

**Bird Conservation Network  
Saturday January 11, 2025  
Location: Online Video Conference**

**QUARTERLY MEETING–FINAL (Adopted April 12, 2025)**

Present: Pat Andersen (TCA), Jeff Aufmann (MCA), Mary Bernat (At-Large), Diann Bilderback (DBC), Sonny Cohen (Lake-Cook), Bob Fisher (IAS), Jim Giocomo (ABC), Kathryn Gorman (TBD), Joanne Harrison (ENSBC), Donna Kubik (DBC), Barb Laughlin-Karon (CFC), Vera Leopold (TWI), Charlotte Pavelka (LCA), Annette Prince (CBCM), Rita Renwick (WCA), Eric Secker (KCA), John Sprovieri (KCA), Dave Taliaferro (Lake-Cook), Fred Thompson (Lake-Cook)

Call to Order: President Diann Bilderback called the meeting to order at 1:17 pm after the annual meeting adjourned. There was a quorum with 12 organizations represented.

**Administration**

1. Approval of Minutes from Oct. 26, 2024 quarterly meeting

Motion: Approve the quarterly minutes from the Oct. 26, 2024 meeting

Moved: Rita Renwick

Seconded: Charlotte Pavelka

Action: Approved

2. Treasurer's Report: 4th Quarter Update

Treasurer Donna Kubik presented the 2024 budget approved a year ago and performance with year-end expenditures compared against the budget. Current bank balance shows about twice the funds we had at this time last year. Kubik asked for questions.

On fundraising, Bilderback said BCN raised \$9,200, net was \$8,900 after fees from Square. All of it was restricted to database development. There was also a \$2,000 donation from COS for the Grassland Research project that will carry over to 2025.

Pat Andersen asked whether annual dues invoices were sent out; Kubik responded that they had not been sent yet. Kubik said last year they were due at the end of April.

Pavelka noted that BCN has a substantial amount of money and raised the issue of whether BCN should be investing some of its money in a CD, for example.

Bilderback commented that this money is anticipated to be spent quickly, but perhaps a three-month CD would be doable. Pavelka noted that the timeline to paying out the money can be long enough that investment might make sense.

Cohen commented that this budget was created a year ago and seemed aspirational at the time, but then BCN did achieve the budget's objectives. Going forward in 2025, BCN again has aggressive objectives but the numbers look good and show a change in the nature of the organization. Pavelka said the amount of donations is impressive. Bilderback said that reflects well on the perception of BCN. Pavelka asked if most of the contributions were from individuals or affiliate organizations. Bilderback confirmed that the donations were from individuals, not from organizations. Pavelka pointed out this year there's an ability to ask affiliates to donate.

Bilderback mentioned that \$5,000 of the \$9,200 was from an anonymous donor; \$3,800 was in matched contributions.

Cohen observed that coming out of covid-era, BCN finished the trends analysis and the Communications Team created a story around it. Now BCN is positioned to spend money on the database upgrade. Therefore we should see this as a progression over the last four years. Bilderback agreed and stated the trends analysis shows changes over time, now the next phase is to make the database easier to access and use by our land managers.

Kubik mentioned all donors are listed on the website if they have given BCN permission. Donors were sent the 2024 accomplishments and 2025 aspirations documents, as well as a thank you note.

### 3. 2025 Budget

Bilderback stated the proposed 2025 budget is aspirational in that BCN would like to raise \$25,000 on top of the \$9,000 just raised. \$10,000 would be through outreach including potential donors, affiliate organizations and their members, other conservation organizations and the general community. \$15,000 would come through grants or foundation dollars, which is an effort BCN will be learning how to do. This effort entails building a network of contacts, telling our story and identifying grants. It requires a long lead-time, and BCN would not likely see any money from this effort before 4th quarter 2025.

Bilderback explained what BCN will spend its money on. \$15,000 would go to Nature Counts for the database upgrade and some custom development. The goal is to have the database live by the middle of the year; this should be doable because there are six months before mid-year. Then BCN would still have \$5,000 for next year as seed money for continued development.

BCN's basic operational costs for 2025 are about \$6,500. This includes \$2,000 for the Grassland Research. \$1,400 is insurance, a new expense, for directors/officers insurance and general liability for the organization.

A database administrative contractor would cost \$6,000. BCN has many tasks which its volunteer community does not have the capacity to help with, e.g. social media, grant writing, data cleansing and data integration activities. This would be a variable expense, and BCN would not spend this money unless it has it.

