

Bird Conservation Network
Saturday April 12, 2025
Location: Online Video Conference

QUARTERLY MEETING MINUTES–FINAL

Present: Pat Andersen (TCA); Tim Balassie (At-large); Stephanie Beilke (AGL); Diann Bilderback (DBC); Sonny Cohen (Lake-Cook); Donnie Dann (TNC); Jim Green (DBC); Bob Fisher (IAS); Joanne Harrison (ENSBC); Vera Leopold (TWI); Annette Prince (CBCM); Carla Schmakel (LCA); Eric Secker (KCA); Laura Simpson (Citizens for Cons); John Sprovieri (KCA); Dave Taliaferro (Lake-Cook); Lee Witkowski (WCA)

Call to Order: President Diann Bilderback called the meeting to order at 1:01 pm. There was a quorum with 13 organizations represented.

Administration

- Approval of minutes of January 11, 2025 Annual Meeting

Motion: Donnie Dann moved to approve the Annual Meeting minutes.

Seconded: The motion was seconded by Dave Taliaferro.

Action: Pass

- Approval of minutes of January 11, 2025 Quarterly Meeting

Motion: Taliaferro moved to approve the Quarterly Meeting minutes.

Seconded: The motion was seconded by Tim Balassie.

Action: Pass

- Membership and Treasurer's Report

Bilderback reviewed the Treasurer's Report, showing balance of \$20,741.97 on Jan 1, 2025. At the end of the first quarter, the balance was \$23,838.36, a gain of \$3,096.39. There were credits for dues and donations, and expenses for BCN dues to other organizations, promotions, and the purchase of D&O and liability insurance.

- Election of Linda Gohlke as incoming Treasurer

Bilderback announced that Linda Gohlke will take over the Treasurer role from Donna Kubik. Gohlke has been a BCN Monitor for twelve years and is a practicing corporate attorney.

Motion: Dann moved to nominate Gohlke as BCN's new Treasurer

Seconded: John Sprovieri seconded the motion.

Action: Pass

- Addition of Kathryn Gorman and Tim Balassie as At-large Members of Executive Committee

Bilderback recommended adding Gorman and Balassie as At-large members of the Executive Committee. Their participation would be helpful because these meetings often focus on the survey and issues with area coordinators and monitors.

Motion: Vera Leopold moved to add Gorman and Balassie as members of the Executive Committee.

Seconded: The record reflects there was a second.

Action: Pass

Kudos

- IAS and IOS are combining their membership and aligning their existing programs, projects and publications.

Advocacy/Conservation Issues

- Advocacy Team

1. Wetland Protection Act

Bob Fisher spoke about the Wetland Protection Act. The legislation that failed last year was reintroduced. The Senate version of the bill passed out of committee and made it to the Senate floor. The House version was re-referred to the House Rules Committee. There will be a major effort that IEC will conduct to apply pressure to the House and Senate and also to the Governor to persuade him to enact this bill.

Fisher said outreach on this to members of Illinois House and Senate is important. IAS will be part of those efforts. Fisher said organizational support as well as individual support is critical.

Fisher said IEC has set up a form that allows an individual to either sign onto a draft letter or write their own letter, and it is sent to state congressional representatives in that individual's district. The form is on the web at <https://act.ilenviro.org/a/wetlands-25>.

Balassie asked how proposed changes to federal EPA wetland regulations might impact this particular bill. Fisher answered that the purpose of the state legislation is to replace the federal legislation that was rescinded, and that it's too soon to have any feedback.

Bilderback said that she doesn't think there is any state protection for wetlands right now in Illinois.

Gohlke said that state reps pay more attention to phone calls; although letters are still good, they are not as effective as calls.

2. Lake County Bird Friendly Building Design

Dann announced that the Lake County Board will vote on May 13 to require all new buildings in unincorporated Lake County to incorporate bird friendly design. This would include residential and non-residential buildings (commercial and industrial). Incorporated areas of the county need to be approached individually.

Update: On May 13, the Board voted unanimously to approve.

3. City of Chicago Bird Friendly Ordinance status

Annette Prince spoke on the topic of bird friendly ordinance in Chicago. A hearing to justify the need for an ordinance may happen this summer. She said the Department of Planning continues to pass projects whether bird friendly or not. Some work with aldermen is going forward to have a hearing and propose an ordinance. Concerns are that development would be de-incentivized if projects were required to be bird friendly.

4. Bird Conservation Updates

Prince also said DuPage Wildlife Conservation Center will open this spring. It was designed as a net zero campus, and the visitor center will teach the public how to make their homes bird friendly. The Center has been receiving wildlife, but has been closed so far to the public.

Regarding bird flu, Prince said it has abated but is not gone. She said there were at least 100 sick birds, and another 100 that were dead. IDNR does not have a total count. But from public reports, she thinks the number is in the 100s of affected birds. Prince says she hasn't seen cases in songbirds, only waterfowl and raptors. Warmer temperatures dissipate bird flu, and researchers don't know yet, regarding severity, if this season was a one-off or not.

