

## **FINAL MINUTES**

### **Bird Conservation Network Saturday, April 16, 2022 Online Video Conference**

#### **QUARTERLY MEETING**

**Attendees:** Pat Andersen (TCA), Tim Balassie (KCA), Mary Bernat (At-Large), Diann Bilderback (DBC), Sonny Cohen (Lake-Cook), Donnie Dann (TNC), Dennis Endicott (PAS), Bob Fisher (IAS), Jim Giocomo (ABC), Diane Hicks (TCA), Vera Leopold (TWI), Mary Lou Mellon (CBCM), Charlotte Pavelka (LCA), Judy Pollock (CAS), Annette Prince (CBCM), Carla Schmakel (LCA), Eric Secker (KCA), Aubrey Sirman (Loyola), Dave Taliaferro (Lake-Cook), Lee Witkowski (WCA), Lisette Zaid (CAS)

**Guests:** None

**Call to Order:** President Secker called the meeting to order at 1:07 pm. A quorum was present with 14 member groups represented. Everyone introduced themselves and stated their name and organization(s) they were affiliated with. Secker thanked everyone for attending virtually and said he would like to get everyone together sometime this summer for an in-person event.

#### **Administration:**

##### **1. Approval of minutes of January 29, 2022 Annual Meeting**

##### **2. Approval of minutes of January 29, 2022 Quarterly Meeting**

**Motion:** Bird Conservation Network approves the minutes of the Annual and Quarterly meetings on January 29, 2022, as presented.

Moved: Sonny Cohen

Seconded: Donnie Dann

Action: Approved

##### **3. Membership & Treasurer's Report (Pavelka)**

###### **1) Membership Report**

Pavelka stated that everyone is paid up on their dues and thanked all reps for their promptness. We currently have two individual at-large members and 20 member organizations.

###### **2) Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer's Report is attached at the end of this document. McHenry Audubon gave a donation in support of the Trends Analysis effort. Other items are straightforward, and there has not been much spending to date this year. Planned new expenses will be coming up over the next few months. BCN currently has a checkbook balance of \$9700, but with our projected budget, we expect to end the year at around

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\$4800. We had budgeted \$2000 for the Trends Analysis communication and up to \$5000 was approved at the October meeting. Another \$3000 is budgeted for the website redevelopment and \$500 for monitor training and recognition.

### **4. Consideration of new at-large members: Ted Wolff and Robert Kusel (Secker)**

Secker said that we are today considering two new at-large members to join BCN. Ted Wolff has been a BCN rep before and is looking to rejoin as an at-large member; he was nominated at the January 29th quarterly meeting. He worked in landscape architecture for a long time and has been involved in a number of restoration projects in Chicagoland. He is active in many birding clubs, as well as IOS. Secker said he is also looking to bring Wolff on the Executive Committee as an at-large member.

**Motion:** Accept Ted Wolff as an at-large member of BCN.

Moved: Donnie Dann

Seconded: Bob Fisher

Action: Approved

Secker then asked for a second vote to appoint Ted Wolff as an at-large ExComm member. In the past, some presidents have simply appointed at-large ExComm members, but calling a vote on them is a good step for accountability.

**Motion:** Accept Ted Wolff as an at-large member of the BCN Executive Committee.

Moved: Donnie Dann

Seconded: Judy Pollock

Action: Approved

Secker shared that the second at-large representative to be considered is Robert Kusel. Kusel has been active with many advocacy issues, including Carvana, and Bob Fisher brought him to our attention. Kusel has worked with *NewsWeek*, the *New York Times*, and more. Fisher added that Kusel is a commercial photographer and a constituent of the state representative who introduced House Bill 5204, regarding turning out building lights. Kusel is quite active with advocacy and Fisher thinks he would be a great addition to BCN. Dann added he is an articulate speaker and expresses himself well.

Mary Bernat pointed out that according to BCN bylaws, new members need to be nominated at a quarterly meeting and then voted on at the next quarterly meeting. Vera Leopold agreed this is the correct process per bylaws, and no vote is needed at this time; Kusel is nominated.

