

## FINAL MINUTES

**Bird Conservation Network  
Saturday, April 22, 2023  
Hybrid Meeting: Sagawau Environmental Learning Center  
and Online Video Conference**

### QUARTERLY MEETING

**Attendees:** Pat Andersen (TCA), Tim Balassie (KCA), Stephanie Beilke (AGL), Mary Bernat (At-large), Sonny Cohen (Lake-Cook), Donnie Dann (TNC), Dan Ellig (Lake-Cook), Bob Fisher (IAS), Jim Giocomo (ABC), Jerry Heinrich (Midewin Alliance), Charlotte Pavelka (LCA), Judy Pollock (CAS), Annette Prince (CBCM), Rita Renwick (Will Cty Aud), Eric Secker (KCA), Aubrey Sirman (Loyola-SES), Dave Taliaferro (Lake-Cook), Lee Witkowski (Will Cty Aud).

**Guests:** None

**Call to Order:** President Secker called the meeting to order at 1:07 pm. There was a quorum present with 13 organizations represented. Secker thanked members for attending in person and via Zoom. 11 members attended in person; seven joined online.

#### Administration:

##### 1. Approval of minutes of January 7, 2023, Annual and Quarterly Meetings

**Motion:** Approve the minutes of the January 7, 2023 annual and quarterly meetings as presented.

Moved: Bob Fisher

Seconded: Donnie Dann

Action: Approved

##### 2. Membership & Treasurer's Report (Pavelka)

Charlotte Pavelka thanked 2023 donors (The Wetlands Initiative, McHenry Co. Audubon, David Johnson, Sonny & Rena Cohen, and David Kusel) and reported that BCN had a balance of \$8800. The Treasurer's Report is attached. All member organizations have paid their dues.

##### 3. Representative Updates

###### a. Nomination of New Member – Jim Herkert

Jim Herkert is nominated to join BCN as an at-large member. Per BCN bylaws, the membership will vote to approve the nomination at the next quarterly meeting.

**Motion:** Nominate Jim Herkert for individual (at-large) membership in BCN.

Moved: Bob Fisher

Seconded: Mary Bernat

Action: Approved

## FINAL MINUTES

### **b. ExComm Update - Aubrey Sirman**

**Motion:** Aubrey Sirman to continue on the BCN Executive Committee as an at-large member.

Moved: Sonny Cohen

Seconded: Judy Pollock

Action: Approved

### **Projects & Initiatives:**

#### **1. Communications Team Updates (Fisher, Secker)**

##### **a. Monitor Recruitment Effort**

BCN has been reaching out to organizations and individuals to recruit new volunteer monitors for the 2023 BCN Survey season. Some non-traditional groups are participating, such as The Nature Conservancy. Good publicity and our excellent website have both played a role in attracting the greatest number of responses that Tim Balassie has seen since he has been the Survey Coordinator. There have been 19 applicants in about 2 weeks, and 14 to 15 new volunteers are ready to be assigned to monitoring sites. Balassie has been working with coordinators to get training set up. Inquiries are coming in from across the state, and he has been trying to connect them with efforts in their area. Social media efforts have also been successful.

Bob Fisher was applauded for the Communications Team's efforts to get the word out. A two-session evening training program is being planned with Vicky Sroczynski hosting. Tentative dates are May 10 and 17. The training is built around species nesting in the area and in specific habitats in order to zero in on the knowledge of vocalizations needed. There is a question of how many sites we can cover. Balassie was also thanked for continuing to coordinate even though retired.

##### **b. Trends Analysis Messaging**

Dialogue with land managers and the conservation community continues. The PowerPoint and overall program for Trends messaging has been very successful. 21 presentations have been made including land managers and conservation groups. Three more are lined up for Will County, Midewin, and Fermilab. Judy Pollock has arranged to meet with Cook County Forest Preserve staff. Neither Kane County nor Chicago Park District meetings have been scheduled.

##### **c. Newsletter Launch**

The next project for the Communications Team is to launch a regular e-newsletter via MailChimp. Work on the first issue is underway and will feature updates on local conservation news, advocacy issues, the BCN Survey, and other BCN projects. The team is also working to get news and local advocacy issues on the BCN website; the e-newsletter will link to longer articles on the website for more information. Suggested items should be sent to Diann Bilderback.

