

## FINAL MINUTES

**Bird Conservation Network**  
**Saturday, April 27, 2024**  
**Location: Online Video Conference**

### QUARTERLY MEETING

**Present:** Pat Andersen (TCA), Diann Bilderback (DBC), Sonny Cohen (Lake-Cook), Donnie Dann (TNC), Bob Fisher (IAS), Jim Giocomo (ABC), Libby Hill (ENSBC), Matt Igleski (IOS), Donna Kubik (DBC), Amy Lardner (IOS), Vera Leopold (TWI), Mark Luscombe (Ft Dearborn), Judy Pollock (CAS), Annette Prince (CBCM), Carla Schmakel (LCA), Eric Secker (KCA).

**Call to Order:** President Diann Bilderback called the meeting to order at 1:06 pm. All attendees introduced themselves. Secretary Vera Leopold noted there was a quorum present with 12 organizations. Eric Secker of KCA and Annette Prince of CBCM joined later, bringing the total to 14 organizations represented.

### Administration:

#### **1. Approval of minutes of January 20, 2024, Annual and Quarterly Meetings**

Bilderback asked for any questions or corrections on the annual and quarterly meeting minutes of January 20, 2024. There were none.

**Motion:** Accept the minutes of the January 20, 2024, annual and quarterly meetings as presented.

Moved: Bob Fisher

Second: Sonny Cohen

Action: Approved

#### **2. Membership and Treasurer's Report (Kubik)**

Donna Kubik reviewed the Treasurer's Report (attached). The top line is the sum of all dues that have been paid to date, including three donations from individuals. Adding in the \$2000 donation from COS for the Grassland Research project, total income is \$4,137. Considering expenses, BCN paid \$3000 to Jim Herkert for his contract on the Grassland Research project and had additional expenses to participate in the Gull Frolic and the Chicago Wilderness event at the Morton Arboretum. Finally, BCN paid our dues to CW and the Illinois Environmental Council, and we needed to file some state documents required annually for nonprofits. BCN's current bank balance is \$10,765.

Judy Pollock stated that Forest Preserves of Cook County is ready to make a donation to support the Grassland Research Project. Matt Igleski reported FPCC asked if the donation could go through Chicago Bird Alliance; they said yes. Bilderback reviewed the other funds that have been secured for the Grassland project: COS has donated \$2,000 to BCN, and BCN matched \$1,000 in donations from individuals with our own \$1,000. Jim Herkert has been paid for his data analysis, and \$1000 is budgeted for the report writeup. Subsequently we will have funding in reserve for future work on the project.

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Kubik said she was contacted by a donor, and BCN will be receiving several contributions in memory of Craig Millard. There has been discussion of how to list memorial donations on the website. Sonny Cohen shared how the donor found BCN: They were googling Montrose Bird Sanctuary and Lake-Cook Audubon came up as a top result, so they contacted Cohen to talk about options for donations to regional bird groups. Craig Millard was a Kenilworth resident. Some donations can be a mystery!

Kubik noted a few member groups have not yet paid their BCN dues. She needs to know if your payment was missed.

### **3. Kudos to BCN reps Donnie Dann and Tom Mulcahy (Cohen, Bilderback)**

Bilderback said she wanted to recognize Donnie Dann for receiving an environmental award and asked Cohen to share more information. He explained that the city of Highland Park regularly gives out awards for various efforts benefiting the community. A photo was shown of Dann with Highland Park Mayor Nancy Rotering. Cohen read the statement that honored Dann, stating it was far from complete on his full environmental record and accomplishments. Dann was presented this award at a ceremony with about 1500 attendees. He gave a speech afterward, including a request to keep cats indoors! [Cohen shared the link to a YouTube video on his award and speech.](#)

Bilderback noted we also need to give recognition to two longtime BCN members who are “retiring” from their involvement: Tom Mulcahy and Mary Lou Mellon. She said Mulcahy is a delightful person and a dedicated environmentalist. Mellon was past president and past vice president of BCN as well as a long-term member rep for Chicago Bird Collision Monitors. Bilderback thanked these two people for their dedicated decades of service to the organization.

