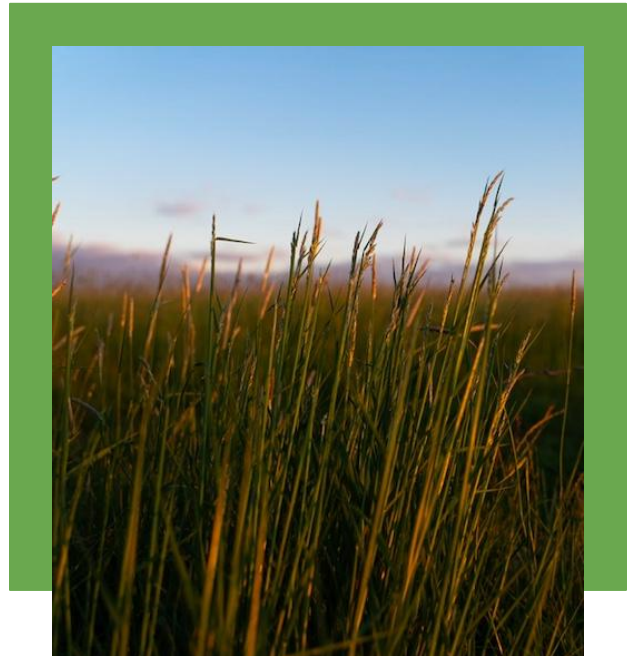
At Willow Waterhole, our goal is always to bring communities together in new ways that support conservation and education about the Southwest Houston environment. We invite you to join us in 2021 and share your fresh ideas to keep this all going.

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## Marking a major milestone in 2021: The Willow Waterhole 20th Anniversary

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy. There will be no public celebration, but we invite the community to take a walk this month and enjoy the latest addition to the Greenway—the Naturescape Garden. Below are a few milestones over the past 20 years to celebrate:

- Construction of six lakes and surrounding greenspace
- More than 200 group conservation and maintenance work days
- Advisor on 60 Eagle Scout and Gold Arrow projects
- Seven annual MusicFests



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### Board member profile: Becky Edmondson



Becky Edmondson grew up in Maplewood South and has been a homeowner in Westbury since 1979. After completing her Texas Master Naturalist training in Galveston in 2004, where she thought nature was, she discovered a whole green world of possibilities in her own backyard.

With the groundbreaking of Willow Waterhole taking place in 2004 just as her training ended, it seemed like a sign and she soon became director of volunteers for the WWGC. She managed Eagle Scout projects; led introductory walks and cleanups; and served on the master plan committee. Her passion is nature and introducing both children and adults to the beauty and wonders of nature. She is currently a director-at-large on the WWGC Board.

Becky attended Texas Tech and the University of Houston. She is an alum of Leadership Houston; serves on the board of the Westbury Civic Club, the WAIC, and Levitt Pavilion Houston; and is a Houston Clean City Commissioner representing District K. When she is not out hugging trees, she and her husband operate a surplus lines insurance agency that they began in 1980.

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## Introducing the Naturescape Garden

If you've visited the Waterhole recently, you likely noticed the new wood carvings near the Schwartz Gazebo. For the upcoming 20th anniversary, the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy created the Naturescape Garden. The carvings were funded entirely by Conservancy board members, and native live oak was used due to its durability and beauty.

Bill Burhans served as project manager and was assisted by Alex Schwarz and his family in laying a permeable foundation for the logs as his Eagle Scout project. We extend our appreciation to Will Winters with Novus Wood Products for donating the logs. The latest addition, "Buster the Dog," was rescued from a downtown warehouse after being removed from Market Square Park and will have a new home at Willow Waterhole.

The talented sculptor James D. Phillips is well-known for his original wood carving sculptures created in Galveston after Hurricane Ike and other sites in the Houston area. Please visit his website, [Inshore Sculpture](#), to learn more about his creations.