## FINAL MINUTES

### 2. Update on Strategic Goals for 2023 (Secker)

#### a. Land Manager and BCN Member Group Engagement

Bob Fisher stated that Lake County Audubon is thinking of switching to eBird for data entry. Charlotte Pavelka stated that they are using a new app called "Field Maps," which enables them to locate points accurately. With a 20% loss of monitors in that county, the app would enable new monitors and those switching areas to locate points in woods. Balassie is working on setting up a discussion with land manager contacts at Kane and Will counties and with the Chicago Park District.

#### b. Trends Database, App/Scorecard

Some monitors enter their data into eBird, but other data is logged outside of eBird; the challenge is how to add the data into a single database to be better shared with land managers and others who ask for it. Chris Wood, Assistant Director of Information Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Project Leader for eBird, will be in Chicago soon and will meet with Secker, Judy Pollock, and Chris Monaghan. They will ask him about establishing more detailed eBird information for BCN.

#### c. Grassland Research

There is discussion and concern about a decline in grassland birds in the Cook County Forest Preserves as shown in Trends Analysis data. An examination of what is going on preserve by preserve would be valuable. A grant of \$4,000 for data analysis and \$1,500 to organize data might achieve this goal. Former contracted TA Analyst, Valerie Steen, is not available. Judy Pollock reported interest from six or seven people to work on this project. Aubrey Sirman will reach out to others. Bob Fisher is working to compile a list of potential funding organizations. Jim Giocomo will be a science advisor for the grassland research. Jim Herkert would be an excellent choice to pull information from the Trends Analysis for individual grassland sites.

### Advocacy/Conservation Issues:

#### 1. Report from Advocacy Chair Donnie Dann

Dann shared the below report on advocacy items. All items are primarily local except for the ABC sign-on.

- Strongly urged IEC to make the wildlife/birds concerns with offshore wind a priority. The New York State Energy Research & Development Authority made the following statement relative to wind turbines in the Great Lakes: Great Lakes Wind currently does not offer a unique, critical, or cost-effective contribution toward the achievement of New York State's Climate Act goals, beyond what existing, more cost-competitive programs are currently expected to deliver...This conclusion is based on a fulsome analysis of the resource development costs, ratepayer impacts, expected State benefits, transmission and interconnection limitations, infrastructure and supply chain constraints, visual impacts, and potential environmental impacts of Great Lakes Wind, as discussed below and

## FINAL MINUTES

throughout the Feasibility Study circulated to appropriate legislators by our ally on this issue, ELPC.

- Signed on to a letter from ABC relative to the 2023 Farm Bill including the provision to “rest-recover-recapture” (aka Bird Saver).
- Bob Fisher requested participation in a meeting with Dr. Natalie Finnie, the new Director of the IDNR. BCN and other conservation groups urge IDNR to devote more resources - staff, education efforts, enforcement/protection, and specifically provide more resources to the Endangered Species Protection Board, via the provisions of the IL Endangered Species Protection Act.
- Filed numerous witness slips on relevant issues before the General Assembly, in support of IEC’s recommendations.
- Signed onto a letter supporting an Evanston tree ordinance.
- Joined the Glenview Environmental Review Committee and other groups, opposing development at the Valley Lo site.

### 2. Wind Turbine Discussion

Dann pointed to a study stating that wind turbines on the Great Lakes are not cost-effective and that siting of potential turbines is key. There is pressure to move quickly to assuage climate change concerns, but it is critical to consider environmental impacts. ELPC is an ally in that their position is the public interest would be violated if wind turbines were placed to profit private companies. Funding legislation in Illinois (\$680 million) would tack a fee on electric bills to fund development of wind turbines on the lake. Another \$6–8 million would be needed for research. BCN has opposed the bill.

Annette Prince asked about improved designs to protect birds. Dann stated that bird-friendly designs do not produce the energy output needed, but research is ongoing. Prince commented that likely any design would be disruptive, especially off the shore near the Big Marsh/Lake Calumet area, which is the location being considered.

Because this is a serious issue with political pressure involved, Balassie suggested that BCN consider developing a position paper regarding the siting of wind turbines on Lake Michigan. An existing BCN paper has been taken down since it didn’t fully address this very complex issue. Balassie encouraged a position paper be given to the City of Chicago regarding the placement of turbines on the South Side. Fisher said that the only thing BCN has stated is that a feasibility study should be first on the agenda, which would include a suitable/non-suitable map for siting. IDNR was tasked through legislation 12 years ago to create a map, but the maps are nonexistent, and the capability is not there to create them.

Secker asked if there was support from members for developing a position paper. Dann agreed we should. Jim Giocomo said that American Bird Conservancy has a map. Herkert was mentioned as someone who might create such a paper. Sonny Cohen said that BCN should take a position, but not necessarily create a document. We should prioritize taking an informed position. We are on record as opposing House Bill 5204. Secker stated that we could take language from that and post on the BCN website.

