

Bird Conservation Network
Saturday, July 13, 2024
Location: Online Video Conference

QUARTERLY MEETING

Present: Pat Andersen (TCA), Mary Bernat (At-Large), Stephanie Beilke (AGL), Diann Bilderback (DBC), Sonny Cohen (Lake-Cook), Donnie Dann (TNC), Bob Fisher (IAS), Jim Giocomo (ABC), Donna Kubik (DBC), Vera Leopold (TWI), Mark Luscombe (Ft Dearborn), Judy Pollock (CAS), Annette Prince (CBCM), Carla Schmakel (LCA), Eric Secker (KCA), Aubrey Sirman (Loyola), John Sprovieri (KCA), Lee Witkowski (WCA).

Call to Order: President Diann Bilderback called the meeting to order at 1:06 p.m. Secretary Vera Leopold noted there was a quorum present with 13 organizations represented. Jim Giocomo of American Bird Conservancy and Mark Luscombe of Fort Dearborn joined about 2:00 p.m., bringing the total to 15 organizations represented.

Administration:

1. Approval of Minutes of April 27, 2024, Quarterly Meeting

Bilderback asked for any edits or corrections to the quarterly meeting minutes of April 27, 2024. There were none.

Motion: Accept the minutes of the April 27, 2024, quarterly meeting as presented.

Moved: Fisher

Seconded: Dann

Action: Approved

2. Membership and Treasurer's Report (Kubik)

Donna Kubik reviewed the Treasurer's Report (attached). The left-hand side of the report shows the BCN organizational budget that was approved for the year at the January quarterly meeting. The right-hand side shows where we stand now: how much BCN has received for dues and how much for donations (\$667.80). Kubik noted that BCN recently received several memorial donations, and there is a plan to start listing these memorial gifts on the BCN website. She explained that there is a fee when people donate or pay dues via Square, which is why uneven amounts are listed.

Donnie Dann asked if BCN is within its budget for the year so far. Kubik responded we have not yet received as many donations as budgeted, but otherwise we are on track with expenses as planned.

Advocacy:

1. Advocacy Team (Dann, Fisher, Secker)

Dann stated that rather than an Advocacy report, he views this as a success and accomplishments report! He said the success recently achieved both on bird-friendly

buildings and with the Great Lakes Common Tern colony comes down to two women, both named Taylor. They are extraordinarily dedicated and have been instrumental in achieving this progress.

a. Bird-friendly building design actions

Dann said he has worked with a staff member of the Lake County Board who is on the Planning, Zoning, Building, and Environment Committee. Existing legislation limited their ability to enact bird-friendly building legislation, which was since overturned. Dann made a presentation before this committee that evoked the emotional aspects of birds' long, dangerous migrations! The Lake County Board now requires bird-friendly glass in all nonresidential new construction in unincorporated Lake Co. They used criteria from American Bird Conservancy to establish what is defined as "bird-friendly."

Bilderback congratulated Dann on this progress and stated we hope other counties and communities follow suit! In other successes, McCormick Place should be installing window film to prevent/reduce bird collisions in time for the fall migration. Kane County Forest Preserve District has also enacted a new light pollution policy for all their sites.

John Sprovieri shared that yesterday he met with an aide to U.S. Representative Raja Krishnamoorthi, whose district includes half of Kane County and some of Cook. The congressman and his staffer are birders, and they reached out to learn any local concerns held by Kane Co Audubon and the birding community. Sprovieri brought up bird-friendly buildings. Rep. Krishnamoorthi has sponsored the federal Bird-Safe Buildings Act. Sprovieri also mentioned that we have been pushing for statewide efforts to restore wetland protections, since the federal delegation talks with state leaders. Sprovieri said we should keep in mind we have this birder ally in politics. Sonny Cohen and Bob Fisher said they both also spoke with Rep. Krishnamoorthi's aide, and he really was looking for information on the local district.

b. Lake County Common Tern colony successes

Dann said he has worked over many years with Taylor at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center and Brad Semel at IDNR to help Illinois' last remaining Common Tern breeding colony, and the 2024 season is showing great results. Dann shared recent photos of Common Tern chicks and said they expect to fledge somewhere in the mid-thirties this summer. This is a marvelous result compared to close to a dozen years when the colony was either flooded out, predated, or PCBs in fish harmed the chicks. All those problems have since been solved!