At the end of the year, BCN expects a balance like what exists now, which is about \$21,000.

Bilderback called for questions. Pavelka commented that the budget is aspirational with regard to timing and amounts, and made the point that some investments could be purchased. Bilderback emphasized that this is just a plan and that BCN will live within its means. With the \$9,200 raised, BCN nearly has what it needs for the initial database investment which is the major project for 2025.

Pavelka asked if BCN received quotes for insurance, expressing the concern that the estimated amounts were substantial. Bilderback responded that three firms were consulted and vetted by Kubik. The preferred firm was cheaper than some others. Pavelka asked how many dollars of general liability are included. Bilderback answered one million dollars, standard coverage. Pavelka said it seems expensive.

With regard to the grants and foundations line in the budget, Vera Leopold said that we have existing relationships with a couple foundations and individuals associated with foundations, so BCN is not starting from scratch. In her opinion the \$15,000 goal is doable. Bilderback commented that reporting on this topic will happen every quarter, and there will be time to identify and discuss red flags. She said BCN needs a vision and is poised to grow if we can get it together to do so. BCN has been asked to consider increasing its monitoring program for migrants, and there are more opportunities coming. Growing BCN would help serve its land managers better. Leopold noted it's an important step toward being a more professional organization which would give us the capacity to accomplish what we want.

Motion: Approve the 2025 budget as presented

Moved: Fisher

Seconded: Leopold

Action: Approved

## **Projects and Initiatives**

### 1. Database Team Update

Bilderback said BCN is ready to manage the database migration to Nature Counts. Some fundraising is still needed. A technical advisory committee is being formed. Gareth Rowell from the US National Park Service and Partners in Flight is the initial member. Rowell has a tool to normalize and rationalize data so it can be made available to different groups, including the

Department of the Interior. He has expressed a lot of interest in helping BCN get its data ready to migrate into Nature Counts.

Leopold mentioned that BCN is almost done with match funding for this initiative. BCN's anonymous donor agreed to match past the deadline, and another reminder will be sent out to notify that gifts will still be doubled.

Cohen asked for a summary of who Nature Counts is. Bilderback responded that Nature Counts is part of Birds Canada, which is similar to Cornell Lab's eBird. Many organizations are using the platform Nature Counts provides, including some US based organizations. Nature Counts would provide a front-end tool for BCN data so users can select the species and other filters to get to BCN data that results from the combination of filters the user has selected. Bilderback said they are able to provide almost all of what BCN asked for. Nature Counts' goal is to expand into the US. Once BCN joins, our data would be available for other knowledge networks to tap into, which is also a win for BCN.

Fisher commented that this endeavor started at the Partners in Flight event which was attended by Nature Counts. One of the dilemmas here in the US is that the major agencies dealing with wildlife have different database systems. So the lure of Nature Counts is that it's a uniform system that is in wide acceptance. Bilderback commented that it's tied into eBird, which is an additional advantage.

## 2. BCN Survey Team Update

Bilderback welcomed Kathryn Gorman, who will join BCN as Survey Coordinator, working with Tim Balassie. Gorman comes to BCN from The Nature Conservancy with experience in volunteer management at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. Gorman commented that she and Fisher have collaborated at Midewin, and that she has experience organizing volunteers.

Bilderback said that Mike McNamee will take over the Area Coordinator role for Southern Cook County. Coordinators for Northern Cook County, Will County and Chicago Park District are still needed.

Fisher thanked Balassie for carrying the load of the three above-mentioned regions. Renwick asked if there is a job description for the coordinator role. Bilderback affirmed and will send the description to Renwick and Andersen.

Bilderback then introduced two slides that are a review from last meeting:

### A. Monitor Onboarding

Bilderback said BCN has met with area coordinators and made decisions about improving the self-evaluation tools, which will be live before the monitor recruitment season begins in

February. There will be additional documentation around conduct in the field, protocols and other questions that BCN doesn't have documented answers to yet.

B. Monitor Communications

Additionally, Bilderback said there will be a simple service agreement between BCN and the monitor so that they know they are a BCN monitor in addition to other monitoring roles they may have. The agreement protects BCN because it will have a liability waiver. Bilderback said BCN will also be standardizing monitor communications this spring so that they are efficient and monitor coordinators are in the loop.