## FINAL MINUTES

Fisher said that Chicago Wilderness will be putting on a café inviting others to discuss the wind turbine issue. Secker stated we should vote on this, since some members may have a different position. Balassie encouraged making our position more public in an editorial, etc. instead of just communicating with politicians.

### 1. Black-crowned Night-Heron Research

Secker summarized Amy Lardner's full report, which is provided below. Although there is a large rookery in Lincoln Park, an adverse event could displace the birds. An effort is underway by Mike Ward's U of I lab, IDNR, and the Urban Wildlife Institute with support from BCN and the Chicago Black-crowned Night-Heron Project to advance more nesting sites. Funding is being sought to do more research including putting trackers on birds. Bird decoys have been placed on the east side of Big Marsh in Chicago's Calumet region. Stephanie Beilke is involved with monitoring at Big Marsh.

This year marks the start of what's hoped will be a brighter future for Illinois' state-endangered Black-crowned Night-Heron (BCNH). In the aftermath of a 2021 project that disrupted a secondary rookery in Lincoln Park, conservationists realized that the Zoo rookery was now the last known remaining BCNH rookery in Illinois. Illinois had hosted up to half a dozen in recent living memory. As presented at the February Wild Things Conference, a working group comprised of Mike Ward and his University of Illinois Avian Conservation Laboratory, Brad Semel of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and the Urban Wildlife Institute's Henry Adams at the Lincoln Park Zoo are collaborating on new BCNH conservation and recovery initiatives.

Thanks to funding from a bird conservation research endowment, the University has established a new graduate position starting this year to lead the field research. Sarah Slayton will spend this summer in Chicago working closely with Henry, Brad, and the University of Illinois team to monitor the herons, and to trap and mount special solar-operated GPS trackers on some breeding adults. These trackers will finally help solve the mysteries of where these birds forage during breeding season, where they disperse to after breeding, and where they migrate to - all valuable in the development of new conservation and recovery strategies.

At the Zoo, Henry, assisted by a crew of summer student interns, will continue his research on the herons, as well as leg-banding. Henry and his team will also lend field support to the University of Illinois team. Sarah plans to develop citizen science volunteer opportunities to support this project.

Last week, the team set up a test site using vocal and visual cues to lure BCNH to re-establish nesting in the Calumet wetlands. A protected site on Chicago Park District land was identified as a suitable site by the IDNR's Brad Semel. This site will be monitored as a test case of using this method, called "conspecific cueing" to induce rookery re-establishment in wetlands.

Concurrently, a restoration project across the Mississippi River from St. Louis also includes a BCNH restoration project. The site of the Alorton BCNH rookery, once the state's largest and long since defunct, is nearby. This makes BCNH restoration not just a Chicago bird conservation project, but a state of Illinois one.

## FINAL MINUTES

Depending on this season's outcomes, it's possible that additional funds will be sought by the end of the summer to fund the purchase of up to 10 additional solar-powered GPS trackers. At a cost of \$1,500 per tracker, this could be a special campaign where one idea might be that funders or organizations could sponsor a specific tracker, and then get special reports on "their" bird.

While the Chicago History Museum project led to investigative articles published by *National Geographic* and *Chicago Tribune* in 2022, the reality remains: bird conservation and protection demands our continued engagement. By participating in volunteer bird monitoring, funding bird conservation research and advocating for birds when we learn of any public projects being planned, we can each play a role in conserving Illinois' birds. We must also share our love of birds, especially with communities underrepresented in birding and bird conservation efforts.

### Old Business

#### **1. Outstanding BCN Leadership Roles**

A new Treasurer is still being sought to replace Charlotte Pavelka. A Survey Coordinator is needed to take over Tim Balassie's position. Please reach out to Bob Fisher or Eric Secker if interested.

### New Business

#### **1. Chimney Swift Monitoring Pilot Program**

An urban/suburban Chimney Swift nest monitoring pilot program is being undertaken. Trends data in Kane County shows an increase in Chimney Swifts, but only natural areas are being surveyed. The objective is to ID chimneys being used by location to determine where swifts are living and nesting. Data from September and October when they are roosting will not be sought. Maureen Hurd with IDNR will provide protocol. Contact Bob Fisher if interested in participating.

