

Bird Conservation Network: 2016, the Year in Review

In 2016, the Bird Conservation Network coalition continued its bird monitoring efforts and advocacy for sound environmental and conservation decisions. Here are highlights:

The BCN Survey completed its 19th year of bird monitoring. Approximately 200 bird monitors have been trained to follow protocols to identify and document the presence of birds at more than 180 sites in Illinois counties during the breeding season. Results are entered into eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology's online national database. Each year's monitoring results are transmitted to land managers, researchers and stewards so they can track their restoration efforts and their effect on the bird life at their sites, including species they might prioritize for management. BCN operates a Survey Council composed of leaders from each county.

BCN contracted with the Urban Wildlife Institute of the Lincoln Park Zoo to develop a protocol for bird migration monitoring at Montrose Point, LaBagh Woods and Burnham Wildlife Corridor. The goal: Evaluate if habitat restoration work benefits migratory birds and how birds are using the restored lands. A successful monitoring season was completed at Montrose and LaBagh Woods in the spring, and at Montrose in the fall. BCN is offering a class with the CPD to train monitors for Burnham Wildlife Corridor.

BCN, represented by Bob Fisher, joined Chicago Wilderness in CW's program to designate a variety of species as critically endangered and in need of protection in the Chicago region. Three bird species were designated: Henslow's Sparrow, Red-headed Woodpecker and Bobolink. These designations highlight the importance of these species to land managers and stewards so management decisions can concentrate on habitat improvements that reverse population declines. Other species that occur in the same habitats show similar declines, so restoration will benefit a much broader community.

The reports of Red-headed Woodpecker Blitzes of 2012 and 2013 are now available on BCN's website at www.bcnbirds.org. Using established scientific protocols, BCN monitors scoured Cook, Lake, McHenry, Will, Kane and DuPage counties for these woodpeckers and their nests. Because of regional threats and documented declines, conservation action is needed. Baseline data are essential to assessing the success of any actions taken. During the 2012-2013 study period, a total of 63 monitors documented 69 nesting sites, 47 confirmed nesting pairs, 43 fledged juveniles and a total of 153 Red-headed Woodpeckers. Monitors also identified nest tree and habitat preferences which are noted on the BCN website.

The funding for this project has dried up (at least temporarily); BCN continues to look for ways to publicize Red-headed Woodpecker conservation as a regional priority.

BCN successfully opposed IL House Bill 4671, which aimed to use public funds to support feral cat colonies and Trap, Neuter, Return programs, practices that are identified as one of the major anthropogenic mortality factors for our native birds. BCN strongly asserts that the environment and our native wildlife should not have to shoulder the

burden of cat overpopulation and has adopted a position on free-roaming cats, urging humane removal of all cats from the outdoors (*see appendix*).

BCN teamed up with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Preserves of Cook County to sponsor trips highlighting conservation success stories at Eggers Grove, Bergman Slough & Cap Sauer Woodlands, Orland Grasslands, Powderhorn Prairie and Marsh, McGinnis Slough and LaBagh Woods.

BCN organized an International Migratory Bird Day celebration at Burnham Wildlife Corridor, working with nine community partners. This celebration was funded via a two-year grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Plans are underway for a second celebration in 2017, this time at LaBagh Woods.

BCN sponsored two Give Back to Birds Workdays with associated bird walks. The first was at Rainbow Beach – the work part of the day was curtailed because of torrential downpours. The second, at Bill Jarvis Migratory Bird Sanctuary, had great weather and participants were able to help with removing seed heads of invasive nonnative and overly aggressive native species.

Donnie Dann, BCN's Advocacy Chair, continued his pursuit of a bird-friendly building ordinance in Highland Park. While the city did not enact a mandatory ordinance, it provided guidelines and published a brochure with recommendations that can serve as a model for communities everywhere. A similar initiative is underway in Chicago. Dann continues to offer advice to BCN member organizations that plan to pursue bird-friendly building legislation or guidelines in their communities.

BCN bird monitors celebrated their 2016 efforts with a bird walk at Orland Grasslands, followed by a picnic at Tampier Lake West. Lee Ramsey was honored for his 18 years of dedicated service as coordinator of the BCN Survey. With Lee's retirement, Emma England has taken over as survey coordinator.

Donnie Dann continues to communicate BCN's positions and concerns on local, regional and national conservation issues. In 2016, BCN opposed the Illiana Expressway, the construction of huge water mains through Illinois Beach State Park, music festivals in Douglas Park, IDOT's proposal for the Shawnee Parkway in southernmost Illinois and the granting of 30-year take permits for eagles. We supported Representative Mike Quigley's bill HR 2280, the Federal Bird-Safe Buildings Act.