### **Projects & Initiatives:**

#### **1. BCN Trends Analysis and RFP Updates (Bilderback)**

Diann Bilderback reviewed the goals that are the foundation of the Trends Analysis communication program. These are to influence land managers, serve as a catalyst for researchers, educate the public about the importance of local natural areas for birds,

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take advantage of a growing interest in birds, and elevate the visibility and positive reputation of BCN.

Bilderback then shared the progress on the communication project to date. She has completed the messaging platform. It has an outline that shares high-level findings by habitat, suggests why certain trends might be occurring, cites topics for potential research, and calls out priority birds of conservation concern. This is the outline for all the tools we will develop to tell our story. The messaging was completed in early March 2022 with input from about 16 people, including our science advisers, expert birders in our community, and the core TA team, made up of Eric Secker, Sonny Cohen, Bob Fisher, Judy Pollock, and Bilderback.

This outline provided the foundation for the first two deliverables: (1) a narrative that follows this messaging platform; and (2) a matching slide presentation. Bilderback said the heavy lifting is done and now it's "showtime"; we are ready to start presenting this to audiences!

We have also published two Requests for Proposal (RFPs) for contract help as we roll out the messaging to the general public. These are:

- 1) Media Relations – helping BCN win some positive coverage in media outlets; and
- 2) Video/Photography – video and photo content to support the announcement and provide social media/website content.

The RFPs will be circulated to all reps. The close date for proposals is April 25<sup>th</sup>.

Bilderback shared that initial outreach has begun to partners such as eBird and the Grassland Task Force. She reported that these organizations were very positive about the TA and what's been accomplished. For example, Chris Wood described the TA data as a "treasure trove of information." Secker said that hopefully there will be some collaborative opportunities with eBird in the future. eBird is interested in getting our PR.

Bilderback then reviewed the key takeaways of the TA she had previously shared. A major takeaway is that more than half of the bird species we surveyed are either stable or expanding in the Chicago Wilderness area, which is better than in the rest of Illinois. We are in a special place in this northeastern Illinois corridor.

All BCN reps were emailed an invite to a presentation on these findings the evening of April 25<sup>th</sup>. BCN reps and monitors are the first priority group to hear the findings, since the volunteer monitors are why we even have the findings, while our member orgs have funded us all along. A second priority audience is the land managers and special-interest groups (e.g., Chicago Region Trees Initiative, Grassland Task Force, Oak Ecosystems Recovery Group). Then we will move on to sharing the messaging with the regional conservation community, including those who may not be exclusively focused on birds but will likely have an interest and could be partners with us on various research projects. Finally, messaging will be shared with the general public. These are the near-term priorities over the next 45 days.

Bilderback explained that the timeline for TA communication has been extended by

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approximately a month for a few reasons. We expect it will take from Q2 to Q3 to get briefings on people's calendars and to gather people together. She anticipates events will happen well into the summer and possibly into the fall. We are currently targeting mid-May for the public news announcement. A news release will go over the wire, and we need a media communications professional to help us win some coverage. Birding clubs, libraries, building owners, and others may respond to this general announcement and want to learn more.

Bernat thanked Bilderback for all her time-consuming work on the project. Secker added that since Bilderback joined BCN, we've been able to get a lot more done on this messaging in-house. He pointed everyone to the email invite and registration link for the April 25th presentation.

Leopold said she will send out the two RFPs to all reps ASAP after the meeting. She encouraged reps to share them with any contractors who they feel would be good possible respondents. It is a short timeline, and we want to make sure we cast a wide net and get some quality proposals to help spread the word with the excellent messaging Bilderback has put together.

Jim Giocomo asked whether the messaging is tying our regional monitoring data to the 3 Billion Birds gone report. This report caught a lot of attention. Bilderback responded that yes, we reference that report specifically in the narrative. Our findings are relevant, and it is important to make that connection.

