

FINAL MINUTES

**Bird Conservation Network
Saturday, October 21, 2023
Location: Online Video Conference**

QUARTERLY MEETING

Present: Pat Andersen (TCA), Stephanie Beilke (AGL), Mary Bernat (At-large), Donnie Dann (TNC), Dan Ellig (Lake-Cook), Bob Fisher (IAS), Jim Herkert (At-large), Libby Hill (ENSBC), Donna Kubik (DBC), Vera Leopold (TWI), Judy Pollock (CAS), Annette Prince (CBCM), Carla Schmakel (LCA), Eric Secker (KCA), John Sprovieri (KCA), Dave Taliaferro (Lake-Cook), Chris Williamson (COS).

Call to Order: President Eric Secker called the meeting to order at 1:06 pm. Vera Leopold noted that a quorum was present with 11 organizations. Libby Hill of ENSBC and Donna Kubik, DBC rep, later joined, bringing the member orgs present to 13.

Administration:

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

Motion: Approve the minutes of the July 22, 2023 quarterly meeting as presented.

Moved: Chris Williamson

Seconded: Judy Pollock

Action: Approved

2. Membership & Treasurer's Report (Secker on behalf of Pavelka)

Secker presented the Treasurer's report on Pavelka's behalf as she could not attend (see attached). He noted that we are roughly on budget for donations. In total, \$1054 has been donated in support of the Grassland Research Project. Secker gave a special thanks to everyone who had donated to the Grassland Research Project. The budget listed \$7500 for general donations for the database project, but we have not initiated that work yet, so there are no actualized expenses that need to be covered at this point. On the grassland initiative, we have some of the funds in place to start reimbursing for work items.

Chris Williamson said she was still interested in making a donation to the Grassland project as previously discussed. Secker said he would connect with her offline.

Secker stated that while there were some events organized for new monitors, the monitors' brunch/luncheon event was not held this year. We need to reevaluate whether that event will be repeated in 2024.

3. Leadership Updates

a. Vote on New Treasurer – Donna Kubik

Secker shared that Donna Kubik is a new member representative from DuPage Birding Club, and she has agreed to step in and take over for Pavelka as Treasurer, effective as

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of today. He shared information on Kubik's background, including that she works at Fermilab, and noted that Kubik was instrumental in helping to set up the recent BCN Trends presentation at Fermilab. She also did a lot of work so that birding groups could table at the Danada Fall Fest, including BCN.

Motion: Appoint Donna Kubik as Treasurer, effective immediately, and thank Charlotte Pavelka for her years of service in that role.

Moved: Bob Fisher

Seconded: Mary Bernat

Action: Approved

At the conclusion of the vote, Kubik joined the meeting and shared that she was interested in getting involved in advocacy and restoration. Everyone introduced themselves. Donnie Dann gave thanks to Kubik for stepping up and being willing to devote her efforts to a very needed position.

4. BCN Survey Updates

a. New Monitor Feedback Session in August (Fisher)

Bob Fisher shared that the feedback session held for new volunteer monitors was well-attended, and we got a lot of good feedback from the new monitors pool. We hope to repeat the process to recruit new monitors in 2024. The outreach efforts reached a lot of different groups, resulting in about 50 monitors who were new. Most got assigned and either did monitor in the 2023 season independently or with a mentor; a lot of existing monitors offered to help new ones. About half were from Cook County, and the other half were distributed across the other counties. The training materials were well received and used. Vicky Sroczyński was instrumental in helping with this, and Diann Bilderback was also closely involved with this effort.

Fisher also stated that we created four bird song/call training files where people could zero in by habitat and learn the vocalizations of the species likely to be found there. The goal is to get these training guides posted on the BCN website by end of the year. This was a very successful effort in 2023 and should serve as a model going forward.

Mary Bernat asked what techniques were used to recruit new monitors. Fisher stated that the Communications Team has been getting the message out to a lot of groups. Vera Leopold noted that two sets of training sessions were held for all new interested volunteer monitors. Sroczyński conducted the training, who is an experienced birder-by-ear. Fisher said that 70–80% of the new monitors attended one or both sessions.

b. 2023 Season Data Entry and Processing

Secker said that he will reach out to Chris Wood at Cornell Lab of Ornithology with Judy Pollock soon to access the BCN Survey database to pull 2023 data. There will be a big taxonomy update at eBird on October 25, so we will wait until after that. Those who enter data in eBird now may encounter some compatibility issues. Pollock explained that the deadline used to be November 1 in order to include data from fall migration, but that project is no longer being done. Secker suggested adding the date on the calendar to keep accountability. Some people don't enter their data in a timely fashion.