#### **2. Open Breeding Bird Survey routes**

Volunteers are needed for several Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) routes in northern Illinois. Mike Ward with INHS/University of Illinois has open routes in Kane and McHenry counties. These include a systematic survey to determine whether nesting Swainson's Hawks continue in Illinois. Contact Mike Ward at [mpward@illinois.edu](mailto:mpward@illinois.edu) if interested.

#### **3. WGN-TV Media Opportunity**

Fisher reported that WGN-TV wants to do a (visual) story about how our native birds are adapting (or not) to climate change and the accompanying weather pattern changes. Pollock stated that National Audubon has maps that show when vegetation is leafing out in contrast to the past. Annette Prince said she investigated a report of a Canada Goose sitting stationary in the snow in January. The bird was sitting on 8 eggs which she later abandoned, and Prince got photos. Nesting failure results from such a situation. Fisher said his impression is that WGN wants to do a story with visuals by perhaps going out somewhere and getting video of birds. Balassie said he is leery of

## FINAL MINUTES

concrete examples to show, but you could go to a forest preserve and highlight potential threats. At the Wild Things Conference, Secker and Fisher included information on extreme weather events' impact on birds; maybe this could be incorporated.

### Announcements

Judy Pollock announced that Chicago Audubon Society is seeking to hire its first Executive Director. A primary objective is to engage people in Chicago in nature. Their website explains position qualifications at a salary of between \$85,000 to \$100,000: <https://www.chicagoaudubon.org/blog/2023/4/20/v6ji06b3i21qygbo2t3mh07cgpba1d>

### **Meeting Takeaways – Representative Communication**

1. Continue to advertise the BCN Survey monitor opportunity through your member groups (social media, newsletter, field trip listing, etc.) if you haven't already done so.
2. Continue outreach to identify new BCN officers. The Treasurer and Survey Coordinator roles need to be filled.
3. Donations to support BCN's strategic goals in 2023 are welcomed.

### **Proposed Next Meeting**

Saturday, July 22, 2023, will be the date for the next meeting.

Online participants were asked about the quality of this first hybrid meeting. There was some difficulty hearing comments made by those attending in person. Winter meetings will probably be online going forward, and others may be hybrid.

### **Adjourn Quarterly Meeting**

**Motion:** Adjourn the quarterly meeting.

Moved: Pat Andersen

Seconded: Donnie Dann

Action: Approved

The meeting adjourned at 2:38 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Rita Renwick, standing in for Vera Leopold, BCN Secretary*

**Treasurer's Report - BCN Meeting – April 2023**

4/17/2023

**1) Membership Report**

2023 membership paid by 20 organizations/3 individual. 1 Reciprocal organization.

**2) Treasurer's Report**

2023 Income	Budget YE 23	YTD	
Dues:	\$ 3,105.00	\$ 3,017.52	
Trends Donations to BCN	\$ 872.12	\$ 779.05	<b>The Wetlands Initiative \$500, McHenry Audubon \$150, David Johnson \$15, Sonny &amp; Rena Cohen \$100, Robert Kusel \$15</b>
General Donations To BCN	\$ 7,500.00		
Transfer from General to Trends Analysis	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$ 12,477.12</b>	<b>\$ 4,796.57</b>	
<b>2023 Expenses</b>			
Database & Scorecard Dev.	\$ 7,500.00		Scope \$1000-2000, Initial Payment \$5000 - \$6000
Monitor Training & Recognition	\$ 500.00		
Email Newsletter	\$ 336.00		MailChimp
Promotion At Events	\$ 600.00	\$ 450.99	WildThings \$214, Display \$50, Handouts \$50, Other \$200
BCN Web Site Hosting	\$ 200.00		Web Hosting fee\$200; Webmaster fee \$400 waived
Dues/Fees to other organizations	\$ 200.00	\$ 150.00	Chicago Wilderness \$50; Illinois Environmental Council \$150
Administrative Expenses	\$ 400.00		Printing, Postage, \$10 State Fee, Misc., Google Workspace
Transfer from General to Trends Analysis	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$ 10,736.00</b>	<b>\$ 1,600.99</b>	
<b>2023 Net Income</b>	<b>\$ 1,741.12</b>	<b>\$ 3,195.58</b>	
Checkbook balance -4/17/2023		\$8,832.15	
Trends Analysis Reserve:	\$ 1,966.60	\$ 1,966.60	
General Funds Balance	\$ 5,411.49	\$ 6,865.55	
<b>Total Balance</b>	<b>\$ 7,378.09</b>	<b>\$ 8,832.15</b>	
<b>3) Treasurer Activity</b>			
* Filed Federal Form 990 on March 10			
* Set up Nature Conservancy on Vendor Pay			