Pollock said that a recent study was published about birds nesting earlier in our region. The authors—John Bates, Chris Whelan, and Mason Fidino—creatively used Field Museum collections to determine earlier nesting. It would be interesting to compare our findings. Birds that were moving their nests earlier in shrublands and woodlands appeared to be the same species that showed positive TA trends. Pollock said she talked with the authors, and they are interested in following up and possibly doing another study to compare BCN findings, Breeding Bird Survey data, and the 3 Billion Birds info. Pollock will refer Aubrey Sirman and Secker to the authors so they can follow up on this possibility. This is one example of how our work fits into a larger scientific context and can help illuminate what's going on with birds in the region. The nesting birds study authors were also interested that local savanna restoration could be leading to an increase in Red-headed Woodpeckers. This is another area for further study.

Secker said we have a huge amount of data from Chicago-region forest preserves that are being actively managed. We want to make sure we keep moving forward and learning more, not just presenting the data. We have a great product now put together that we wouldn't have otherwise, which is very exciting.

## 2. BCN Survey Update (Balassie)

Balassie said that June is coming around, and we will soon be communicating with all BCN monitors to get them out into the field early to review their survey points. Balassie also thanked the reps for helping to communicate with their memberships about

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volunteer monitor opportunities. After he made this request at the January meeting, a lot of new interested people reached out about the Survey, and many of them are qualified to be monitors. The county coordinators are also working hard to recruit new monitors. We have been able to expand, adding new preserves and new habitats to create a more robust database for the BCN Survey.

Balassie posed a challenge: **When reps go back to your memberships, please think of one person who might make a good monitor, then approach them and see if they would consider it.** This would be a great adjunct to the recruitment that has already been done. Balassie will also make the same challenge to current monitors in the next newsletter

Balassie and the county coordinators are working on a monitor appreciation event. A few separate events are being considered that would combine two counties, with the thought that we may get more participation if the events are more local to where monitors live. With \$500 currently budgeted, Balassie said he would like to talk with ExComm to see if that budget can be increased to cater a nice lunch. Secker asked how much more might be needed for volunteer appreciation events. Balassie responded he was not sure yet and would need to discuss further with county coordinators.

Balassie said we have been reaching out to all agency organizations about the Survey and maintaining a good relationship with them. They appreciate what we're doing, and Balassie thinks they will be very interested in the findings BCN has put together.

### **3. BCN Website Revision (Secker, Cohen)**

Secker shared that he and Sonny Cohen have done some content mapping for the website, though Secker has taken a sidestep to work on branding. Secker shared an updated logo and colors for the website and newsletter. Everyone is welcome to provide feedback on these to him back-channel.

Over the next month, Secker and Cohen will work toward rolling out the new website design and putting new pages together. Some content needs updating and some new copy is needed, but things are progressing well. The hope is to roll out the new website when we are rolling out the TA messaging, so that the website reflects a modern and reputable organization. They could go back and build out some additional content later.

Cohen restated their anticipated timeline for the website. Over the next 90 days, they should make some substantial progress and get a new site in a staged (non-public) environment for more people to review.

### **Advocacy/Conservation Issues:**

#### **1. Report from Advocacy Chair Donnie Dann**

Dann presented a portion of his written advocacy report verbally but had to leave the meeting early.

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- Supported an all-court press in opposition to the Carvana tower in Skokie. Regrettably, with minor concessions, the tower was approved.
- Considerable effort was made, primarily by Bob Fisher, on two bills that came before the General Assembly in the session just concluded. Both bills were scuttled which is disappointing relative to a bill that would have furthered the “lights out” campaign. Importantly, a bill that would have allowed wind turbines everywhere and anywhere in Lake Michigan also failed.
- Signed on to an effort to significantly increase funding in Congress for endangered species conservation in FY2023.
- Signed on to a petition to ban agricultural pesticides on National Wildlife Refuges.
- Supported action to reform the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s process for listing species as threatened or endangered.

Dann noted that Bob Kusel was a lead advocate on the Carvana issue. The tower will be built and lit 24/7 but diminished in lighting and the lower floors will be covered. Advocates achieved a partial gain, but Dann thought it was mostly a loss.