In addition to the three man-made nesting platforms now used by the terns, this year the birds elected to nest on a sandbar in the middle of the harbor. Though this site could not be protected, some young terns did fledge from there.

c. UMGLJV Workshop on Bird Collisions

The Upper Mississippi/Great Lakes Joint Venture (UMGLJV), a regional arm of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, put on a workshop on bird collisions in July that was the last in a series of three USFWS workshops/events held over 2023–24. Fisher said USFWS has shifted their mission to make urban bird conservation and addressing building/window

collisions part of their core goals. USFWS has 4800 government buildings across the country, and a great majority have now been retrofitted to be bird-friendly. The agency is successfully convincing individuals and communities to do more on this front. They have developed toolkits, extended the program into Central America, and are collaborating with other federal agencies.

Fisher shared selected slides that illustrated the key takeaways and partners present for each of the three meetings (see attached). The July UMGLJV session was attended by Annette Prince of Chicago Bird Collision Monitors. Fisher highlighted that the workshop included attendees and presenters from all over the country; we have a lot of allies and resources available to increase the number of bird-friendly buildings! The next bird collision summit will be held in fall 2025. Fisher said he hopes for more good news to share then, as the recent successes are galvanizing others!

d. Horizon Farms master plan

Secker shared that a master plan for Horizon Farms is being discussed, though it has been delayed. Secker is a BCN monitor there, and it was one of the sites visited by the team working on the Grassland Research Project. Several conservation groups are active there, and there is a lot of birder concern because it has high populations of grassland birds, particularly Bobolinks! He asked if anyone had heard additional info from Cook County about their master plan for the site.

Judy Pollock said there is a steering committee developing a plan, but she is unsure who is representing bird concerns on that committee. Some horse advocate groups want to see Horizon Farms returned to what it used to be with a racetrack and a greater focus on horseback riding. Chicago Bird Alliance may be able to investigate and reach out to John McCabe. Secker said he could also seek more info and agreed we need to engage so we have birder representation on the committee. Mary Bernat concurred the forest preserve needs to hear our voices, because other groups bring in money. Pollock suggested Friends of the Forest Preserves as a good contact. Leopold shared the FPDCC website for Horizon Farms site planning, but noted it had not been updated recently: <https://fpdcc.com/places/locations/horizon-farm/#planning>.

Projects and Initiatives:

1. eBird portal transition (Secker)

a. New Observation Type called “BCN Survey Point Count”

Secker reported the transition to a new observation type on eBird for BCN Survey data was completed just in time. The new function is now working on laptops and mobile. An email went out to monitors with instructions about the change in protocol just before the BCN monitoring season started on June 1. Pat Andersen confirmed the new protocol is easy to use; just select the observation type as “BCN Survey Point Count.” Secker added that as eBird builds out their Projects capability, there should be other benefits for BCN. As a very large regional database, we are a test pilot for them.

b. Documentation on BCN website

The new BCN history page is now live on the BCN website. A big thanks was given to Libby Hill for leading this initiative. View the new BCN history compilation here: <https://www.bcnbirds.org/history/>.

2. BCN Survey Team update (Kubik, Balassie)

a. New monitor recruitment and training

BCN had 206 total monitors in the field this season, with 24 of those new! Bilderback said we were a little late starting recruitment and training this year, so we will be correcting that and aim to be ahead of the curve in 2025.

b. Transition of BCN Survey Coordinator role

Bilderback reported that the transition of the BCN Survey Coordinator to Donna Kubik is going well. Kubik and Tim Balassie are a good team.

c. Monitoring needs and plans

Kubik shared that she has been learning about BCN monitors and their distribution in the Chicago region. She has concluded that we need more monitors based on input from Balassie, Pollock, and other Area Coordinators Glenn Perricone and Charlotte Pavelka. There are quite a few monitors who cover multiple sites. In DuPage County, for example, Perricone said there are 32 sites and they have the capacity to take on 15 more monitors so that existing volunteers no longer have to cover two, three, or even four sites. He also has nine sites that do not have monitors.

However, adding more monitors requires more coordination in each area to train the monitors and set up new points! Balassie currently has five areas to cover as Area Coordinator, so he is overstretched and we need new volunteers in that coordination role. If you would like to be an area coordinator or know of someone who might be a good candidate, please share ideas with Kubik of how we can connect.

Kubik added that they are planning already for the 2025 season, including updating the screening criteria to make sure interested people have enough experience to ID birds by sight and sound. We will aim to start training earlier so potential monitors can learn what to study up on or pair with a more experienced monitor to brush up on their skills.