3. Communications Team Update

A. Newsletter

BCN News is up to 600 subscribers, with an average 60% open rate. In order to reach leadership in BCN affiliate organizations, Bilderback asked reps to send key contact info from their organizations (e.g., president, treasurer, newsletter editor) so that BCN can be sure we are communicating with them. Contact info can be sent directly to Bilderback or to Leopold.

B. Fundraising

The Communications Team managed the year-end giving campaign because the fundraising team is still being formed. Focus was on friends of BCN, solicitations through the email list, and some outreach to IEC.

C. Outreach

Bilderback called attention to "Bird Conservation Network: A Citizen Science Coalition" written by Vice President Eric Secker, published in Illinois Audubon Magazine, winter 2024-25. She also brought attention to Fisher, who will speak at the Chicago Wilderness Managing Healthy Landscapes Workgroup on Jan. 28, 2025. Upcoming events where BCN will exhibit are as follows: Gull Frolic, 2/16/25; Wild Things, 3/1/25; Earth Awareness Fair in Frankfort, 3/9/25.

Cohen asked if BCN needs volunteers to staff a table at the Wild Things conference and confirmed he can volunteer. Bilderback said the Communications Team will talk about these events and invited other participants to volunteer.

**Advocacy/Conservation Issues**

1. Advocacy Team update

Fisher updated on the wetland protection provisions in Illinois statutes. This was a large-scale effort mounted by the conservation community in Illinois to restore federal level protections the Trump administration removed. The end result was that the companion bills never moved out of committee, largely due to a coalition of big-name opponents (American Petroleum Institute, Chamber of Commerce and more) that were resistant to the idea of restoring the federal level of wetland protection.

Fisher said that The Wetlands Initiative had a lead role in this effort and will work on it again in 2025. A plan for publicity and direct outreach to state reps and senators is being developed. BNC will partner with the legislators in our region who can champion this again.

Bilderback asked if there were questions. Leopold commented that there is no comprehensive wetland protection in Illinois. No state-level legislation exists because it came from the federal level and now that's been removed. The bill is designed to just get a basic level of protection for Illinois wetlands, and hopefully we can get that done. Fisher stated much of this is related to flooding problems. Impact is not limited to wildlife, there are many bad impacts on people as well. Bilderback said BCN will stay close to IEC and look for opportunities to assist with their work, e.g. witness slips.

## 2. Research Projects

Black-crowned Night Heron project: Monitoring continues, a full update will be given at Wild Things. They would like reports of sightings and nesting. Andersen commented that it's an easy form to fill out, it's on her affiliate's website. Banded BCNH can be reported using this link: <https://arcg.is/0vKHPW0>. Signs of nesting (other than at Lincoln Park Zoo) can be reported to Sarah Slayton at University of Illinois (email: slayton4@illinois.edu) or Brad Semel at Illinois Department of Natural Resources (email: brad.semel@illinois.gov)

Bilderback said the other project is the Grassland Research, BCN still needs to integrate some of the site reports, then the review cycle will begin. Mary Bernat is overseeing the development of the report.

## **Old Business**

Bilderback addressed Fundraising for 2025. She said there isn't a team yet, only herself, Fisher and Leopold, and called for additional volunteers. Initial outreach was successful, the next phase is reaching out to our affiliate organizations. BCN needs its reps to help connect with the right people in the affiliate organizations and to advocate for BCN.

Outreach is also needed to foundations with conservation interests and grant opportunities need to be looked into. Any volunteers with fundraising, grant writing, business management and social media development skills are welcome to participate.

## **New Business**

### 1. Request for Input

Bilderback said that LEAM (Landuse Evolution and Impact Assessment Model, University of IL) is developing the first comprehensive Natural and Working Lands Plan for Illinois. The project is looking for input from nature enthusiasts and invited BCN to do their survey. They want responses by mid-Jan, but they may keep it open longer; they were glad BCN is sharing it. Bilderback encouraged meeting participants to have a look at the survey, it's an opportunity to voice your opinion. The survey can be accessed here: <https://illinoisnwl.web.illinois.edu/survey/>.

### 2. Survey of experience as a BCN Representative

Bilderback said there will be a survey project to gather opinions on the frequency of BCN communications, quarterly meeting timing and other needs/wants. Leopold will lead this survey as outgoing Secretary.

Leopold commented that the survey is a way to take the temperature from participants about involvement, and how BCN leadership can keep improving. It may be done as a google form or survey monkey. She said she would like to try to reach some reps that don't come to the meetings as often to find out what might inspire them to get more involved.

