

Bird Conservation Network: 2013, the Year in Review

The end of 2013 marks 16 years of bird monitoring in the Chicago Wilderness region. A standardized protocol for bird monitoring was implemented by BCN in 1998, with major participation by a group of dedicated birders, scientists, land managers and conservationists. This effort transformed monitoring practices, leading to the establishment of the BCN Survey, which enlists volunteer monitors to systematically report on breeding and migrating birds in natural lands across the Greater Chicago area. Currently, 170 volunteer bird monitors in 8 counties in Illinois and northwest Indiana are monitoring at more than 200 sites!

Their data have been entered in BCN's eBird portal and the resulting information has proved valuable to land managers, forest preserve districts and stewards in determining the best way to continue to manage the sites to support the birds and the habitats they need to survive and flourish. The data are also contained in Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird national database.

This year also marked the successful creation of Monitor Monthly, an online newsletter replacing the annual information letter to volunteer monitors. The *beebzz* listserv, encouraging discussion among bird monitors, stewards, land managers, researchers and others interested in conserving bird habitat in the Greater Chicago area, continued in its third year with interesting, lively, educational and entertaining exchanges.

An Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund Grant was received, to be utilized to update and reprint BCN's Birds of Concern brochure. Completion of the new brochure is scheduled for early 2014.

Representing BCN, Bob Fisher presented a talk titled Wind Turbines in Lake Michigan; How They Might Impact Birds at the Wild Things conference in February. It may be seen at http://www.bcnbirds.org/BCNdocuments_files/WindTurbinesTalk-4-3-2013.pdf

BCN representatives Donnie Dann and Bob were both named to the Governor's Lake Michigan Offshore Wind Energy Advisory Council (LMOWEAC) in 2012; the purpose of LMOWEAC was to provide specifics for an appropriate regulatory framework for evaluating offshore wind developments. HB 2573, based on the LMOWEAC report, was signed by the Governor in August 2013, and is now law, providing IDNR the authority as the final arbiter of where, **or if** turbines can be placed in the lake. Due to efforts by BCN and others, the law's language provides IDNR an open-ended time window for completing their scientific evaluation process.

BCN expressed vehement opposition (both by letter and in direct testimony) to the Illiana Expressway project, since the currently "preferred" route would border Midewin. Despite widespread opposition to the proposed tollway, CMAP's MPO Policy Committee (which under federal law holds the final say on inclusion of Illiana in the regional plan) bowed to political pressure and voted 11-8 for the project to be included in the plan.

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BCN continues to actively oppose legalizing Trap, Neuter, Release/Return. TNR has been demonstrated to be ineffective at limiting the population of free-roaming cats, as the scientific evidence continues to increase quantifying the serious harm to native bird populations inflicted by feral and free roaming cats. In March, at the Cook County Board hearing on the subject, BCN advocacy chair Donnie Dann testified in opposition to TNR, with a follow up letter to President Toni Preckwinkle and the entire Board, proposing an amendment to the present statute, specifically prohibiting TNR colonies in and near forest preserves and other bird-rich areas. Judy Pollock, BCN rep from Audubon Chicago, also testified in opposition to TNR.

BCN co-sponsored a two-year Red-headed Woodpecker Blitz (with Audubon Chicago Region). The Blitz encompassed 47 sites in 6 counties in 2012; an additional 17 sites were covered in 2013, for a total of 64 sites. 47 nesting pairs of Red-headed Woodpeckers were confirmed across these 64 sites.

The Redstart Connection, a BCN fund-raising project initiated in 2012, concluded successfully in April 2013. This effort united the bird conservation communities of the Chicago region through BCN and a grassroots initiative in Guatemala named Community Cloud Forest Conservation. Half of the money raised was used to help fund the reforestation of five acres of cloud forest in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala; the rest will fund an update of the 2007 analysis of BCN monitoring data. Completion of the updated Trends Analysis is expected in early 2014. It will provide more robust and current data that can be applied to guide local habitat restoration efforts.

BCN actively supported the Orland Grassland's steward in her campaign to modify the CCFPD's perimeter Orland Grassland bike path to avoid the wetland on the east side of the grassland/wetland complex and to eliminate interior access via paths. The goal: To minimize human impact on the restored prairie, benefiting nesting grassland birds and other wildlife. Letters of support were sent to David Kircher, Chief Landscape Architect, and Chief Superintendent Arnold Randall, Cook County FPD.

Various member organizations of the BCN coalition worked hard and well in promoting bird conservation during 2013. Here are just a few examples:

- Audubon Chicago Region organized Wild Things, a conference for people and nature, in February; 1163 registrants, 170 presenters, and 90 sessions on an amazing variety of subjects relating to nature and conservation made Wild Things a smashing success. BCN President Mary Lou Mellon served as conference co-chair.
- Chicago Bird Collision Monitors assisted with the design and launch of building monitoring programs at both Loyola University and Northeastern Illinois University. These programs, and the data they provided, raised awareness and understanding of bird strikes and led to modifications in lighting and building design to improve bird safety on campus. More than 100 Chicago Bird Collision Monitor volunteers monitored buildings in downtown Chicago during approximately 24 weeks of spring and fall migration, resulting in the recovery of 5000 migratory birds injured or

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killed by window strikes. An additional 3000 birds were recovered by volunteers throughout the non-migratory months of 2013 and from other parts of the Chicago area. Injured birds were taken to rehab – the majority were ultimately released. Dead birds collected by CBCM were donated to the Field Museum for scientific study.

- Lake Cook Audubon installed a number of Barn Owl nesting boxes in selected appropriate locations in Lake County in accordance with a barn owl recovery plan approved by IDNR.
- The Illinois Ornithological Society, joined by several other members of the BCN coalition, provided funding for a number of IOS Grants to ornithology/biology students within Illinois, supporting field research studies of our state's birds.
- Lake County Audubon erected several artificial nesting tripods for the Great Blue Herons at Almond Marsh to replace the trees that have fallen. This year's additions to the tripods were utilized by Double-crested Cormorants. The chapter held a spring "Welcome Back, Herons" event with viewing scopes and refreshments at the marsh, to increase public awareness of the marsh and its inhabitants, and drew 65 attendees. Their end-of-the-season "Cheese and Crackers with the Herons" had 71 attendees.
- BCN and a number of its member organizations sponsored high school students to attend one day of the annual joint meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union and the Cooper Ornithological Society, held in Chicago in August.

Our coalition functions effectively because of the commitment and dedication of BCN volunteers! The annual BCN thank you to all bird monitors featured a bird walk at the Hickory Knolls Natural Area in Kane County led by Jon Duerr, followed by a picnic lunch. Bill Jarvis Migratory Bird Sanctuary was the location of BCN's annual Give Back to Birds Day, featuring a bird walk led by Christine and Geoff Williamson and an onsite workday.

Thanks to all who work so diligently and effectively on behalf of the cause of bird conservation in our region and our state. The BCN coalition of 18 member organizations with an aggregate membership of more than 35,000 individuals will continue to advocate and work for the birds in 2014 and beyond.