

FINAL MINUTES

**Bird Conservation Network
Saturday, July 22, 2023
Location: Online Video Conference**

QUARTERLY MEETING

Present: Pat Andersen (TCA), Jeff Aufmann (McH Cty Aud), Stephanie Beilke (AGL), Mary Bernat (At-large), Diann Bilderback (DBC), Donnie Dann (TNC), Dan Ellig (Lake-Cook), Bob Fisher (IAS), Jim Giocomo (ABC), Marianne Griebler (ENSBC), Amy Lardner (IAS), Vera Leopold (TWI), Annette Prince (CBCM), Rita Renwick (Will Cty Aud), Carla Schmakel (LCA), Eric Secker (KCA), John Sprovieri (LCA), Dave Taliaferro (Lake-Cook), Chris Williamson (COS), Lee Witkowski (Will Cty Aud).

Call to Order: President Secker called the meeting to order at 1:06 pm. There was a quorum present with 16 organizations represented.

Administration:

1. Approval of minutes of April 22, 2023 Quarterly Meeting

Motion: Approve the minutes of the April 22, 2023 quarterly meeting as presented.
Moved: Donnie Dann
Seconded: Rita Renwick
Action: Approved

2. Membership & Treasurer's Report (Pavelka)

Secker presented the Treasurer's report on Pavelka's behalf as she could not attend (see attached). Budget year-to-date is \$3105 while the YTD actuals are \$3017. We are right on track for donations. In terms of anticipated expenses we have not done a monitors brunch this year, as these events have had low attendance in recent years. County coordinators may still do focused events in their counties. Expenses for the Trends and database projects were budgeted to be offset by \$7500 in budgeted donations. Everything else is in line with what was budgeted.

3. Representative Updates

a. Final Vote on New Member – Jim Herkert

Jim Herkert was nominated to join BCN as an at-large member at the April 22nd quarterly meeting. A vote needs to be taken at this meeting to approve the nomination.

Motion: Approve Jim Herkert for individual (at-large) membership in BCN.
Moved: Bob Fisher
Seconded: Donnie Dann

FINAL MINUTES

Motion Approved

Dann commented that he did not know anyone more qualified to become a member of BCN! Herkert is one of the foremost authorities on grassland birds in Illinois and has been involved in many different bird conservation groups. Secker will welcome Jim Herkert to the group.

4. BCN Survey Updates

a. New Monitor Recruitment

Bob Fisher reported that we had a very successful recruitment season, reaching out to many organizations both inside and outside of BCN to recruit interested new monitors. In total, 50 new monitors joined the BCN Survey effort. Fisher also developed new study aids by habitat type to help participants learn birding by ear.

b. Feedback via Zoom on 8/1 or 8/2 (Fisher)

Fisher stated there will be a Zoom event held in early August to gather feedback from new monitors on their experiences and celebrate their first season. This event is intended to be a discussion, not a lecture with the hopes of getting input directly from the new monitors. Secker thanked Fisher and asked him to thank Vicky Sroczynski for her hard work assisting with the online training sessions held this past spring.

A target item for later this year is to see if clubs can promote the BCN Survey in their field trip calendars for the upcoming season. Some groups form their calendars far in advance. Listing "First day of BCN Survey season" or similar could gain more attention.

Projects & Initiatives:

1. Communications Team Updates (Bilderback, Fisher)

a. Summary of April–June Updates

As previously mentioned, Diann Bilderback stated that the Communications Team conducted very successful outreach to potential new monitors and the broader conservation community. This outreach was backed up by training and orientation to the BCN Survey effort, including two sessions given by Vicky Sroczynski on birding by ear and Fisher developing the great study tools for bird vocalizations. The new birding-by-ear resources have been circulated to member reps and monitors for wider sharing; ultimately, they will live on the BCN website. Fisher added that our hope is that the birding-by-ear guides will be sent on to members of BCN's various orgs. Secker said the guides will be up on the BCN website by this winter and they can be distributed widely.

b. BCN Newsletter

This year we will be kicking off a BCN e-newsletter that will be published quarterly between meetings. The first issue will come out soon. The goals will be to elevate awareness and interest in BCN; showcase recent accomplishments; highlight monitors

FINAL MINUTES

and member orgs; promote volunteerism and support donations. Bilderback thanked Vera Leopold for taking the lead on this, and other Comms Team members will be contributing. Please share any future story ideas you have. We will need field reporters! Leopold said occasional advocacy alerts would be sent out if they are urgent and timely, but these would be shared judiciously so as not to push out too many emails to the list.