**Willow  
Waterhole  
Naturescape  
Garden**

# Introducing the Naturescape Garden (cont.)

Many thanks to the following members and donors for their gifts:

## Wood Carving Sculptures



**"Happiness is a Friend and Good Book"**

**Commissioned By:**  
Cindy and Walter Chapman  
Becky and Bill Edmondson



**"Wild Flowers"**

**Commissioned By:**  
Barbara Richards  
**In Memory Of:**  
Betty and Warren Richards



**"Bald Eagle"**

**Commissioned By:**  
Janie and Russell Schexnayder  
**In Memory Of:**  
Gladys and Arlon Blount  
Longtime Westbury Residents



**"Channel Catfish"**

**Commissioned By:**  
Janie and Russell Schexnayder  
**In Memory Of:**  
Eva and Mike Schexnayder  
New Iberia, Louisiana

# Introducing the Naturescape Garden (cont.)

Many thanks to the following members and donors for their gifts:

## Wood Carving Sculptures



**"Observant Scout"**

**Commissioned By:**  
Bruce Krewinghaus



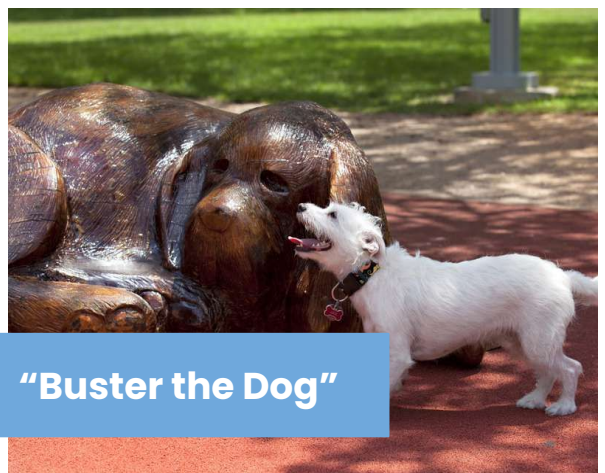
**"Feathered Friends"**

**Commissioned By:**  
Bill and Kelley Burhans



**"Basking in the Sun"**

**Commissioned By:**  
Tony and Donna Robert



**"Buster the Dog"**

**Commissioned By:**  
Ray and Valerie Runge  
**In Honor Of:**  
All Our Furry Friends

**\*Relocated to Willow Waterhole\***

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## How Russell and Janie Schexnayder took action to develop and establish Willow Waterhole

If you are a frequent visitor to Willow Waterhole Greenway (WWG), you have probably seen the Schexnayder Arboretum Trail near Ricecrest.

Unbeknownst to most, the original proposal for building the WW Stormwater Detention Facility and Greenway at the current site was developed by the dynamic duo of Russell and Janie Schexnayder.

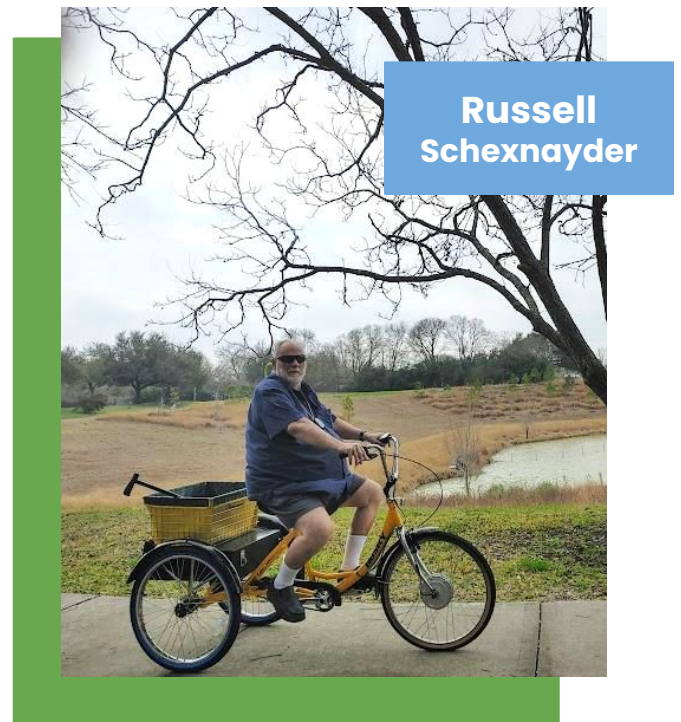
During the period of 1996-1999, the married couple made proposals, conducted research, provided support documents, and advocated for the property to be purchased by the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD).