3. Database Team update (Bilderback, Secker)

a. Welcoming a new volunteer

Bilderback and Secker have been bringing Jim Green up to speed as a volunteer. He is currently screening vendors and tools that can help us develop easier access to data. At the recent Partners in Flight conference at the Morton Arboretum, they also saw a potential platform to use that seemed to align closely with BCN's goals.

b. Review of tools and vendors in process

Bilderback said that we will be ready soon to form the Database Advisory Team to provide input on options.

4. Communications Team update (Fisher, Bilderback, Leopold, Cohen)

a. BCN News

Bilderback announced that the August BCN e-newsletter issue is in development, and story content is due to Leopold on July 25. The e-newsletter is very well read with 500-plus subscribers and nearly a 60% open rate, which is quite high.

b. Website updates

Secker said the Donate page on the BCN website now has additional fields for people who want to give anonymously or who want to donate in honor or in memory of someone. Another major web update is the previously mentioned history piece put together by Libby Hill with the help of other longtime BCN leaders. It is filed under Our Work → Our History in the BCN web menu. E-newsletter pieces and the advocacy wins mentioned could also be posted as news on the website.

c. Discord usage poll

Bilderback asked whether any BCN reps use the Discord app regularly; Fisher identified this platform as another avenue to share BCN news or advocacy alerts. Of those on the call, Pat Andersen, Bob Fisher, John Sprovieri, and Stephanie Beilke use Discord. Discord has 1200+ people using it now. In addition to rare bird alerts, Discord has other features where you can post events or news.

Andersen volunteered to post on Discord on behalf of BCN if she is sent the information we want posted. She said such posting would be a good means of getting BCN's name out there and providing info. You can join the Birding Illinois community on Discord by downloading the Discord phone app and then clicking this link:

<https://discord.gg/KuXjTduuTt>. Discord can also be used on a computer by visiting the same link.

d. Calendar of Events

Bilderback reviewed the recent calendar of BCN events:

- Fisher presented in May to a group of Midewin volunteers on the Trends Analysis.
- BCN had a presence at the Partners in Flight Science Committee and Eastern Working Group conference in July. Secker presented there on BCN data and regional birds of concern populations, and Fisher presented on the Black-crowned Night Heron story in Illinois.
- The *Meadowlark* summer issue coming out in August will have a feature on BCN and the Trends Analysis.
- Bilderback and Fisher will be working with the Will County Forest Preserve District for a BCN feature in an upcoming newsletter.

i. Partners in Flight Conference 7/9-7/11

Jim Giocomo received kudos for his work in putting together the Partners in Flight conference held at the Morton Arboretum over July 9–11. He advocated for having the conference here in Chicago so attendees could hear the local conservation activities and successes within our bird conservation community. Fisher said the conference was well-attended, and a full afternoon was devoted to talks on local bird conservation topics from BCN and other Chicago-area groups.

Fisher added Benjamin van Doren gave a very impactful presentation on the power of applying technology for bird migration monitoring in the Chicago region. He had some interesting hypotheses, and his data illustrates the value of greenspaces for migrating birds on the move. Fisher commented van Doren's research will be very useful to the University of Illinois team and relevant to BCN's and Chicago-area groups' work.

Projects/Conservation Issues:

1. Black-crowned Night-Heron research project (Lardner/Fisher)

Fisher presented on the BCNH Project at the Partners in Flight conference on behalf of Amy Lardner and Sarah Slayton. He highlighted that over two years, a lot of data has been accumulated on the birds' behavior, movements, and how they travel through trapping and tracking. The birding community's sightings of BCNH are very important, not just in eBird but directly shared with the project team. Any banded birds and also the species' presence in any areas should be reported. The ultimate goal is to find methods to reestablish BCNH colonies across Illinois. The Lincoln Park Zoo rookery is the last large rookery of this species in the state.

2. Grassland research project (Pollock)

Pollock reported the Grassland Research Project is kicking into high gear after collecting a lot of data and figuring out how to organize the information. We now have good direction on the report and an outline. Jim Herkert has analyzed all the monitoring data from the targeted grassland sites to examine at which points grassland birds are increasing and decreasing. The goal with the report writeup is to attract researchers to use it to answer important questions. Pollock is now getting Bernat the last few writeups from the field, and Sonny Cohen is creating maps for the report.

Judy attended the PIF conference day focused on grassland birds and said it underscored how important what we have in the Chicago region is, both in terms of grassland sites and rich monitoring data. Not a lot of research has been done by others on what happens after a grassland is intensively restored. Why do the numbers of grassland birds tend to go down over time?