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Projects & Initiatives:

5. Communications Team Updates (Secker on behalf of Bilderback; Fisher)

a. Summary of July–October Updates

Secker and Fisher discussed the birding community response to the McCormick Place tragedy of nearly 1,000 birds killed in collisions with the windows/building over October 4-5. The Bird Friendly Chicago alliance created a petition for McCormick Place to extinguish their lights or draw shades every night of migration. The petition has now been widely circulated to all our coalition's member groups; most forwarded the appeal for signatures directly to their respective members. Outside groups including the IL Environmental Council's Open Space listserv also publicized the appeal. Once signatures reach the goal of 10,000, Chicago Audubon Society will present the petition to the MPEA board. *[Signatures are now over 10,000 and that meeting occurred.]*

Fisher noted the Center for Biological Diversity has written to both McCormick Place and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service threatening lawsuits for not enforcing the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) to reduce bird kills. Annette Prince has connected with USFWS, and they are looking into it and seeing what options they have. Williamson commented that a higher-up staff member at the USFWS presented to the group a long time ago and said that if they were aware of any serious problem buildings, they would act on it.

Judy Pollock said that people often misunderstand the MBTA and how it can be used. It is actually difficult to deploy to do any kind of enforcement because there are no regulations around it. One enforcement contact handles six different states.

b. Community outreach events

Donna Kubik gave a summary of the Danada Fall Fest on October 7–8, where BCN did community outreach. Two tables were set up, one for BCN to interact with adults, another one for kids' activities by DuPage Birding Club. Both days had huge turnouts. This weekend was immediately after the sad event at McCormick Place, so many people stopped by to get info about bird collisions and samples of Bird Tape.

- Kids' activities included making books with stickers and then "going birding" in the garden to look for plush birds that were hidden and write down what birds they found.
- The tables provided info on how you can help prevent bird collisions at your home.
- Finally, they set up a "mini backyard" with bird feeders and a sign that read "NO CATS" to promote the "7 ways you can help birds."

Bernat then shared an update on BCN tabling to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day at Kankakee State Park on October 14. It was a dark, cold, windy day, and only three organizations showed up to table under the pavilion! Nine people attended from the public, but she used BCN display materials and people did look at materials and sign the petition. They were most interested in bird collisions and which binoculars were best. She had a Bluetooth speaker playing bird calls.

c. BCN Newsletter

Secker said the pilot issue of the BCN quarterly e-newsletter went out on August 25, and the next issue will be sent in November. The goal is to get information out between

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the quarterly meetings and reach a broader audience with BCN news and updates. Please share any items you think would be relevant and suggest them for inclusion.

Libby Hill commented that Evanston North Shore Bird Club has a lot of people who aren't aware of BCN. She wants to do an update or history on BCN that could be shared with them. This idea was discussed further under New Business.

2. Database Team Update (Secker)

Secker reported he met with Chris Wood from eBird earlier in 2023, discussed the challenges we had in developing our Trends Analysis database, and shared new elements we are hoping to include. They stepped back to assess what's in the pipeline with eBird features. Since BCN will be spending significant money on the database project, we want to make sure we're not duplicating something that eBird will offer later. Since there was a lot of initiative behind the Grassland Research project, we focused on that effort first. The goal by end of 2023 is to contract with someone to start doing work for BCN on the database. A new meeting will be scheduled for the Database Team.

Fisher asked whether there was a timetable for updating the Trends Analysis data. We now have three more years' worth of data. Should we start thinking about the date for a future Trends update that would include three, four, or five more years of data? Secker responded we should have a sit-down discussion in 2024 to determine when we are ready to redo the Trends Analysis.

Jim Herkert commented that he needs to gain more familiarity with the Trends data to evaluate what makes sense. How much time and energy is needed to pull it off? Can we do an annual Trends Analysis? Pollock said that if we had an app, that could make it easier to do an annual Trends! Secker agreed that with an app and enhanced database, there would be a lot more data that people could pull without anyone spending time number crunching. People could be querying the data themselves more easily.

Pollock noted there is an issue with site naming that we definitely want to correct before we do the next Trends Analysis. We should do some broad thinking about whether we're getting all the data into the database. Herkert added that we need to figure out a plan for nomenclature. It is very time-consuming to make corrections when doing analysis, but they may be difficult to change in eBird.