## **Projects and Initiatives:**

### **1. BCN Survey Team (Bilderback)**

Bildeback shared that Tim Balassie met with DeKalb County Forest Preserve District at their request to explore BCN monitoring in the county. Their feedback was they will look at potential sites to monitor and who would be appointed to help, with a targeted 2025 start.

#### **a. New team approach to monitor coordination**

Bilderback explained BCN will be taking a different approach to the Monitor Coordinator role that Balassie has housed. We have not been able to find a replacement to date, partially because it is a broad role with a lot of heavy lifting. Going forward, we will parse out some of these responsibilities to make it more manageable. Donna Kubik has agreed to step into the redefined role of Monitor Coordinator. Balassie will stay on to mentor her and teach her the ropes in 2024 so she can lead it next year. The Monitor Coordinator will do many of the same tasks with a few exceptions: Recruitment and outreach for new monitors will be handled by the Communications Team, and training has been offloaded to others. Vicky Sroczynski and Bob Fisher have developed a birding-by-ear training and a series of workbooks so that new monitors are more

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comfortable in the field. The monitor coordinators are also putting together a new intro to monitoring that will cover the basics on how to get started with setting points, entering data in eBird, and other practical elements of monitoring.

### **b. 2024 plan for recruitment and training**

Two Zoom training sessions will be held in May: an Introduction to Monitoring on May 20 and a Birding by Ear session on May 22. Bilderback said we are going to introduce stricter screening criteria for potential new monitors on the BCN website. The monitor coordinator will then do the first cut, and the county coordinators will do final vetting to determine whether interested people are assignable. This adjustment emerged from a meeting with county coordinators who requested more screening up-front, as too many birders were passed along who didn't have the necessary skillset and experience with visual and auditory ID. We are working on the criteria now. The form on the website will be self-screening and include elements such as years of birding experience, can you identify these common summer resident birds, etc.

For county coordinator roles we are looking for Mulcahy's replacement in southern Cook County and in Will County where Tim Balassie would like to move on. Fisher noted the south end of Will County is particularly in need of monitors because of new land acquisition by the Forest Preserve District. Pat Andersen asked which properties needed coverage. Fisher responded it was listed on the FPD website. Judy Pollock wondered if we might pay monitors who live outside of Will Co to stay over at a hotel, but Andersen commented not many hotels are available in that area.

## **2. Database Workgroup (Secker, Fisher)**

### **a. Meetings with land managers**

To inform the Survey database improvement project, Fisher said BCN held meetings with land managers from DuPage, Lake, and Will County Forest Preserve Districts to gather more feedback on what land managers are seeking with Survey data. He noted Will Co has a new biological database manager, and she was forthcoming on what she felt they needed. They primarily said they needed direct access to data, and they had a limited number of fields that they wanted to export into their own system. Meanwhile, DuPage FPD does not currently have a statistical person, so not much feedback was obtained. Eric Secker added that in Lake County, they are trying to get basic access to the data currently. These three meetings did not yield much new information that would necessitate going back to revise the scope of work.

### **b. Refinement of scope document and early circulation**

The scope of work document has been circulated a few places, but the Database Team has not yet found a suitable contractor. Bilderback asked for member reps' suggestions of contacts who are potential database contractors. Formation of a Database Advisory Committee still needs to be done so they can provide input on vendor selection.

### **c. eBird portal changes**

Secker talked through upcoming eBird portal changes, which are expected to happen before the monitoring season begins. The impact on monitor data entry will be minimal,

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but it could impact the database scope of work. eBird has proposed that BCN switch from being a portal to an eBird protocol. They want portals to be transitioned to state level and other broader summaries of data. For those who use eBird, when you choose Stationary or Incidental, there will be a choice for “BCN point-count,” which monitors will select rather than switching to the BCN portal page. We are working with county coordinators to make sure monitors are informed when the switch happens.

