

RAMONA BASS

Recipient of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas'
2010 International Award of Excellence in Conservation

Wildlife conservationist Ramona Seeligson Bass learned firsthand about the importance of land stewardship and the interrelationship of wildlife and the land from working cattle as a child with her grandfather on his South Texas ranch. Her family engendered a lifelong passion in her for conservation.

A native of San Antonio, Mrs. Bass has lived in Fort Worth for the past 25 years where she and her husband, Lee Marshall Bass, have raised their three children. With a shared interest in conservation, the couple has been active in the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Species Survival Plan to save the endangered black rhinoceros, which they breed and raise on their South Texas ranch. In 1993, they established the Lee and Ramona Bass Foundation, which provides grants to conservation organizations.

Mrs. Bass has become widely known as the transformational leader of the Fort Worth Zoo. Serving as co-chair of the board of directors of the Fort Worth Zoological Association for the past 18 years, she has led the 100-year-old attraction through privatization to its current standing as one of the top zoos in the country. The Zagat survey in 2008 named the Zoo the No. 1 attraction in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex.

Ever the catalyst for conservation, she has attracted a committed cadre of allies. In 2001, her family and friends established the Arthur A. Seeligson, Jr. Conservation Fund in memory of her father. Administered by the Fort Worth Zoo, the fund supports the conservation of native Texas wildlife through grant awards to scientists, educators, and organizations committed to conserving the biodiversity of Texas. Mr. Seeligson's love of the land served as the inspiration for the Zoo's Texas Wild! exhibit, which teaches the importance of land stewardship and of conserving the biodiversity found in our own backyard.

Opened in 2002, the Zoo's \$40 million, eight-acre Texas Wild! exhibit featuring live animals and flora native to Texas has garnered national attention for its cutting-edge conservation, education, and design. An editorial in the Fort Worth Business Press on June 18, 2004, sums up the role that Mrs. Bass played in the important educational project:



"...As usual, Ramona Bass manages to slip quietly into the background, offering several insightful facts about the zoo's growth but carefully avoiding the limelight...Mrs. Bass has made an incalculable contribution of selfless devotion and tireless commitment. She was the leader in the late 1980s and early '90s of a group that had a vision for a Fort Worth zoo that would be literally world class; that would benefit our community and especially our children as a destination for family outings, entertainment and education."

Mrs. Bass continues to lead the Fort Worth Zoo to promote responsible stewardship of wildlife with its latest attraction, the Museum of Living Art. Scheduled to open in March 2010, the exhibit will boast one of the best reptile collections of any herpetarium in the United States. The 30,000-foot indoor/outdoor exhibit will house more than 300 species of amphibians and reptiles.

Besides her involvement with the Zoo, Mrs. Bass co-hosted a weekend outing in 2002 for women who had taken a lead in managing and conserving the natural resources of Texas. Wildlife experts lectured and gave tours of La Paloma Ranch in South Texas. Then in 2003, she hosted a two-day writers' workshop in Fort Worth sponsored by the Environmental Defense Fund, an environmental advocacy group, and the Sand County Foundation of Madison, Wisconsin, which fosters personal responsibility and individual stewardship to protect our environment. Forty writers heard important discussions between landowners and environmental groups about land use, endangered species, related law, and human interaction with nature.

Because of Mrs. Bass's collective achievements in wildlife conservation, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton appointed her to serve on the National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Commission in 2003.

Her accomplishments are splendid examples of how one person can make a huge difference on behalf of the conservation of our environment. The impact of her work is INVALUABLE.