Mary Bernat said grassland bird conservation is a hot topic, and our data is unique and important because it is collected right in the middle of the habitat! How do we let people know about this research and disseminate it? Bilderback said we will create a plan to share with a broader audience to include media, researchers, and the general public.

3. Illinois Coastal Stopover Tool (Beilke)

Stephanie Beilke shared Audubon Great Lakes' new Illinois Coastal Stopover Tool. The tool was intended to provide resources for a range of land managers working in the Illinois coastal region on planning habitat management specifically for migration stopover in spring and fall. Migratory landbirds are vulnerable, and they are heavily using the Great Lakes and Chicago coastal region, offering a huge opportunity to better manage land for stopover. Goals were to identify high-priority sites in this IL Coastal

FINAL MINUTES

zone; provide habitat recommendations and best management practices for grassland, woodland, and shrubland; and promote awareness of stopover birds and their needs.

Beilke showed the IL Coastal boundary from the IDNR's Coastal Management Program, a narrow band hugging the lakeshore and Calumet/Chicago River systems. The stopover tool was limited to this zone by grant funding, but AGL is hopeful that the resources will be useful for land managers outside of it as well. Beilke thanked Pollock and Secker for their contributions as part of an advisory team, which helped with making some key decisions. Beilke then demonstrated the tool and encouraged everyone to check it out: <https://gl.audubon.org/landingmigratory-stopover-habitat/illinois-coastal-stopover-tool>

Habitat quality, opportunities, and threats were ranked in the tool. Eight sites were highlighted with input from land managers. Priority species were selected based on BCN scores and climate vulnerability scores. Profiles are accessible on each of the bird species, identifying prime habitat and food relied upon. Targeted management resources are also provided.

Bilderback asked whether AGL is presenting this tool to land managers, and do managers need assistance using it? Beilke responded that AGL had a webinar in the Chicago Wilderness Café series in February and has shared it out several times as a recording. Beilke encouraged BCN to share it whenever having conversations with land managers as appropriate.

Fisher said Beilke shared this talk at the PIF conference and got a lot of questions about using the data. Fisher asked if there was any plan for a forest preserve stopover tool? Beilke said they initially wanted to do all of the Chicago Wilderness area but did not have sufficient funding or capacity. AGL wants to leave that door open as conversations evolve, including how BCN could work with them. Secker agreed the tool provides an excellent summary of migrants and habitat they need and is great to share with managers, even those not in the coastal area. We should look at linking on our website!

Old Business:

1. BCN get-together/social event still TBD

Bilderback shared that we are narrowing in on a bird walk paired with a luncheon as a late-summer/fall social event for all BCN representatives and monitors. A potential site is Lucky Monk in south Barrington, which is indoor with an outdoor patio and easily accessible from various highways. The details and dates still need to be finalized. Bilderback said it has been a long time since we all got together due to the pandemic. She requested ideas for activities during this event.

[The date for this all-BCN social is now set for the afternoon of October 19 at the Jewel Tea Pavilion at Citizens Park in Barrington.]

New Business:

1. Proposed Change to Bylaws: Adding new category of BCN affiliation (Bilderback, Secker)

Bilderback said that BCN leadership is proposing a change to our bylaws to include a new category of people to affiliate with BCN, something that has been proposed in the past but not yet implemented. As our visibility increases and interest level from the public is growing, we are getting inquiries about whether people can become “members” of BCN. This would be a nonvoting membership position and provide a small source of revenue for BCN.

Secker added this is something that past BCN president Terry Schilling brought to our attention, but the change did not previously pass. Secker has developed language and a structure such that there now is a clear way to handle it (see attached proposed language for bylaws revision). Similar to being a member of another organization like American Bird Conservancy, this would provide an avenue to allow people to join BCN and support it, rather than telling them no. This Member level would be distinct from our Representatives and At-Large Representatives, which are more like our board members and have a voting role.

Discussion followed with questions raised by several reps for clarification:

- What is the difference between At-Large Representatives and Members? Secker responded that At-Large Representatives are people who we nominate to serve on BCN’s “board” that have made a substantial contribution to bird conservation and/or have particular skills but are not affiliated with a certain member organization.
- Would members feel excluded in not being able to vote at quarterly meetings? As BCN is set up now, Representatives essentially constitute the “board of directors,” which makes voting decisions. Members would not have that level of involvement and responsibility, and so would not be part of the “board” that votes.
- Could other words be used such as “supporter”? Secker said that from a legal standpoint, “member” is often used as the language for this type of involvement with a nonprofit.
- We often state that BCN represents thousands of Chicago-region birders through its member groups; would creating this member category minimize that? Thousands of birders will continue to be represented through the BCN member organizations/representatives, so this talking point about BCN would not change.
- Will there be a nominal contribution to BCN to become a member? Bilderback said yes, but we have not determined the exact contribution level. ExComm had discussed a donation of at least \$20 to \$25 annually in order to be a member.
- Would the contribution to become a member be tax-deductible? Yes.

