

Bird Conservation Network: 2015, the Year in Review

The Bird Conservation Network coalition began 2015 by publishing and distributing a new eight-page brochure titled ***Chicago Wilderness Region Birds of Concern***, in which 59 locally breeding bird species needing conservation action are listed, as are 38 migrant species that depend on the Chicago region for critical resting and feeding habitat during migration. These BOC species are rated using a numerical gauge of concern/priority, based on their population trends within the Chicago Wilderness region (see [map](#)), compiled from 18 years of BCN's large scale, region-wide monitoring program. The brochure also provides conservation scores from Partners in Flight's regional database.

The brochure's goals:

- Provide accurate information to the public and land managers about the status of the Chicago region's bird species of concern.
- Help inform best land management practices for bird conservation.
- Provide statistically reliable information on bird population trends via the ongoing BCN Census.
- Provide an impetus to further broaden the volunteer bird monitors pool.

The new brochure was introduced to the conservation community at Wild Things on January 31st and was widely circulated to that community and to the public after the event. It is now in its 2nd printing. It can be viewed online at www.bcnbirds.org; copies may be requested at president@bcnbirds.org. Thanks to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, which generously funded the publication using contributions to the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund.

Early in 2015, BCN along with Cook County Forest Preserves brought together a Chicago-area partnership (BCN, Cook County Forest Preserves, Chicago Park District, Chicago Ornithological Society, Chicago Audubon Society, Lincoln Park Zoo Urban Wildlife Institute, Friends of the Chicago River and GreenCorps) that obtained a \$50,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Five Star & Urban Waters Restoration Program. The Chicago Park District matched the grant and plans to use its \$50,000 contribution for habitat restoration in the Burnham Wildlife Corridor. Activities planned under the grant include creation of a migratory bird monitoring protocol, community outreach, habitat restoration at LaBagh Woods and three smaller sites on Chicago's south side, bird-conservation activities and extensive International Migratory Bird Day celebrations in the city of Chicago, primarily at LaBagh Woods and the Burnham Wildlife Corridor. BCN is the facilitator for the grant fulfillment process over the next two years, ending August 31, 2017. Judy Pollock of BCN has been named Community Bird Conservation Consultant for the grant.

The BCN Survey completed its 18th year of bird monitoring in 2015! This ongoing project recruits and trains birders to follow a carefully designed protocol to identify and count the region's breeding birds at numerous sites during the breeding season. About 200 volunteer bird monitors in seven counties in Illinois are currently monitoring at more than 180 sites. The results of the monitoring are entered on eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online national database. This database provides the "raw material" upon which the population trends of the Chicago region's breeding birds are based. The most recent analysis of this large, continually expanding database was published in 2014 and can be viewed [here](#). It contains a rigorous statistical analysis of 14 years of breeding-bird-monitoring data. There are 125,000 individual observations and almost 300,000 individual birds of 160 species that have been counted at more than 1600 points dotted across Chicago region sites; volunteer bird monitors spent 10,500 hours doing point counts. The subsequent years of additional data have further increased the size and significance of this database.

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BCN has been a stakeholder with the Chicago Park District, participating in planning meetings with Conservation Design Forum (landscape design firm employed by the CPD) as the CPD developed a new Master Plan for the Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary. The final plan was released to the public in late December 2015. The first read of the document suggests that the plan is responsible, appropriate and beneficial. Most of the stakeholders' many concerns have been heard and have been addressed. Some concerns are highlighted at the end of the [plan document](#). The plan's implementation will necessarily require many years. Accessibility and entrance improvements will be implemented first, along with interpretive signage to convey the unique ecological value of Montrose Point to the general public.

An updated Bird Conservation Network brochure was also published and distributed at Wild Things in January. It may be viewed at <http://www.bcnbirds.org/z-brochureBCN.html> or copies requested by writing to president@bcnbirds.org.

Bob Fisher, BCN's Communications Chair, spoke at the Wild Things symposium on how the breeding birds in the CW Region are doing over the past 100-plus years, comparing data from several sources: the BCN Survey, the 42 years of the Illinois Spring Bird Count, the Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas (completed in the late 80s), and three Illinois Natural History Survey studies conducted 50 years apart, summarized in *Illinois Birds: A Century of Change*. Annette Prince of Chicago Bird Collision Monitors also spoke at Wild Things, presenting case studies about making buildings safer for birds. BCN representative Judy Pollock was the conference co-chair.