Chris Williamson suggested doing a contest with the birding community to identify a name for the newsletter.

c. Fermilab Colloquium Recap

The Trends Analysis presentations are winding down with two dozen talks given to date! The last one was given recently at the Fermilab Colloquium, a weekly gathering of the Fermilab community that features speakers on a range of topics. Working with Donna Kubik and other monitors at Fermilab, we tailored our presentation to integrate Fermilab's monitoring data with BCN's. The talk also emphasized the importance of Fermilab's natural areas for birds. Attendance was a broad audience of 70 people from all across the lab! Fermilab will also be doing a story in their newsletter on the Trends.

Bilderback noted final targets for Trends presentations are the Lake Co Forest Preserve District and Midewin.

2. Database Team Updates (Secker)

Secker said that the Database Team has been on a hiatus due to other activities and communication efforts. Secker, Judy Pollock, and Chris Monaghan did meet with Chris Wood from eBird in April in Chicago to discuss elements we would like to see added to eBird to facilitate better monitoring/extracting of the BCN Survey data. We want to make sure we are not independently building out features that will be an eBird-wide feature soon. However, we will likely need to track additional data on top of what eBird collects.

Pollock and Secker will meet shortly to talk about the yearly download of BCN Survey data. There will likely be an end of September deadline for data entry by monitors.

3. Grassland Research Team Update (Secker)

Secker said the purpose of the Grassland Research Team is to investigate why certain preserves are no longer supporting grassland birds well. Williamson shared background on why this was identified as an issue based on observations of specific Chicago-area sites. Mary Bernat and Pollock have done a great job pulling together people to participate in field assessments at a list of targeted sites. Jim Herkert will be paid for conducting data analysis, and Bernat will be compensated for writing a report on the findings. The total expense will be \$4000. This work will be followed by a discussion of next steps to determine how we effect change in management practices, if needed.

Chicago Ornithological Society has offered to contribute \$2000 to support the work by

FINAL MINUTES

Herkert and Bernat. Secker and Pollock are still talking with Cook County Forest Preserves about possible funding and will be meeting with contacts there soon.

Motion: BCN will seek to raise at least \$1000 in donations to support the grassland research project, with BCN matching up to \$1000; any excess funds raised would go toward the Trends Analysis/Database work.

Moved: Chris Williamson

Seconded: Bob Fisher

Action: Approved

Williamson offered she is willing to give \$1000 up-front to keep the work moving forward if that is needed. BCN could pay her back after funds are raised.

Dan Ellig stated that his first monitoring experience this year was at Paul Douglas Preserve, and Bobolinks were doing well there. That data would be an interesting comparison.

Secker said that this is a Cook County-focused initiative but should be viewed as a pilot project that could be deployed elsewhere across the BCN region to analyze the data from sites supporting grassland birds and go into more depth county by county.

4. Migrants Presentation for BCN Reps via Zoom (Secker, Fisher)

Secker said that he and Fisher gave a presentation at the Wild Things conference earlier in 2023 that was well-received, and they would like to get the talk out for monitors to be able to see it too. The presentation focuses on how migrant birds are doing in our area and how they are being impacted by climate change, particularly warblers. They will be setting up a date for this.

Fisher added that, relevant for migrating warblers, a new regional RCPP award will direct a major infusion of U.S. Department of Agriculture money to restore and build upon the oak ecosystem across our region, led by American Bird Conservancy.

Advocacy/Conservation Issues:

1. Advocacy Report from Donnie Dann

- Most significantly, legislation was passed in the General Assembly that now allows non-home rule counties, like Lake County, to enact legislation, similar to the bird-friendly buildings legislation which was passed two years ago but could not be enacted. That restriction will now be eliminated upon the governor's signature. There is high confidence he will sign it. Meanwhile, on June 28 I made a presentation before the Building, Zoning, Planning and Environment Committee that was enthusiastically received.
- Joined the American Bird Conservancy's sign-on letter addressing two recent developments on lead ammunition and fishing tackle regulations in the US.

FINAL MINUTES

Donnie Dann explained how “home rule” counties in Illinois can affect conservation efforts. Lake County was a non-home rule county, so two years ago they were not able to pass bird-friendly legislation because they had to follow the dictates of the state. State legislation is now going forward to change that requirement. Dann made a new presentation about bird-friendly buildings to Lake Co officials, and the bird-friendly ordinance is now moving forward. In unincorporated Lake County, all new buildings including residential, multi-family, industrial, and commercial will all have to be built bird-friendly. The passage is not a done deal but has a high likelihood of being approved.