Motion: Initially approve the proposed bylaws amendment to establish a BCN Member category, for further review and final voting at the next quarterly meeting.

Moved: Bernat

Seconded: Fisher

Action: Approved

Announcements:

Pollock announced that Chicago Bird Alliance, Chicago Ornithological Society, and three other birding organizations are putting on the first-ever Urban Birding Festival in Chicago over September 13-15! Registration and more details about the event are at: <https://www.theurbanbirdingfestival.org/> [BCN is now a sponsor of the festival.]

Meeting Takeaways – Representative Communication

1. Review the attached language for a proposed revision to the BCN by-laws to add a general Member category (non-voting) as a way people can join/support BCN. This by-laws change will be voted on at the October 26th quarterly meeting.
2. Mark your calendar for the All-BCN Social event on the afternoon of October 19!
3. Recommend candidates to participate on the Database Advisory Team.
4. Recommend candidates for Area Coordinators in Southern Cook, Will counties – let Donna Kubik know if you are interested or have contacts to suggest (surveycoordinator@bcnbirds.org).
5. Provide any feedback on screening criteria that should be used for new BCN monitors.

Proposed Next Meeting

October 26, 2024, via Zoom

[The date proposed for the meeting was October 19, but due to conflicts with the available venue date for the BCN social, it has been changed to October 26.]

Adjourn Quarterly Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 3:06 pm.

Membership and Treasurer's report

	2024 Proposed Budget for Bird Conservation Network 17-Jan-24				Budget Update 10-Jul-24	
	General Fund	Trends Analysis Fund	Total		17 Jan 2024 to 10 Jul 2024	
INCOME						
Membership Dues	\$3,205.00		\$3,205.00	Revised goal: \$3040.00*	\$2,826.61	All member dues paid! Note: LCAS paid early, so not included in 2024 income**
Trends Donations to BCN		\$800.00	\$800.00			
General Donations To BCN	\$7,500.00		\$7,500.00		\$667.80	Donations from 10 individuals
Grasslands Research Project Donations to BCN	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00	Donation from COS
TOTAL INCOME	\$12,705.00	\$800.00	\$13,505.00		\$5,494.41	
EXPENSES						
Database & Scorecard Dev.	\$7,500.00		\$7,500.00			
Grasslands Research Project	\$4,000.00		\$4,000.00		\$3,000.00	Paid \$3000 to Jim Herkert
Monitor Training & Recognition	\$500.00		\$500.00			
Mailchimp email	\$336.00		\$336.00			
Promotion At Events	\$800.00		\$800.00		\$400.00	Gull Frolic \$150.00, Chicago Wilderness \$250.00
BCN Web Site Hosting	\$203.88		\$203.88			
Dues/Fees to other organizations	\$200.00		\$200.00		\$200.00	Chicago Wilderness \$50; Illinois Environmental Council \$150
Administrative Expenses	\$200.00		\$200.00		\$219.00	State fee, etc.
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$13,739.88		\$13,739.88		\$3,819.00	
NET INCOME = TOTAL INCOME - TOTAL EXPENSES	-\$1,034.88	\$800.00	-\$234.88		\$1,675.41	
	General Fund	Trends Analysis Fu	Total		Total	
Beginning Balance	\$10,549.80	\$450.54	\$11,000.34	Bank Balance Jan 17, 2024	\$12,675.75	Current Bank Balance: Jul 10 2024***
Net Income	-\$1,034.88	\$800.00	-\$234.88			
Transfer from General to Trends Analysis	-\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00				
Final Balance 12/31/24	\$8,514.92	\$2,250.54	\$10,765.46			
	*19 Organizations@150, Fort Dearborn@50, Midewin(reciprocal), 4 At-Large@ \$35.00				** Note: Sevice fee deducted for payments via Square	
					***Check:: Bank Bal today = Bank Bal Jan 17, 2024 + NET INCOME today	
					\$11,000.34 + \$1,530.66 = \$12,531.00	