BCN's advocacy efforts were many and varied:

- BCN joined many groups in staunchly opposing the Illiana Tollway; we hope this poorly conceived project is finally dead.
- BCN intervened to protect the dunes complex at Waukegan Beach after the City of Waukegan illegally attempted to disrupt them. The city was ordered to cease its illegal activity by the Army Corps of Engineers and was threatened with heavy fines.
- BCN opposed the proposed Longmeadow Bridge/Parkway project in Kane County.
- Progress was made communicating with Sierra Club's national leadership to remember and apply its core values concerning wildlife and wild places, when SC is faced with impacts on wildlife (especially birds and bats) from industrial scale renewable energy development. Certain elements of SC's national leadership and certain SC Chapters seemingly ignore the wildlife impacts issue. The next test case will be SC's public position, both at the national and local level, to mega scale offshore wind turbine development in the central and western basins of Lake Erie. These two IBAs are critical to both migratory birds and wintering waterfowl.
- BCN continued to participate in the Chicago Wilderness Priority Species selection process. CW's process integrates social science and outreach perspectives, focusing on naming a small indicator group of species representing the varied habitats within the CW Region. They will be the "canaries in the coal mine" to evaluate progress on various fronts over the next five years. BCN's ability to monitor and observe bird population changes means birds will likely be well represented in the final "short list" of CW Priority Species

Bird Conservation Network: 2015, the Year in Review

BCN participated in the Cook County Forest Preserves' Millennial Celebration – *100 Years/100 Events* – leading beginning birder walks at Thatcher Woods, Deer Grove East and Skokie Lagoons. The three walks were very well-received; more than 60 beginning birders participated.

BCN Survey bird monitors were and thanked and honored for their dedication and service at a bird walk and brunch at Half Day Forest Preserve in the spring; 27 monitors attended. Suzanne Checchia, Donnie Dann and Stan Stec received recognition for more than 15 years of monitoring; Larry Bahr and Marilyn Schmidling were honored for ten years of monitoring.

A BCN group Facebook page was created and has posted some very interesting content. Members and their organizations are encouraged to post their activities and other information.

BCN coalition member organizations are very active in bird conservation efforts of their own. Examples include:

- Chicago Bird Collision Monitors (CBCM) recovered more than 8,000 birds in 2015. CBCM responded to thousands of calls for assistance with birds harmed primarily by building collisions, but also by other urban hazards such as vehicles, fishing line entanglement, poisoning and domestic animal attacks. It provided education and awareness programs to schools, architects, building management, birding groups and nature conferences throughout the year. CBCM consulted with several newly-forming light reduction and collision monitoring programs around the country and continued its collaboration as a member of National Audubon's Bird Friendly Building committee.
- BCN's newest member, The Wetlands Initiative, conducted a 24-hour BioBlitz at TWI's Dixon Waterfowl Refuge (formerly Hennepin-Hopper) in mid June; more than 100 participants came to find as many species of birds, plants, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and insects as possible.
- COS did a Big Year at LaBagh Woods to raise money for new native plantings for habitat restoration at the site. Many planting days were held (with hundreds of volunteers) and thousands of dollars were raised in 2015 to help fund the replanting of the forest's understory after the removal of the non-native vegetation. Five bird monitors tallied 167 species at LaBagh in 2015, including nesting Broad-winged Hawks and Eastern Screech Owls.
- DuPage Birding Club persuaded the DuPage County FPD and Waste Management to defer mowing the Green Valley closed landfill until after August 15th to benefit grassland nesting birds.
- Evanston North Shore Bird Club and its allies adopted the newly dedicated Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary, bordering the south end of the Northwestern University campus. This site is remediation for the trees the university removed to build a Visitor Center. Plans are underway for maintenance and future habitat development at the Sanctuary.

Thanks to all who work diligently and effectively on behalf of the cause of bird conservation in our region and our state. The BCN coalition of 21 member organizations, representing an aggregate

Bird Conservation Network: 2015, the Year in Review

membership of more than 35,000 individuals, will continue to advocate and work for the birds in 2016 and beyond. We all know that birds need all the help they can get!

BCN Member Organizations:

- Audubon Chicago Region
- Chicago Audubon Society
- Chicago Bird Collision Monitors
- Chicago Ornithological Society
- DuPage Birding Club
- Evanston North Shore Bird Club
- Fort Dearborn Audubon Society
- Illinois Audubon Society
- Illinois Ornithological Society
- Kane County Audubon Society
- Lake-Cook Audubon Society
- Lake County Audubon Society
- Loyola Institute of Environmental Sustainability
- McHenry County Audubon Society
- Midewin Tallgrass Prairie Alliance
- The Nature Conservancy of Illinois
- Peoria Audubon Society
- Prairie Woods Audubon Society
- The Wetlands Initiative
- Thorn Creek Audubon Society
- Will County Audubon Society