The constituent groups of the BCN coalition were involved in many independent conservation initiatives around the region, ranging from a massive restoration effort at LaBagh Woods (where more than 1000 native shrubs were planted by volunteers) to partnering with the Chicago Park District to assess remnant wetland sites in the Calumet area for restoration to benefit declining wetland-dependent species. BCN members served as "watch dogs" on projects around the region, from the restoration of Big Marsh near Lake Calumet to the proposed Longmeadow Parkway in Kane County. Representatives

from coalition members kept BCN apprised of developments and of the ways BCN could act in support.

BCN Member Organizations:

- Audubon Great Lakes
www.greatlakes.audubon.org
- Chicago Audubon Society
www.chicagoaudubon.org
- Chicago Bird Collision Monitors
www.birdmonitors.net
- Chicago Ornithological Society
www.chicagobirder.org
- DuPage Birding Club
www.dupagebirding.org
- Evanston North Shore Bird Club
www.ensbc.org
- Fort Dearborn Audubon Society
www.fortdearbornaudubon.org
- Illinois Audubon Society
www.illinoisaudubon.org
- Illinois Ornithological Society
www.illinoisbirds.org
- Kane County Audubon Society
www.kanecountyaudubon.org
- Lake-Cook Audubon Society
www.lakecookaudubon.org
- Lake County Audubon Society
www.lakecountyaudubon.org
- Loyola Institute of Environmental Sustainability
www.luc.edu/sustainability
- McHenry County Audubon Society
www.mchenryaudubon.org
- Midewin Tallgrass Prairie Alliance
www.sites.google.com/site/midewinalliance
- The Nature Conservancy of Illinois
www.nature.org/Illinois
- Peoria Audubon Society
www.peoriaaudubon.org
- Prairie Woods Audubon Society
www.pwa-il.org
- The Wetlands Initiative
www.wetlands-initiative.org
- Thorn Creek Audubon Society
www.thorncreekaudubonsociety.org
- Will County Audubon Society
www.willcountyaudubon.org

APPENDIX

Bird Conservation Network Position on Free-roaming Cats

At a time when nearly a third of North American bird species are in documented decline, releasing additional cats into the wild is a practice in direct opposition to the many attempts by conservation organizations to turn the tide on these declines¹.

Conservative estimates put the number of birds killed by free-roaming cats at 1.4 billion in the United States every year, with that number possibly as high as 4 billion; the number for small native mammals killed is even higher².

Cats are also one of the main vectors for several diseases that affect people, including rabies. Toxoplasmosis (for which cats are the leading vector) can cause serious birth defects when a woman is infected during pregnancy and it is the most common cause of certain retinal infections that can lead to blindness. There are increasing concerns with serious infections such as *Pasteurella multocida* that are transmitted through cat bites or scratches.

There are already an estimated 80 million free-roaming cats in North America³. Proposals to establish additional cat colonies will result in even greater devastation of wildlife and more negative health consequences. While “Trap, Neuter and Release/Return” programs may slow the growth of cat colonies in some cases, the released cats will continue to kill wildlife throughout the course of their lives. While rat control is often the rationale for the establishment of feral cat colonies, in an outdoor setting, there is no scientific evidence that free-roaming cats control rat populations.

Because of free-roaming cats' impact on native wildlife populations and their potential as disease vectors, the Bird Conservation Network:

- > Strongly opposes the establishment of new outdoor cat colonies.
- > Strongly opposes the maintenance of outdoor cats whether individuals or colonies.
- > Supports programs to urge owners to keep their cats indoors, the adoption of un-owned cats and the humane removal of free-roaming cats from the outdoors.

¹North American Bird Conservation Initiative, State of North American Birds, 2016:
<http://www.stateofthebirds.org/2016/overview/results-summary/>

²Loss, S., T. Will, and P. Marra. 2013. The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States. *Nature Communications* 4:1396:
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235382340> The impact of free-ranging domestic cats on wildlife of the United States

³American Bird Conservancy – Cats Indoors! <https://abcbirds.org/threat/cats-and-other-invasives/>

Other useful references:

Wildlife Society: <http://wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/28-Feral-Free-Ranging-Cats.pdf>

American Veterinary Medical Association: <https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Free-roaming-Abandoned-and-Feral-Cats.aspx>

Florida Fish and Game: http://myfwc.com/media/1348637/Domestic_Cats_whitepaper.pdf

Longcore, T., C. Rich, and L. M. Sullivan. 2009. Critical assessment of claims regarding management of feral cats by trap-neuter-return. *Conservation Biology* 23:887-894.: <http://www.urbanwildlands.org/Resources/2009LongcoreetalConBio.pdf>

BCN is a coalition of 21 organizations sharing an interest in the conservation of birds. BCN promotes public awareness, knowledge, appreciation and enjoyment of birds, and other wildlife and wildlife habitat. BCN proposes and supports public and private programs designed to protect, restore, and enhance the natural environment, and conserve/increase native bird populations.