As a longer-term goal, eBird is working on the Projects concept and is interested in BCN being a pilot as they develop it. This change could allow us to have different protocols and showcase all our point-counts on eBird. Monitors could pull up their points on the map, which also has advantages! A new monitor currently has to manually re-enter the same coordinates. We will have the opportunity to voice input on the process.

Pollock asked whether monitors’ data entry through the BCN protocol will still be assigned to their personal account; for example, will life birds seen when monitoring show up on your list? Secker answered that yes, that should still work as normal.

Carla Schmakiel asked whether the BCN portal will still exist. Secker responded it will go away and when monitors are entering an eBird checklist for the Survey, you will select the protocol (e.g., Traveling, Stationary), as BCN point count. A page on the website with screenshots will walk people through the process of this simple change, and the link will be shared with monitors [\[now on the BCN website here\]](#).

### 3. Communications Team updates (Fisher, Bilderback, Leopold, Cohen)

#### a. Calendar of events

Bilderback congratulated Secker and Fisher on a very successful Chicago Wilderness Café session on migrating birds on April 4<sup>th</sup> with a turnout of 130 attendees! Per CW organizers, it was one of their best-attended cafes. [The recording of the presentation and slides are now available through the BCN website.](#) This was a rich presentation with a lot of excellent data, insights into the importance of our region for migratory birds, and what we can do to help them. Attendee feedback was requested on which migrant-related topics they would like to hear more about; these results have not been received yet but should provide some guidance for future talks down the road.

#### b. May BCN News

We will be featuring Kane County Audubon in the May BCN e-newsletter issue and would love to feature your organization in the next issue! The deadline is April 30 for articles, and the next issue will come out on May 15<sup>th</sup>.

#### c. Pending website update (including history of BCN document from Libby Hill)

Bilderback thanked Libby Hill for generating a very detailed history-of-BCN document. **We are now looking for BCN pictures to accompany the document, particularly any early photos from the ‘80s and ‘90s.** This content will be housed on the website.

Additionally, **we are looking for suggestions on the BCN website.** Please send an email

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to Cohen and Secker, who are shepherding a web update through the work cycle. Websites are living documents, so there will be continuous updates.

Bilderback shared a calendar of communication events that happened since the last quarterly meeting. Fisher presented the BCN story at three different events, which gave us good visibility in the region with different organizations. There are several upcoming communication opportunities: Bob Dolgan will be doing a story in *Meadowlark* about the BCN Survey and will be interviewing Jenny Flexman. American Bird Conservancy is a major driver in the Bird Collision Workshop that will be held in June in Chicago by the Upper Mississippi/Great Lakes Joint Venture. ABC will also be taking a large role in the Eastern Partners in Flight conference that will be held at the Morton Arboretum in July. BCN has been invited to participate in and present at each of those events.

### Advocacy/Conservation Issues:

#### **1. Advocacy Team (Dann, Fisher)**

Fisher said there has been a big statewide effort for the wetlands bill, which will restore wetland protections in Illinois to the level of previous federal protection before the Supreme Court ruling greatly limited it. IL Environmental Council and others are very much focused on that process. So far the news is good, but time will tell. The legislation probably will not be resolved until after the summer recess.

Leopold shared Dann's Advocacy Report and briefly summarized it:

- Regarding the long-delayed Lake County ordinance regarding bird-friendly buildings in unincorporated areas, it's disappointing to say no action has taken place as yet, but I remain optimistic. I've received nothing but positive vibes from staff, but meetings continue to be canceled which results in the delay.  
*[Breaking news since this meeting: The Lake County Planning, Building, Zoning and Environment Committee gave the green light to move forward with a proposed ordinance for bird-friendly design requirements on new construction and renovations on non-residential properties in unincorporated Lake County! The Lake County Board also adopted a policy requiring new Lake Co government facilities to use at least 80 percent bird-friendly glass on their exteriors from ground level to 100 feet high.]*
- Your Advocacy Committee has been active submitting witness slips on proposed legislation in the Illinois General Assembly. Some of the subjects include soil health, opposing deforestation, wetlands protection and others.
- At the federal level, we signed on to a letter relative to the Rodenticide Act and one that joins in supporting a strengthening of the Endangered Species Act.