Secker said we need to revamp training protocols and update how things are done. For example, we need to make sure new monitors know how to set up their points properly; is this passing down through all the county coordinators? Pat Andersen commented that she recruited some new people to monitor but didn't want to send them to the website for instructions, as it needs to be updated with the modern technology tools we use. Secker responded this is something we can tackle as an initiative in 2024, and all of the items mentioned are important considerations for creating a cohesive BCN Survey database. It would be great if we could select our custom protocol in eBird.

3. Grassland Research Team Update (Pollock)

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Pollock reported that she and Bernat have been working on the report of the Grassland project findings. Their timeline is to finish writing the report by the end of October, send through a review phase, then finish the whole project in December after review. Jim Herkert completed the data analysis, then redid it after discovering a problem with naming. They will connect offline about a question on redoing site-level analyses.

Monitors, stewards, and the forest preserve district have been involved with site visits and gathering data. Several visits were done in June and July by the team. They are hoping to get additional people to fill out the form or provide info for sites that were not visited this past summer. Williamson offered to provide additional help on the project after early November, including visiting outstanding sites.

People have been noticing that grasslands do great for birds when they are first restored, but then the number of grassland birds often deteriorates over time. Through the report we are trying to demonstrate the richness of what's happening at sites and suggest several questions that could be answered by future research efforts. We are hoping people will want to put some money toward doing a more advanced study, or that universities will want to tackle questions. It will be a great data source.

The Grassland Research effort is a \$4000 project. Between Chicago Ornithological Society and Chicago Audubon Society, each pledged to back up to \$2000 of the cost. BCN has raised \$1,000 from individual donors and pledged to match it with another \$1,000. Pollock suggested we reach out to Forest Preserves of Cook County one more time and see if they're willing to contribute any funding; if not, we can determine a fair way to split it across the groups who have already pledged to help cover. Iza Redlinski is the contact at FPD. Secker noted the Forest Preserve District had said they are on board but have not provided any specifics on how much they want to contribute.

Williamson said we want to make sure we're putting the data to work with the forest preserve district. We could do a presentation to show the value. Secker agreed through this effort we can see actual results for birds produced from on-the-ground actions and thanked everyone for their hard work on the project.

4. Migrants Presentation via Zoom (Fisher, Secker)

Fisher and Secker shared that a presentation adapted from the previous Wild Things migrant birds talk will be scheduled this fall for the Chicago Wilderness Café series. Given the events on October 4–5, we definitely want to have discussion and conversation about that issue soon. Fisher said we need to add some info addressing the fallout conditions, why the McCormick Place tragedy happened, and so many birds were harmed. *[This talk was originally planned for November 15 but has been pushed back to early 2024.]*

The overall presentation looks at threats that migrating birds face and the latest research on resources needed for migrants, especially warblers and the food sources needed to sustain them. It's also important to discuss how extreme weather events due to climate change are impacting migrants. What will happen if migrants arrive at times

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that they won't be able to feed? The talk also uses maps to show how migrating birds funnel through the Chicago region in spring and fall.

Hill commented this would be a great presentation for a bird club. She asked whether Fisher and Secker could give this talk to ENSBC in December. They requested that she connect with them on this after the Chicago Wilderness talk.

Pollock commented that the message about the importance of Chicago natural areas for migrating birds is not getting through with land managers very well yet. The shrub layer is being completely transformed in woodlands, and migrating birds are not yet a strong consideration. LaBagh Woods has had a lot of success with native shrub plantings for migrating birds, but forest preserves are against replicating this elsewhere because caging the plants is needed to protect them from deer browsing.

Secker responded that we need to spread this message that native shrubs need investment. Bird groups can't solely be relied upon for funding these efforts. Fisher added that initiatives like the Oak Ecosystem Recovery Group are important to support one of North America's largest migration corridors. The scale of migration through the Chicago region and the importance of stopover habitat here is huge! We have to make the habitat we're preserving more resilient. In the spring, roughly half a billion birds travel through the six-county area; in the fall, the number is even greater due to juveniles hatched that season, but migration is more dispersed in the fall.

Stephanie Beilke brought up Audubon Great Lakes' migratory stopover tool. For that tool we're hoping to showcase recommendations for stopover habitat conservation. They are also discussing including examples of work that's already been done in the Chicago region as success stories (e.g., LaBagh Woods).

Williamson suggested thinking about how cemeteries could be enhanced to benefit migrant birds. Hill noted that a small project done at Pioneer Woods demonstrated that where migrant birds were found was the native shrubs! Secker invited all reps to share feedback on the presentation and to attend the café session when scheduled. This is an important topic and fresh in people's minds. Fisher added this talk will hopefully be the start of an important dialogue on addressing the bird collision problem more broadly.