### 3. BCN Organization Chart

Bilderback shared the top-level organization chart showing BCN President, Affiliate Representatives, and ExComm and Work Groups. She said there are open roles on the Communications, Database, Advocacy, Survey, and Development work groups, encouraging anyone with additional time/interest to get involved.

## **Announcements**

Action items are as follows:

- Reps should send Bilderback the name/contact info for key coalition organization contacts
- BCN needs to fill the Treasurer role
- BCN needs to enlarge the fundraising team
- BCN is looking for suggestions on candidates for area coordinators for Northern Cook, Will County and Chicago Park District.

Bilderback asked for discussion on any other topics.

### 1. Bird Strikes

Annette Prince said that McCormick Place had a 95% reduction in bird strikes as a result of modifications. In one location, strikes went from 200 to 0. More areas will be covered next season. On some days there were still 100s of strikes in downtown Chicago but McCormick Place had none, so it's been very effective.

## 2. Lead Poisoning

Prince discussed that in Nov and Dec 2024, many birds in DuPage County were found to have lead poisoning. All had hundreds of tiny lead pellets in their stomachs. Research to figure out where the pellets are from and whether the cause is malicious is ongoing. IL DNR has been consulted. Pellets could be from golf courses that conduct skeet shooting in the off season. Perhaps the geese are eating them when foraging. Another theory is that birds are ingesting them because water levels have been low. More answers are needed, and IL DNR has not made much progress. Dozens of birds were taken to the DuPage center for chelation therapy. In Naperville, the same issue occurred. A local reporter advocated for lead shot to be changed to steel shot.

## 3. Bird Flu

Prince also spoke about rampant bird flu. It is creeping into Cook County. Initially only waterfowl was affected but now flu is moving up the food chain. Cleanups of affected birds are not being done, so great horned owls, eagles, etc feed on the dead birds and become ill. One pond had more than 60 dead birds. No idea how long the situation will persist. DNR takes reports to track flu but that's about it. Prince thinks vaccines would help but they won't be made until human to human transmission takes place, which is quite short-sighted policy. The public is concerned about children and pets, and there is an interest to see the spread controlled better than it is now.

Jeff Aufmann asked Prince to confirm that passerines were not generally susceptible. Prince replied it's not typically thought that they are. She said that cats, however, are susceptible to bird flu. A zoo in Washington state lost 20-30 large cats, and they said one of the causes was from sparrows. Utah is seeing large numbers of pigeons with flu, and so the question is not if, but when this goes to other bird species, which would be catastrophic. Some birds might be silent carriers. In Washington state, zoos are being told to stop feeding raw poultry to cats. However there has not been a bird feeder warning yet, as there was a few years ago. Some states are seeing a huge number of gulls with bird flu, others see it in starlings, sparrows and pigeons. The majority of human acquisition is from an exposure with an affected bird.

Bernat questioned why there is transmission through meat when it is respiratory. Prince answered that it is viral and not destroyed until it is cooked. It can be airborne, shed from feathers, mucus, droppings and contact with infected animals.

Prince said flu is so contagious that centers are not even accepting waterfowl. There's only a 1% survival rate. In captivity there is a high risk of spread so centers can't take the risk of intake

for treatment or euthanasia. People are told not to touch the birds, no one is cleaning them up, it's a hard situation right now. Centers were not accepting raptors at all, but now some are, but they have to take precautions and wear personal protection gear.

Bernat said this is the largest bird conservation issue she has ever heard of. We should think about it for the April meeting. Perhaps BCN should form a new committee to address it. This is going to be an issue for anyone doing bird-banding.

Leopold proposed having an article about bird flu in the February newsletter. Bilderback asked Prince if she could write something. Prince affirmed she could write an article. Bilderback asked that it include suggestions of actions people can take. Prince said they are telling people not to handle dead birds, but she doesn't know of an effort to clean up and remove them.

Aufmann asked if authorities are finding dead coyotes. Prince said no, they're not finding transmission to mammals. Bernat disagreed and reminded that large cats including a cheetah died. Prince affirmed and clarified that didn't happen regarding Illinois' wildlife. Bilderback thanked them for their comments.

Bilderback called for any other announcements.

### **Proposed Next Meeting**

Next meeting will be April 12, via Zoom.

Bilderback adjourned the meeting at 2:43 pm.