#### **a. Bird-friendly building design**

Annette Prince shared updates on the efforts to push for bird-friendly building design in Chicago. The Bird-Friendly Chicago alliance originally pursued an ordinance directed by Alderman Hopkins after a vague measure was passed, stating that bird safety should be given priority in new building design. They were directed to work with the Chicago

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Department of Planning and Development (DPD) to get more specific guidelines incorporated in the new Sustainable Development Plan. They worked with DPD for four years to make measures achievable, affordable, and understandable, with DPD always giving the impression that these items would be required. Drafts used the word “Required” every time through 2023; then by 2024 they said DPD could not require things but promoted that extra points would be given for bird-friendly design elements (20 points instead of 5). However, if action is not required, this increase will not really be helpful. Bird-friendly design should be mandatory, it’s too critical to be optional. [A WGN piece was done on this issue.](#)

Very strong support for bird-friendly design was expressed on the DPD survey before the release of the new Sustainable Development Plan, with bird safety overwhelmingly ranked as the highest priority. The plan was released in April, and the public comment period on it runs through May 15. Prince said a city that provides the greatest threat to migratory birds should be taking strong measures for protection that are enforceable. She said efforts at this point need to be directed to an ordinance.

Bilderback asked since we are showing a united front with the conservation community in Chicago, what is the approach for an ordinance? Prince responded the ordinance would go through the Dept of Housing and become part of the building code, included with other required elements such as sprinklers, ramps, etc. that any new building must meet. We would then still have to contend with retrofitting buildings that already exist. The resistance is likely coming from developers saying it’s expensive and will be hard to get the materials, neither of which are true. Bird-friendly materials are readily available now, and the prices are dropping as more people are using them. Someone needs to have the will to push it through City Council to change the housing code.

Pollock said affordable housing advocates were trying to get the hoops reduced in terms of paperwork and bureaucracy needed for building anything. That was something that worked against us in terms of timing, though we are supportive of their effort.

Prince shared that McCormick Place now got a contract to put film on their windows and is getting bids for new shades. She thinks a huge number of strikes can be eliminated if they install shades or blinds as an efficient way to block light. Hopefully a more modern system will add protection! Pollock added that Field Museum staff were not being allowed on McCormick Place property, but that has been resolved and they can continue their monitoring. All the letter-writing and petitions helped!

Bilderback said the 30-day response notice has been shared with BCN reps and encouraged to share with their organizations. *Living Bird* did a story on Chicago and McCormick Place, in which Prince was quoted. A copy of this magazine should be sent to the mayor! New York City long ago instituted bird-friendly measures, and it is embarrassing that Chicago is still lagging behind.

Cohen asked where the pressure points are for an ordinance and who will take on carrying it through. Prince responded that we need an alderman or group of aldermen to show leadership and propel it forward. The mayor could also take action if he made it a

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priority. We need to find constituents who are city residents to reach their alderman. Pollock noted there are ongoing efforts to find some strong champions who have a good relationship with the mayor. We have been advised to wait until the affordable housing ordinance gets through, then need to identify someone who will introduce the ordinance for us. Cohen said he has a connection with an alderman.

### **b. Offshore wind update (Fisher)**

Fisher reported that Illinois is lagging far behind other states in terms of getting a renewable energy project hooked into the grid. Many solar, wind, and other projects have been approved already that are waiting to get connected into the grid. It is hard to say what effect this has on the wind project proposal for Lake Michigan.

### **c. Other local advocacy actions**

No other advocacy actions were discussed.