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Recently, two members of the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy spoke with Russell about his and Janie's involvement with the Greenway. One of their initial questions was "Why are you a recognized expert in stormwater damage?" The answer was, "I'm a Cajun!"

Russell is originally from New Iberia, Louisiana, while his wife Janie grew up right here in Ennis, Tex. He moved to Houston in 1971, met Janie in 1972, and settled in Westbury in 1978 where the two still reside.

The history of WWG began with the rainfall event on September 19, 1983, that flooded about 1800 homes in the Meyerland/Willow Meadows area.



There were no large detention basins in the Brays Bayou Watershed at that time and land developers were opposed to them; however, the newly formed Brays Bayou Association (BBA) had plans to finance a stormwater infrastructure engineering study.

A major recommendation from the 1985 study was for more stormwater detention in the Brays Watershed east of Gessner Road.

Enter the Schexnayders! Janie and Russell were owners of a local upholstery shop and after the 1983 flood their services in furniture repair were in high demand. Russell was a member of the Westbury Civic Club and became a founding member of the BBA.

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## How Russell and Janie Schexnayder took action to develop and establish Willow Waterhole (cont.)

Russell and Janie proposed a stormwater detention site to the east of Westbury High School and Westbury Little League and proceeded to further investigate the potential.

Janie spent countless hours at the Harris County Appraisal District office looking up land records (eventually producing 80 parcels for purchase) and prices, while Russell researched detention basin design and economics at the office of the HCFCD.

Their efforts produced the first master plan for Willow Waterhole, and it was presented to the Westbury Area Improvement Committee (WAIC) in 1997. This committee had previously set a goal to add more public greenspace to improve the environment around Westbury High School.

During the next three years, the BBA and HCFCD further developed the plan, and in 2000 the federal Project Brays was approved for \$480 million, which included \$75 million for the beloved Willow Waterhole.

Every major hydrologic engineering element that has been incorporated in the Willow Waterhole Stormwater Detention Facility design today was originally identified by Russell and Janie's documents and was the basis for the engineering study and cost evaluation.

You will need to wait until our June newsletter to hear the rest of the story that takes us up to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy in April 2021.

Thank you Russell and Janie for your amazing work!



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## Opportunities for fishing right in your backyard: An update from Bill King

What is the closest place to go fishing for bass, catfish, and sunfish?

Willow Waterhole Greenway is a popular option in Southwest Houston, and it offers six different lakes in the 290 acre park. The size of the lakes range from 10 acres to the 110 acre Westbury Lake at the main entrance of the park.

This family-friendly park offers easy access to the lakes.

The lakes are joined by underground culverts and were stocked by Texas Parks & Wildlife from 2016 to 2019, so the fish are becoming mature and plentiful. We have reports of bass in the two-pound range and catfish in excess of two pounds.

All you need is fishing tackle, bait, and a comfortable chair or stool. You will also need a fishing license if you are 17+ years of age. Non-motorized vessels are welcome in the lakes, and the grassy shores make it easy to launch from anywhere on any of the lakes.

If you have fished at Willow Waterhole in the past, you are no doubt familiar with the fences that dominated much of the shoreline in the Westbury and Triangle Lakes.

This was a failed attempt at keeping the carp from destroying the aquatic plants close to the shoreline and, thus, recently all of the fences have been removed. While they did not work on the carp, they did work on keeping lures! It's good news the lure traps have been removed, opening up more shoreline to fish.

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## Meet Miss Annie: Our resident duck whisperer

Many are familiar with our resident duck hanging out near the Schwartz Gazebo.