2. Great Lakes Common Tern Colony (Dann)

Dann shared that they had a very successful Common Tern breeding season at the Great Lakes Naval Station in 2023. A scientific report that came out 20 years ago has a chart going back to 1936 showing nesting Common Terns in Illinois. It has a lot of zeroes for most years. Since 2003, nesting success at the Great Lakes colony has not occurred. Challenges included avian predators, PCBs when the harbor was dredged, terrestrial predators like minks, and flooding of the habitat. Brad Semel at IDNR decided to try building rafts, and the birds took to it. In 2023 they successfully overcame all previous obstacles, and it was a remarkable year for Common Tern nesting. As shared on IBET, 18 young have fledged already, and another 19 or 20 are likely to fledge.

Williamson asked if people could help with volunteer monitoring of the tern colony. Donnie responded this is not possible due to Great Lakes naval security limitations.

Dann added that Semel is a very dedicated public servant, well-versed on conservation issues. He will do anything to help endangered species and should be recognized.

3. Black-crowned Night-Heron Project (Lardner)

Amy Lardner reported that graduate student Sarah Slayton started her Black-crowned Night-Heron research this summer. Banding the herons was more challenging than expected, but they successfully banded 7 birds in total, including three fully flighted juveniles. All the birds so far are transmitting well. This project will provide proof of concept about their movements. In the big picture, this data can yield some useful insights into night-heron migratory foraging behavior and connect to other conservation projects in Illinois. Lardner said we should feel encouraged and proud that the unusual BCNH population in Chicago has made this research possible.

Under the conspecific attraction project at Big Marsh, heron decoys and vocalizations were established, which may have attracted night-herons. Matt Freer is working on a commitment from the Chicago Park District to keep Big Marsh as a trial site.

At the Lincoln Park Zoo, Henry Adams with the Urban Wildlife Institute is also committed to bird conservation. He is working on summer internships to expose young students to bird conservation and working with the education team on developing teaching tools. About 500 herons nested at Lincoln Park Zoo in 2023, and almost 500 chicks have hatched recently during an early nesting season.

FINAL MINUTES

4. Illinois Coastal Stopover Tool (Beilke)

Stephanie Beilke reported on the Illinois Coastal Stopover Tool in development by Audubon Great Lakes. She shared that the goal is to identify areas in the Illinois coastal zone for future conservation efforts during the migratory stopover period. This project came together through Illinois Coastal and IDNR funding. Land managers want to know which sites are the most important to prioritize for conservation, and many land managers aren't familiar with how to restore habitat for migration stopover (spring and fall). Another goal is to connect them with resources and develop future funding opportunities. Hopefully this tool will help boost more projects such as LaBagh Woods and other efforts along the Chicago River, driving more interest in protecting and managing stopover habitat. Patchy environments may not attract rare breeding birds, but they are still very important for migration.

The boundary for the tool is the Illinois coastal area as defined by IDNR. It is narrow but includes lots of lakefront preserves and riverways, as well as the Calumet region.

AGL wants the tool to be a resource for making conservation decisions and to identify high-priority sites for conservation actions. It compiles best practices for managing stopover habitat and will give an in-depth view of priority species. The mapping tool is still in draft form and not ready to show yet.

Fisher suggested Benjamin Van Doren as a contact. He is a new specialist in bird detection by radar joining the faculty at UIUC from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and one of the people who created BirdCast. Beilke said she would like to work with him.

5. Update on National Issues and Initiatives (Giocomo)

Jim Giocomo said the North American Grassland Conservation Act, which was introduced last session to Congress, is being reintroduced this year as a bipartisan bill in the House to fund grassland conservation. It would function in the same way as the NAWCA program that started in the 1980s-1990s and could fund on-the-ground conservation work in Canada and Mexico at approximately \$60 million per year. In September, start contacting your reps to support that legislation—more details to come.

As mentioned previously by Fisher, American Bird Conservancy recently got a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) award. This five-year grant will fund working with private landowners to do conservation on the ground for oak woodlands. ABC has hired two staff already and staff at two other partner organizations. Through this project, BCN could target neighbors of the public parks that we are monitoring and have some tie-ins to make a bigger effect for conservation being done on public lands.