Annette Prince said she hopes this sparks additional advocacy work elsewhere and that there are more bird-safe buildings in Illinois in the future. Secker added in his view the outcome was a win, as there didn’t seem to be much chance with the village board of getting the tower project stopped entirely. A lot of concessions were won, though it wasn’t everything we wanted. Fisher recognized Chicago Bird Collision Monitors for their leadership in the Carvana effort.

Balassie asked whether doing surveys to detect bird mortality around the structure is part of the plan. Prince said that was included in the agreement and monitoring will be done, but if there prove to be a large number of strikes, Carvana may not do anything in response. There appeared to be no intention to retrofit the building.

Pollock added that Skokie residents are now talking about changing their system of village government, as they realized village officials were not really representing them. This seemed to be an outcome of the Carvana decision; like many things we do, it was an important exercise in democracy.

Bernat asked whether birds circling the building attracted by the lights is also a threat. Prince said yes, lighting is important and they did agree to some light reduction, but glass remains the primary source of concern for mitigating harm to birds.

## 2. Other Advocacy Issues

### 1) Illinois 30x30 Initiative (Fisher)

Fisher said that the state has created a commission charged with developing a plan to have 30% of Illinois’ land area in natural communities by 2030. That commission will issue its report by the end of June, and they are holding listening sessions to get public input. Fisher presented a short talk on behalf of BCN and gave them a one-page statement. The focus was on the value of the TA in the context of those natural lands and how to make sure they’re doing what they should be. Fisher noted two issues he

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saw with Illinois' campaign: The 30% goal is likely impossible to achieve unless the definition of "natural land" is broadened, and any natural areas program needs to include adequate funding for habitat management, not just land acquisition.

### **2) Challenge Grant – Caldwell Woods (Secker)**

The Cook County Forest Preserve District reached out to Secker and COS about upcoming meetings to gather input on what the public would like to see at Caldwell Woods and two other sites that have been selected as gateways. The District has some grant money to do work there. COS was not able to attend because of a date conflict. Secker passed this along to some active BCN monitors in that area. There are questions of active or passive recreation and the possibility of more development.

### **3) Illinois HB 5204 – Nighttime Lighting (Fisher)**

Fisher explained that State Representative Denyse Stoneback introduced House Bill 5204 after her involvement with the Carvana issue. In its first iteration, the bill had a fairly narrow focus on switching any steadily burning lights on communication towers and similar structures to flashing lights. It subsequently extended to include the concept of "lights out," especially for buildings that are adjacent to Lake Michigan, then further evolved to include establishing a commission that would create a report on best practices for addressing light pollution and casualties of nocturnal migrants.

The bill did not advance out of committee for a full vote in the House, and the House session is now closed. Rep. Stoneback said they hope to get it passed in the November veto session, and she asked for BCN's support. Fisher will put together notes on what individuals and BCN as an organization can do.

Fisher also discussed another bill introduced in the Illinois House by Rep. Gabel that would allow bypassing much of the regulatory process for the placement of utility-scale wind turbines in Lake Michigan. The contracts would be executed over a one-year timeline. After the bill did not advance, the language was slipped into other bills or amendments, but those also did not advance. Lack of regulatory oversight would be a problem if the Gabel bill were to pass in the future.

### **4) Bell Bowl Prairie**

There were no new action items on Bell Bowl Prairie. (This website <https://www.savebellbowlprairie.org/> has the latest updates on this issue.)

### **5) Lakefront Casino**

Fisher said that one of the proposed sites for a new Chicago casino was McCormick Place, which has already been known long-term to cause serious bird mortality. The city has decided to withdraw that site from consideration as a location, but it did not appear to have anything to do with bird risk. No decision has been made yet where a casino would be located.

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Prince added that there were public hearings recently where three casino proposals were presented. There is a committee of aldermen working on deciding requirements, but the ultimate decision comes down to the mayor. She expects it will not be long before we hear a site selection. Bird-Friendly Chicago had a representative at each of the meetings to ask what was being considered for bird-friendly design and is sending letters to further communicate concerns. To date, they have received poor responses; the city wants the building to be bright and “flashy.”