Advocacy/Conservation Issues:

1. Advocacy Reports (Fisher, Dann)

a. Advocacy Report from Donnie Dann

- Staff of the Lake County Board reported to the Planning, Building and Zoning Committee regarding their recommendations for bird-friendly buildings in unincorporated Lake County. Board responded to staff that they wanted to make the regulations even stricter. BCN continues to provide assistance to staff.
- Signed on to a letter to President Biden urging efforts that stem the loss of biodiversity and halt the global extinction crisis.

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- Brad Semel from the IDNR reported that he had under-calculated by 7, and the total fledged Common Terns for this breeding season was 39!

On the Chicago bird collision issue, Dann suggested a brainstorming session before the Chicago Wilderness Café presentation. We have an opportunity while we have people's attention to drive action on the building collisions issue.

On bird-safe building design, Dann shared he has been in regular communication with the staff of the Lake County board, who presented ideas to the planning and zoning committee. They are developing codes and requirements, not just guidelines! Dann said he was optimistic that Lake County will be presenting some tough and helpful code for future construction in unincorporated Lake County.

b. An update on the state legislative session regarding wind turbine development in Lake Michigan

Fisher shared the following specifics on legislation regarding Lake Michigan wind turbines:

The [IPA Policy Study \(illinois.gov\)](#) introductory webpage provides essential background on why the Illinois Power Agency is proceeding with a study involving three separate legislative initiatives, all on the agenda for the October IL legislature veto session. [HB 2132](#) is the specific bill which authorizes an offshore wind turbine "pilot" project in the Lake.

This [Request for Stakeholder Feedback](#) published on 9/23 by IPA gives a pretty clear picture of the legislative background and reasons for the study.

These [comments on the study](#) were posted to the IPA website on 10/31; they include the BCN comments and attachments. The comments link is also of interest for what other organizations have to say about the idea. The draft IPA report will not appear and be opened for further comments until January 2024.

Fisher noted that through HB 2132, the Illinois legislature proposes a large-scale "pilot project" installing 175 MW of wind turbines in Lake Michigan. The criteria set in the Request for Stakeholder Feedback does not address wildlife concerns, bird collisions, etc. As proposed, the legislation would require an enormous subsidy at taxpayer expense. Several technical problems have not been addressed. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) issued a report that estimated appropriate research in the Great Lakes would take three to five years to gain sufficient information about potential impacts to birds and bats.

Discussion followed on Illinois conservation groups' positions on placing wind turbines in Lake Michigan. The Illinois Environmental Council is officially neutral on HB 2132, while Environmental Law & Policy Center opposes their construction. Dan Sprovieri brought up a speaker at Lake County Audubon who had done a study on where turbines could be sited in Lake Michigan to not impact birds. His data is likely no longer up-to-date. Fisher said he and Dann served on a commission 10-plus years ago to

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investigate wind turbine use in Illinois, with the goal of creating a go/no-go map for siting wind turbines on the lake, but that never happened.

2. Building Collisions at McCormick Place and Elsewhere (Prince)

Prince gave an update on the work of the Bird Friendly Chicago coalition after the McCormick Place tragedy. They have met with leadership at the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority (MPEA), which expressed a commitment to address this issue. Enough people have approached them that they are considering it a high priority. This organization had not even been willing to meet in the past! They are researching solutions for long-term building light reduction and glass installations to find the most effective means to reduce collisions via retrofitting. Over the short term, they committed to doing “lights out” or drapes drawn at McCormick for the duration of migration season.

An MPEA meeting is coming up Oct 30th, at which Doug Stotz of the Field Museum will share what they know about the history of bird collisions at McCormick Place. There is an opportunity to give public comment, which goes into the public record. We are encouraging people to weigh in on the tragedy of this particular event. Prince said she thought the bigger tragedy is that bird collisions have been happening here for 50 years, with tens of thousands of birds killed.

Pollock added that they’ve done work with the City Department of Planning and Development, and bird-friendly regulations for new buildings will hopefully be put into place by the end of 2023. Before her recent passing, Claire Halpin put together a book explaining how to meet the guidelines; hopefully this will be provided to all developers who request a permit. In the meantime, Evanston and Skokie have already passed bird-friendly ordinances modeled on the Chicago law, and these towns are using our manual. Dann added that American Bird Conservancy has established sample building code, and Lake County staff is using it to establish their provisions. The next step is to pursue retrofitting, establishing practices to make existing buildings safe.

