

Bird Conservation Network: 2014, the Year in Review

The BCN Survey completed 17 years of bird monitoring in 2014! This continuing project recruits volunteer birders to identify and count the Chicago Region breeding birds at numerous sites during the breeding season. Monitors follow established scientific protocols, reporting their findings on eBird (Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online national database). Currently, 200 volunteer bird monitors in seven counties in Illinois and northwest Indiana are monitoring at more than 200 sites.

In early 2014 BCN presented its latest study, ***Breeding Birds Population Trends of the Chicago Region 1999-2012***, based on the data from the large scale monitoring effort that is the BCN Survey.

The report contains the results of a rigorous statistical analysis of breeding bird monitoring data from the Survey. There are 125,000 individual observations; almost 300,000 birds of 160 species were counted, at more than 1600 points dotted across 277 sites. Over the course of the study, volunteer bird monitors spent 10,500 hours doing point counts. Including travel time moving from one monitoring point to the next, the aggregate time spent by this dedicated group is estimated at 55,000 to 65,000 hours. This report was funded by BCN's 2013 Redstart Connection fundraising campaign. The Trends Analysis was widely publicized to the region's forest preserve districts, land managers and stewards, bird clubs and conservation organizations, and the general public, and is available [here](#).

This analysis has proven useful to land managers, stewards, ornithologists and restoration specialists. Dr. Jeff Walk, Director of Science, The Nature Conservancy, Illinois, said, "The joint BCN report is a terrific example of citizen-scientists generating information that has real conservation value. The fine-scale monitoring and short-term trend data that the dedicated volunteers are able to provide for the Chicago region is remarkable... it is very encouraging to see some species of high conservation concern bucking their longer-term, larger-scale population trends with stability or recent increases in the Chicago Region."

Dr. Mike Ward, Assistant Professor, University of Illinois and Scientist at the Illinois Natural History survey, specializing in the population dynamics and behavior of birds, commented: "It is encouraging to see the several species of grassland birds, including Bobolink, Henslow's Sparrow and Dickcissel, either increasing or holding their own. I would suggest that the great work of many Chicago Wilderness partners in restoring and managing grasslands is allowing these species to persist and potentially increase in the area."

In conjunction with the completion of the Breeding Birds Population Trends analysis, BCN published a newly updated **Chicago Wilderness Region Birds of Concern** (BOC) brochure. This project was funded by a Wildlife Preservation Fund Grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. This brochure is an update of the original BOC brochure published in 2010. The report identifies 59 breeding species needing attention. For the first time, it also includes 38 species that migrate through our area, as our region provides significant stopover habitat for these 38, a crucial element in determining their breeding fitness. Within the 59 breeding species, the level of concern/action needed, breaks down as follows:

- Level 1—immediate management needed! **11 species**
- Level 2—species showing moderate to strong declines and/or threats to breeding. **29 species**
- Level 3—declines or threats to regional populations. **8 species**
- Threatened or endangered species in one or more of the four states comprising Chicago Wilderness. **11 species**

An explanation of how the species were selected for the list is [here](#). The BOC brochure is being publicized and distributed in early 2015.

In 2014 a BCN Survey Council was established, comprised of 11 members from the seven Chicago area counties that participate in BCN's bird monitoring. The Survey Council is charged to help coordinate and manage this massive project. Council members will review Survey policies and protocols, maintain contact with land managers and promote conservation action.

BCN has been a stakeholder with the Chicago Park District in developing a new Master Plan for the Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary. Numerous meetings about the Master Plan gave BCN the opportunity to provide input and to work with the chosen landscape design firm Conservation Design Forum. Throughout this process, BCN emphasized the most important goal for Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary: To provide habitat, food and water for migratory birds. The Master Plan evolved from certain flawed original concepts and now looks very positive, providing for a slow evolution of the Montrose Point landscape over five to ten years to further benefit birds. The final plan is to be presented to the public in late January 2015.

Two bird blitz projects took place in 2014:

- BCN assisted the University of Arkansas with a survey on the migratory routes of American Woodcocks. More than 40 BCN monitors were recruited to do point counts at likely sites for woodcocks from January 15 through April 9th in 2014 and will repeat their monitoring in 2015.
- A Grassland Bird Blitz in the summer of 2104 found that Eastern Meadowlarks are abundant but Dickcissels and other grassland species were harder to find. This Blitz contributed data

to the Chicago Wilderness Grassland Bird Task Force's exercise in modeling grassland bird habitat in the region. The data will be used to set regional goals for grassland birds.

BCN is alert and active in advocacy. Our wind advocacy team continued to work successfully with Sierra Club, significantly modifying SC's position on off-shore wind energy specifically as it applies to the Great Lakes. We (and many other regional conservation groups) forcefully opposed the ill-advised Illiana Tollway; despite widespread opposition, plans moved forward. We contacted View Chicago about the proposed clear-glass-wall memorial to Daniel Burnham for the north plaza of the Field Museum, emphasizing the importance of using bird friendly glass or frosted glass. We worked to be certain that the construction of the George Lucas Museum on the lakefront will be bird-friendly. We joined the American Bird Conservancy to ask the Department of the Interior to establish a national policy governing the issue of feral and free-roaming cats, and joined several other programs spearheaded by ABC.

Bird-window collision flyers were obtained from American Bird Conservancy and labels were applied to the flyers to refer the public to Chicago Bird Collision Monitors (<http://www.birdmonitors.net>) for more information from a local source on how to prevent collisions and/or help with sick or injured birds. The flyers were distributed to BCN member organizations, nature centers, bird-supply stores, etc.

BCN member organizations initiated some significant projects on behalf of bird conservation.

Examples:

- The Chicago Bird Collision Monitors picked up more than 8000 birds in 2014, taking the injured birds to rehab and the dead to the Field Museum for its collection. CBCM continues to work successfully with building owners and managers to decrease window strikes.
- Lake County Audubon added more nesting platforms to the existing artificial platforms already installed for the Great Blue Herons nesting at Almond Marsh, where many of the original nesting trees have fallen.
- Kane County Audubon members began a program to build Chimney Swift towers to help this declining species find habitat in which to roost and nest. KCA volunteers monitor the use of the towers and were thrilled to report one nesting pair the first year.
- Several BCN coalition member groups supported the Illinois Ornithological Society's Grants Program. IOS is a BCN member, and has successfully built up the Grants Program to support innovative field research on our Illinois birds.

Our coalition functions effectively because of the commitment and dedication of BCN volunteers! The annual BCN Bird Monitor Outing "thank you" to all our monitors—the dedicated people at the heart of the BCN Survey and Trends Analysis—was held in early May at Bemis Woods.

BCN produces the Illinois Birding Calendar, a free calendar of all birding field trips and events in the Chicago region and throughout Illinois, in conjunction with Illinois Audubon Society and Illinois Ornithological Society <http://www.illinoisbirds.org/illinois-birding-calendar/>

BCN added two new member organizations in 2104: McHenry County Audubon and Loyola University of Chicago's Institute of Environmental Sustainability.

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 20 member organizations with an aggregate membership of more than 35,000 individuals will continue to advocate and work for the birds in 2015 and beyond.