Regarding the Black-Crowned Night Heron project, Bilderback said data collection continues on sightings and nesting. The Grassland Research project is also on-going, and Secker will be helping with the assembly of the document.

Projects and Initiatives

- Database Team update

Secker said BCN is working with Nature Counts to move the database over to them. BCN currently has paused next steps with them in order to clean up the list of point counts. eBird has released a new feature, eBird Projects, that they would like BCN to switch over to. Monitor points will already be in eBird Projects, but the current list has to be deduped. BCN has contracted with Jorge Garcia at Windy City Bird Labs to do that. This will make it easier for monitors and also help when BCN does its trends analysis.

Bilderback added that cleaning up the back-end will make the transition to Nature Counts less expensive, and BCN has secured the donations already for this work.

The goal is to have the list cleaned up by May 1 so it can be incorporated into eBird.

Update: As of May 15, work to dedupe the point counts is still being conducted.

- BCN Survey Team Update

1. Monitor Recruitment

Bilderback said the monitor recruitment effort is about to kick off, it will center on monitors and friends/family again this year. Representatives are encouraged to share this opportunity with their affiliate organizations. There will be an email to land managers, so area coordinators will work with land managers to identify open points and screen new monitors. Also, Pat Andersen is working on getting a notification to the local Discord community that BCN is recruiting.

Update: In an April 15 meeting with Area Coordinators, the decision was made to defer more monitor recruitment this spring given the short window to onboard new monitors and the additional work that would be needed to load any new points in the eBird Projects functionality prior to start of monitoring season. New monitors in the queue presently will be vetted and assigned if appropriate.

2. Monitor Onboarding

Last fall BCN met with area coordinators to gather feedback for this season. There will be tighter screening and more clarity on duties for monitors. Fisher and Vicki Sroczynski have developed a self-assessment tool for birding-by-ear skills. The tool profiles 15-20 species with their song calls and asks people to identify what those species are. Scoring and implementing the self assessment is still being worked out. Efforts are being made to have it in place for the spring season.

Update: Since new monitor recruitment has been deferred, the BCN Survey team will take additional time to refine the Self-Assessment and test it with experienced monitors to ensure validity.

BCN has updated the monitor application to ask about eBird usage. The application clarifies that a monitor must be in good physical condition, and it details how to handle flyovers and incidental reporting. The two training modules are optional. A service agreement and waiver for the monitors is in the process of development.

- Communications Team Update

Bilderback reported on recent events. The BCN table at Gull Frolic was staffed by herself and Cohen. The table at Wild Things was staffed by Secker and Fisher. Wild Things had 2,500 attendees, and Secker and Fisher gave a well-attended presentation on Chicago as a migratory bird corridor.

Secker said a lot of people visited the BCN table at Wild Things and signed up to learn more. Cohen added that it was over 100 people who signed up. Bilderback said the BCN newsletter subscription list is close to 700 people now, with a high open rate.

- Fund-raising Team Update

Bilderback said BCN had about \$3,000 of donations in the first quarter of 2025. This quarter additional funding sources have been identified, and BCN will ramp those up in the third quarter. BCN is still in need of volunteers to work on this committee to brainstorm ideas and approaches.

Old Business:

Leopold has created a survey for representatives to provide feedback on how BCN is doing. She said that the survey will cover a few different things: how frequently BCN leadership communicates, quarterly meeting schedule and times, what's most valuable, what representatives would like to see more of, and the relationship between BCN and affiliate groups. The last survey was five years ago, and things have changed since then; for example meetings are online now, and there are new working groups. She also stated it would be great to get feedback from representatives that don't attend meetings very often, so that she can find out what would help them participate or be more valuable to them.

New Business:

Bilderback explained that last December BCN amended its bylaws to create a new member category. There are a number of decisions that must be explored before the membership category can be implemented. It will be an affiliation and donor category. Dues will be \$25 annually. BCN will need membership management software to administer this initiative so that the Treasurer is not burdened with it.

Bilderback said with regard to advocacy, the team could be stronger if it had more participants. Participants could follow topics of their choice and report back to the Advocacy team to determine what action should be taken. If anyone wants to help out this way, by following an issue, researching what's happening legislatively in Illinois or in regional news, and could provide updates periodically, please let her know.

Dann said that the work on the bird friendly design ordinance in Lake County was meant to be a model for other counties to adopt. Balassie commented that it would be a good idea to have some of our members mentor others who want to learn about how to go about working on these issues in different counties. Fisher added that there are groups that have training on how to be an effective advocate, e.g. Environmental Law and Policy Center.

Proposed Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on July 12, 2025, via Zoom.

Action items

Bilderback said BCN is still trying to build a list of key contacts, so please send the email for the President, Treasurer, Communications, etc to Leopold.

Area Coordinators for Northern Cook, Chicago Park District, and Will county are still needed.

BCN needs volunteers for the Fundraising and Advocacy teams.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:10 pm.