Leopold commented that the more specific resources we can share on the BCN website or refer contacts to at cities and counties, the better. It would be valuable to make it easy to replicate the successes that have been achieved in Lake County, Evanston, Skokie, and Chicago. Secker thanked everyone for their work on this critical issue.

Old Business

1. Nominating Committee (Secker)

For 2024, Secker announced that he is proposing to stay on as President, Leopold will stay on as Secretary, Kubik will be on the board as Treasurer, and Bilderback will continue as Vice President. He said that we need a Nominating Committee that’s responsible for presenting the slate of officers for next year. John Sprovieri and Jim Herkert volunteered to serve on the Nominating Committee.

Motion: Accept John Sprovieri and Jim Herkert as this year’s Nominating Committee
Moved: Bernat

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Seconded: Leopold
Action: Passed

2. World Migratory Bird Day at Kankakee River State Park (Bernat)

This topic was previously discussed.

New Business

Libby Hill said she would like to discuss creating a history of what started BCN and how it is continuing to fulfill its mission. She reached out to Fisher and Pollock about the idea, and she is willing to help write it herself. She is interested in us pulling together info on activities from where we started, working with land managers on buckthorn removal, to BCN's continuing work with land managers and others for the good of birds.

BCN reps were enthusiastic about the idea. Bernat commented that it would be great to highlight significant accomplishments over the years—for example, the netting that was put up at a forest preserve visitor center in 2013 to reduce bird collisions. Leopold suggested such a timeline could go on the BCN website to make what BCN does more visible. Secker said he had also noticed that a history of the organization was a missing element. The Communications Team could help review this history/timeline document.

Hill asked that people send in their information about BCN history. Some people have old archives. Fisher suggested files could be sent to Hill or stored on a Google Drive. Secker said he will set up a shared folder on the BCN Google Drive.

Announcements

Pollock announced that yesterday, Chicago Audubon Society officially changed their name to Chicago Bird Alliance. The logo is the same but uses different words.

Additionally, Pollock shared that on November 11, there will be a rally at Steelworkers Park, and Chicago Bird Alliance would love for the birding community to come out and show their opposition to the confined disposal facility continuing as a dump for the next five years. [*This info was later circulated to the reps by email.*]

Meeting Takeaways – Representative Communication

1. Share the McCormick Place petition through your groups to get us over 10,000 signatures: <https://works.audubon.org/petition/mccormick-place-keep-lights-out> [*The petition is now over 10,500 signatures!*]
2. Send ideas for future issues of the BCN quarterly e-newsletter to Bob Fisher at media@bcnbirds.org or Vera Leopold at secretary@bcnbirds.org.
3. Be prepared to spread the word about the Chicago Wilderness Café presentation on migrants. This was originally set for November 15 but has been postponed to early 2024. When the sign-up event details come out, share widely with your members.
4. Share any significant milestones and historical files you have with Libby Hill (libbyhill@comcast.net), Bob Fisher (media@bcnbirds.org), and Eric Secker (president@bcnbirds.org) for compiling a timeline/history of significant BCN accomplishments.

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Proposed Next Meeting

The next meeting date was set for January 20, 2024.

Adjournment

Motion: Adjourn the quarterly meeting.

Moved: Fisher

Seconded: Pollock

Action: Approved

The meeting adjourned at 3:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*Vera Leopold
BCN Secretary*

Treasurer's Report - BCN Meeting – October 2023

10/10/2023

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	The Wetlands Initiative \$500, McHenry Audubon \$150, David Johnson \$15, Sonny & Rena Cohen \$100, Robert Kusel \$15
Grassland Donations to BCN	\$ -	\$ 1,054.47	<i>See Separate List</i>
General Donations To BCN	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 366.50	Kurt Leslie \$55, McHenry Audubon (honorarium) \$100, Will Cty Audubon \$200, Amazon Smile \$16
Transfer from General to Trends			
Analysis	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	
Total:	\$ 12,477.12	\$ 6,217.54	
2023 Expenses			
Database & Scorecard Dev.	\$ 7,500.00		Scope \$1000-2000, Initial Payment \$5000 - \$6000
Grassland Initiative	\$ -	\$ -	<i>Approved up to \$1000 match (met) at July mtg; \$2054.47 total is pledged</i>
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	\$ 4,616.55	
Checkbook balance -10/10/2023			\$10,253.12
Trends Analysis Reserve:	\$ 1,966.60	\$ 1,966.60	
General Funds Balance	\$ 5,411.49	\$ 6,232.05	
Grassland Donation & \$1000	\$ -	\$ 2,054.47	
Total Balance	\$ 7,378.09	\$ 10,253.12	