We have no knowledge as to how he arrived at Willow Waterhole, but we love having him join the resident wildlife.

Since his arrival, one park visitor has become his favorite, Miss Annie.

The reason might be that she faithfully feeds him twice daily! She has named him Click-click, and he immediately comes waddling up when she comes into his view.

Miss Annie has lived near WW for 20 years. Originally from Vietnam, she came to the U.S. in 1975 with her husband after the war. Her husband had been aiding the US troops and was offered asylum. Of course, Annie came with him to our country.

We love having Miss Annie and Click-click at WW! Her smile and joy will light up your day, so say hello whenever your paths cross.



Click-click



Miss Annie

## Conservation updates

Highlights from our tree planting projects and other conservancy efforts:

- Ricecrest Street litter pickup contract addendum presented at Brays Oaks Management District Board meeting and approved; started January 2021
- 47 large trees - planted on Willow Lake by HCFCD with green screening of industry, retail, and apartments
- 18 trees - planted as a green screen on AT&T property by Scouts
- 10 trees - planted by Scouts near benches and tables to add more shade
- 79 trees - Livelihood.eco tree planting
- 18 trees - Bat Mitzvah tree planting
- City completed tree trimming at Westbury and Triangle Lakes (brought in wood chipper)
- City replaced wood planks on bridge rails at Westbury Lake
- Willow Waterhole Greenway to be included in a new book titled “Wild Houston,” for which we provided history and photos and that is due out in a couple years

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## FAQs: You asked, we've got answers

We often hear from community members, “How can I get more involved?” or “What all can you do at Willow Waterhole?” Our FAQs section addresses some of our most popular questions. Send in questions via email to [info@willowwaterhole.org](mailto:info@willowwaterhole.org) or on our Facebook page.

Your questions might be helpful to someone else, or help us develop new projects or partnerships for the Greenway.



### Q: What's the water quality of the lakes?

**A:** Although we haven't had a recent water quality test, it is safe for fishing and boating. The last test occurred when the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) began stocking the ponds with catfish, bass, and sunfish about four to five years ago. They measured pollutants and oxygen content to make sure fish would thrive in the lakes. They gave it a thumbs up, and the fish are thriving. We expect TPWD to return and do its annual fish survey soon, as they weren't able to make the trip in 2020 due to COVID.

The water in the ponds comes from either 1) rainfall immediately from its banks, 2) seepage from the bottom (they dug as far down until almost hitting water table), and 3) overflow from Willow Waterhole Bayou during large storm events. Water clarity is low like most Texas ponds, given they are mud bottom and do not have a constant intake and outturn of flow.



### Q: What's the latest with Prairie Lake?

**A:** Exciting times are beginning to happen at Prairie Lake. A Scout has recently committed to add two benches as part of his Eagle project scheduled for June. It is wonderful to see neighbors stepping up to help.

We are starting to fundraise and write grants to add amenities. It is a slow process, but we have high hopes! All donations made through the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy are tax deductible.

Donations can be made through [www.willowwaterhole.org](http://www.willowwaterhole.org) or mailed to 11415 Chimney Rock Suite 201, Houston, TX 77035. Please note that the funds are to be used for Prairie Lake.

# Volunteer Spotlight

## Local residents lead Bat Mitzvah project at Willow Waterhole to give back to community

In February 2021, two local residents—Melody Joy Leal and Rayna Laufmann—selected Willow Waterhole as the site of their community service project for their upcoming Bat Mitzvah. Both young women shared what motivated them to lead a tree planting project for the Greenway:

### MELODY JOY LEAL

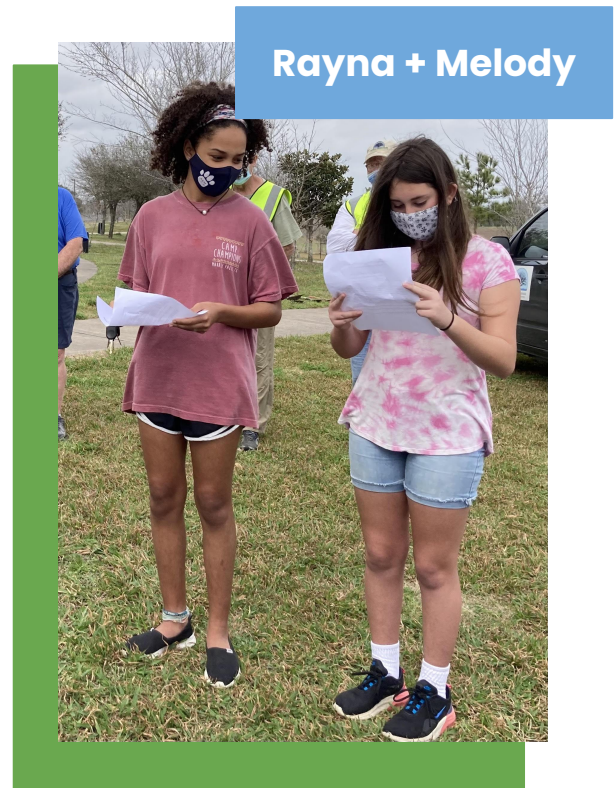
“I chose to do something at WW because I wanted to do something for the environment. I want to give back to the earth because I think humans take too much. I am 12 years old and I go to Hogg Middle School. I like to play soccer and bake. My favorite thing to bake is cakes. I have 6 pets: 2 dogs, 2 cats and 2 rats. My favorite animal is a cat.”

### RAYNA LAUFMANN

“I am a 7th grader at Tanglewood Middle School. I just turned 13! I enjoy participating in school activities and all kinds of sports. [...]

As part of my Bat Mitzvah, I am required to complete a community service project, and I have always wanted to find a way to help the environment. I thought that planting trees for Willow Waterhole was a great opportunity. Willow Waterhole helps my neighborhood by collecting water in the detention ponds so my neighborhood does not flood when we have heavy rainstorms. I have lived in Westbury all of my life, and I have seen how the floods can affect my friends, neighbors, and even my former elementary school, Kolter.

I know that a lot of work is being done at Willow Waterhole, and it will continue to grow and develop. I am excited to see the improvements that are constantly being made there. It provides people a great place to take walks through nature. [...] It is even more special because we got to help select the sites of where the trees will be planted. We hope our trees help provide people with shade while they sit at the picnic tables or benches throughout the park and that some of the trees will help hide some of the surrounding buildings so visitors only see beautiful scenery.”



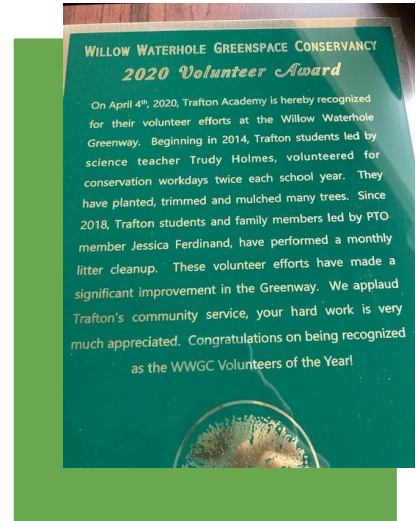
# Volunteer Spotlight

## WWGC recognizes Trafton Academy as the 2020 “Volunteers of the Year”

Recently, Trafton Academy was recognized for its volunteer efforts at the Willow Waterhole Greenway—receiving the WWGC 2020 “Volunteers of the Year” award.

Beginning in 2014, Trafton students led by science teacher Trudy Holmes volunteered for conservation work days twice each school year.

In the years since, they have planted, trimmed, and mulched many trees. Since 2018, Trafton students and family members led by PTO member Jessica Ferdinand have performed a monthly litter cleanup. These volunteer efforts have made a significant improvement at the Greenway. We applaud Trafton’s community service and dedication.