The Midwest Landscape Initiative (<https://www.mlimidwest.org/>), which has a geographic focus that includes the Chicago area, is starting to put together some tools and GIS data and doing larger-scale planning that will filter down to on-the-ground conservation. They are starting to plan grasslands work, which will be a partnership led by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

FINAL MINUTES

The Eastern Loggerhead Shrike Working Group has put together a population viability analysis. A distinct subspecies has been listed as endangered in Canada which winters in Ohio, Indiana, and probably part of Illinois, which could have implications for our area. Giocomo is on the technical team for this analysis; they hope to have it applied to conservation practices on the ground to benefit shrikes, with follow-up monitoring.

Finally, Giocomo noted that ABC has been successful convincing only one NFL team to build their new stadium using bird-friendly glass. We need to go after the Bears to build a bird-friendly stadium!

Old Business

1. Open BCN Leadership Roles (Secker, Fisher)

Secker said that we have a potential candidate interested in the Treasurer position. Charlotte Pavelka has stayed on in a temporary role while seeking her replacement. We may begin a transition process this fall, then seek reelection for the new Treasurer in January.

Tim Balassie is stepping away from the BCN Survey Coordinator role. We are discussing ways we could restructure this role and get more of a group involved to deal with the various tasks.

New Business

1. World Migratory Bird Day at Kankakee River State Park – October 14 (Bernat)

Bernat reported that a World Migratory Bird Day event at Kankakee River State Park is in the early planning stages. The state park's education coordinator contacted Secker for a brainstorm about holding this event in October and reached out to other birding groups asking for ideas. Bernat would like to have a BCN table at the event and asked for other volunteers to join her. Bernat also noted that Friends of the Kankakee will have a table, and perhaps other organizations would be interested in tabling. This is a great opportunity to build support by reaching the birding crowd.

2. Recognition/awards (Fisher)

Fisher said that Dann already alluded to honoring Brad Semel and contacts at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center to honor their commitments and effort over the years to restore breeding Common Terns in Illinois.

Also, next year will be BCN's 25th anniversary as an organization. This is an opportunity to have a special celebration, invite back alums, etc. We should also recognize the longtime commitment people have made to the BCN Survey, including thousands of volunteer hours. This should be an agenda item for next meeting to discuss ideas.

FINAL MINUTES

Announcements

Stephanie Beilke shared on behalf of Chicago Ornithological Society that last month Claire Halpin passed away. She was a COS board member and active member of the Bird-friendly Buildings initiative. There is a memorial planned for her at Promontory Point on September 29th at 11 am. Beilke can share the details on that with anyone who is interested.

Meeting Takeaways – Representative Communication

1. Share the BCN newsletter with members of your group and invite them to sign up; a message with more details about the newsletter will be going out shortly.
2. Let Mary Bernat know if you are interested in tabling at World Migratory Bird Day at Kankakee River State Park on October 14.
3. Keep an eye out for the opportunity to speak to your representatives about the Grassland Bird Conservation Act – Dann/Giocomo will send us updates about this legislation.

Proposed Next Meeting

The last quarterly meeting of the year will be held on October 21, 2023.

Secker requested that member reps share thoughts on whether the meeting should be in-person or Zoom.

Adjourn Quarterly Meeting

Motion: Adjourn the meeting.

Moved: Rita Renwick

Seconded: Diann Bilderback

Action: Approved

The meeting adjourned at 2:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Vera Leopold, BCN Secretary

Treasurer's Report - BCN Meeting – July 2023

6/27/2023

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	
			The Wetlands Initiative \$500, McHenry Audubon \$150, David Johnson \$15, Sonny & Rena Cohen \$100, Robert Kusel \$15
Trends Donations to BCN	\$ 872.12	\$ 779.05	Kurt Leslie \$55, McHenry Audubon (honorarium) \$100, Will Cty Audubon \$200, Amazon Smile \$16
General Donations To BCN	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 366.50	New in Q2
Transfer from General to Trends Analysis	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	
Total:	\$ 12,477.12	\$ 5,163.07	
 2023 Expenses			
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	
Total:	\$ 10,736.00	\$ 1,600.99	
 2023 Net Income	 \$ 1,741.12	 \$ 3,562.08	
 Checkbook balance -6/27/2023		 \$9,198.65	
Trends Analysis Reserve:	\$ 1,966.60	\$ 1,966.60	
General Funds Balance	\$ 5,411.49	\$ 7,232.05	
Total Balance	\$ 7,378.09	\$ 9,198.65	

3) Treasurer Activity

- Final Amazon Smile payments received