## **2. Black-crowned Night Heron research project (Lardner)**

Amy Lardner said the 2024 field season for the BCNH Project is underway and off to a great start. They plan to trap three times the number of birds as last year and fit them with satellite trackers. They are seeing interesting developments in mapping the birds' foraging movements and the different communities they're using. Two conspecific attraction sites are now being monitored. Brad Semel was able to get usage of Almond Marsh, and Lake-Cook Audubon helped set up nesting platforms there. Meanwhile, efforts are underway to build and place dummy heron nests in the hopes of attracting night-herons. Those tools are also being used at Big Marsh.

Lardner said promotion about BCNH and the research has been very successful. They had surprisingly good turnout for three Zoom presentations this spring with 115 to 200 attendees on each. There will soon be an opt-in newsletter to cover the project's field highlights. She also shared a special event will be held at Lincoln Park Zoo on May 9<sup>th</sup> called "[Twilight in the Rookery.](#)" It will be a behind-the-scenes interactive bird walk and conservation safari with researchers and great presenters on hand. Spots are limited!

Finally, Lardner said they are making a citizen science push for people to report banded night-heron sightings. Pat Andersen asked if there will be a writeup describing how to do BCNH monitoring. Lardner responded she was waiting for confirmation on the mapping system, but she would like to circulate a blurb to tailor for our audiences.

## **3. Grassland Research Project**

Bilderback said this project has entered the production phase. The data analysis is complete, but the report is proving complex to write up and will be circulated a bit later than anticipated. Hard work continues, and the expectation is to see the report before the next quarterly meeting.

## **Old Business**

### **1. Open leadership roles—BCN organizational structure review**

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Diann shared a visual on how BCN is structured with work groups/committees. This is intended to identify where needs are if you have some bandwidth or a certain skillset to contribute. Openings include the Communications Team, helping to maintain the website and BCN social media channels; on the Advocacy Team, where Dann and Fisher have been leading the charge for a long time and could use additional support; and two County Coordinator openings on the Survey Team.

### New Business

#### **1. Consideration for an all-BCN social gathering in the summer**

Bilderback said the July quarterly meeting will be held on Zoom because we want high participation of member groups. However, there has been some discussion about having an all-BCN in-person social gathering in the summer. She asked member reps to share their interest in a social gathering and contribute ideas for a central location (e.g., an outdoor pavilion with some indoor space, a favorite gathering area you have used).

#### **2. Formation of Development Team for grant-writing, fundraising**

Bilderback said that a Development Team will be formed in 2024 to work on grant-writing and fundraising. Fisher and Kubik are interested in joining. If anyone has fundraising experience, we would love to have your participation on this team.

### Announcements

Pollock said that the city will be making improvements to North Lake Shore Drive, and there is a lot of opportunity there for bird habitat. Plans will be finalized this year. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has asked CBA to collect comments and suggestions from birders. She shared the link for providing input: [Give Feedback on DuSable Lakeshore Drive Expansion — Chicago Bird Alliance](#)

Leopold shared info on a [screening of Bob Dolgan's documentary "Fluddles"](#) at Music Box Theatre on May 9<sup>th</sup>. Anyone who donates to the Wetlands Initiative or is a member of Chicago Parks Foundation is invited to attend. This is the "Chicago premiere" of his film on ephemeral wetlands. Date does conflict with Twilight in the Rookery.

### Meeting Takeaways – Representative Communication

1. Recommend potential contractors for the Survey database improvement project.
2. Recommend candidates for County Coordinator in Southern Cook, Will counties.
3. Share any old BCN photos you have to accompany the BCN history document created by Libby Hill, particularly early photos from the '80s or '90s.
4. Send suggested BCN website enhancements/updates to Eric Secker and Sonny Cohen.
5. Let Bilderback know if you are interested in joining the Development Team to assist with BCN fundraising efforts.

### **Proposed Next Meeting**

July 13, 2024, via Zoom

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**Adjourn Quarterly Meeting**

**Motion:** Adjourn the April 27 quarterly meeting.

Moved: Fisher

Seconded: Lardner

Action: Approved

The meeting adjourned at 2:38 pm.