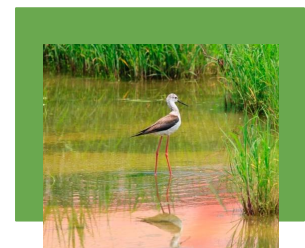
Trudy Holmes, Samantha, Travis, Inez Hutchins, Carter (L to R)



# Thanks to our newest Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy members and continuing donors

The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy is grateful for new members and continuing donors. Membership donations provide general operations funds that help maintain the park and programming, including free recreational events. When you join us, you become a partner in keeping Willow Waterhole a beautiful urban green space. The list below reflects new members and donors from November 2020 through February 2021.

Individual Members	Supporting Members	Sustaining Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avery Hawkins</li> <li>• Brian Goodwin</li> <li>• Brittany Aldridge</li> <li>• Bruce Biundo</li> <li>• Cameron Bird</li> <li>• Christopher Hokanson</li> <li>• Gertrud Pater</li> <li>• Jonathan Hammond</li> <li>• Katelyn Bleiweiss</li> <li>• Katherine Niemann</li> <li>• Marie Woodward</li> <li>• Marlys Williams</li> <li>• Michael Martin</li> <li>• Patrick Cox</li> <li>• Vera Hammond</li> <li>• Victoria Agee</li> <li>• William Huttenbach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Britt Jung</li> <li>• C J Claverie &amp; Caroline Burom</li> <li>• David Swenson</li> <li>• Edith Smith</li> <li>• Elaine Britt</li> <li>• Gayle Nesom</li> <li>• Greg Arnold</li> <li>• Jeanne Light</li> <li>• Jerry Helfand</li> <li>• Julieta Ruppert</li> <li>• Linda Pett-Conklin</li> <li>• Paul &amp; Ruth SoRelle</li> <li>• Sandra &amp; Gordon Kuehl</li> <li>• Terri E. Bourne</li> <li>• Wallace &amp; Norma Davenport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barbara Richards</li> <li>• Becky Edmundson</li> <li>• Bill &amp; Kelley Burhans</li> <li>• Bill &amp; Shawn King</li> <li>• Bruce Krewinghaus</li> <li>• Hazel &amp; Allen Potvin</li> <li>• Jay Broadfoot</li> <li>• Pamela &amp; James Pool</li> <li>• Phyllis Jackson</li> <li>• Russell &amp; Janie Schexynader</li> <li>• Tony &amp; Donna Robert</li> <li>• Walter &amp; Cindy Chapman</li> <li>• William E. King</li> </ul>



## Dear Willow Waterhole,

"We are so enjoying this gem on a regular basis and will soon become members of the Conservancy! I tell everyone that within five minutes from my house I can feel and truly be, 'outside - in the country.' It's really opening up a kind of more outdoorsy lifestyle within minutes of Meyerland - walking, running, biking, birdwatching, and so on. My next idea is to start boating there, with a simple kayak. [...] It is really a magnificent effort and accomplishment and gift!"

- Nelson Gruber, new Willow Waterhole lover

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## Snapshots: Urban Retreat

Local artist Rona Lesser painted the landscape below of Willow Waterhole. She often visits the Greenway to walk and plein aire sketch. Her artwork, including the piece below, is available at [www.ronalegger.com](http://www.ronalegger.com). Visit her studio at The Silos at Sawyer Yards, Studio 313, or contact her via email at [ronalegger@gmail.com](mailto:ronalegger@gmail.com) to learn more.



## A final word: Send us your photos!



We'd love to feature your photos in The Watering Hole newsletter. Clear, simple snapshots of landscapes, wildlife, and the lakes are ideal. Email photos to [volunteer@willowwaterhole.org](mailto:volunteer@willowwaterhole.org) or tag us on Facebook.

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### Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy

Park Address:  
5300 Dryad Drive, Houston, TX 77035  
Email: [info@willowwaterhole.org](mailto:info@willowwaterhole.org)  
[www.willowwaterhole.org](http://www.willowwaterhole.org)

#### Editor's note:

Credit for Howard Sacks' photo in the Winter 2020 newsletter goes to [Steve N. Magoon](#)