Chicago’s bird-friendly ordinance is not yet in place, otherwise the casino would have to meet bird-friendly requirements. The ordinance was approved in 2020, but the Department of Planning says they’re not ready to implement it yet. We need to make sure the implementation of the ordinance is not delayed further.

Leopold asked if there is something BCN could do as a whole to help drive the implementation of the ordinance forward. Prince said they are going back to the planning commission one more time, and then will be looking at ways to apply more pressure with the mayor’s office, etc. They could look to other groups for advocacy help.

Pollock stated it is important for vague language to be replaced with concrete info on what bird-friendly glass and buildings look like. Evanston has been working on a bird-friendly ordinance for a long time; because it was included in the Evanston sustainability plan, they are now going ahead and doing work on all elements of it. It appears Evanston will have some regulations in place before Chicago! Pollock also shared that Bird-Friendly Chicago has created a wonderful booklet on what it means to comply with the ordinance, which provides a useful resource.

Charlotte Pavelka shared that Lake County is also moving forward with a bird-friendly ordinance. A public hearing was held, and it is being further written up for a second public hearing by the environmental committee.

Secker said he was pleased by how far we have come since BCN first started working on the issue of bird-friendly buildings 20 years ago. Several municipalities are now working on legislation! Fisher added he is meeting with the driving force within the DuPage County administration building complex. They had done research through the American Bird Conservancy website on the issue. Awareness of the need for bird-friendly buildings is definitely higher than it was.

Reps discussed resources or standard materials that could be shared with groups that reach out to BCN about bird-friendly buildings for guidance. Prince said the Bird-Friendly Chicago booklet is still in draft form and not yet a public document, but could be shared. BCN could also just refer contacts to Chicago Bird Collision Monitors. Though the basic principles are readily available, the specific products change frequently, and a one-pager could become outdated quickly. Architects need to consult with experts on the various tools available, not just treat one solution as a silver bullet. The recommendation(s) that will be most effective depend on the specific building project.



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### **Old Business**

#### **1. Bylaws Proposal: Adding General Members (Secker)**

Secker said he would like to revisit a bylaws change that was proposed by Terry Schilling in the past: Allowing interested individuals to join BCN as general members and receive a newsletter, info, etc. with smaller, modest membership dues assessed. He would like to bring a proposal next meeting for changing the bylaws. The goal is to allow people to join BCN like they would other nonprofits or birding clubs. It is important for BCN to be expanding our reach, increasing awareness and getting more people involved at a basic level.

Bernat asked how this proposal would affect the current members-at-large. Secker responded it would not affect anyone who is a current voting rep; it would just entail allowing people to join BCN in a minor role as non-voting members. BCN members currently, including both individuals and organization representatives, are like BCN's board of directors. This group of reps is in charge of voting on issues and setting the organization's direction. At-large members have typically been people who have an active involvement in conservation. He wants to move away from the "members" term.

Balassie said he thinks this is a great idea. There are many people who understand the work we do and would be interested in supporting it. He questioned what we can offer to make it worthwhile for people to join; do they receive updates, a newsletter, etc.? First, we should have a structure for how we would put the program into effect. Secker responded that we would not start accepting individual members immediately, but perhaps could target next year. This would give time to determine what to put together that would provide value to members. Bilderback suggested action alerts on pending bills and other issues could be part of the mix of deliverables for members.

### **New Business**

There was no new business.

### **Announcements**

Stephanie Beilke asked whether BCN has discussed avian flu. Member groups are receiving inquiries and requests for a statement on whether people should take down bird feeders. There has been a lot of mixed messaging, with some saying it is probably a good idea to take feeders down as a preventive measure, even though we have yet to see impact to songbirds. BCN could be an avenue to get the message out consistently.

Giocomo said he hasn't seen any specific recommendations for Illinois, but some states are seeing impacts on all different bird species. Congregating birds is not helping them. Carla Schmakel shared some recent articles on Illinois impacts of bird flu in the chat:

- <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/environment/ct-dead-birds-avian-flu-illinois-20220414-mp6rsls54ndpbl7ylh5zz6hzrm-story.html>
- <https://abc7chicago.com/bakers-lake-barrington-illinois-bird-flu-2022/11749159/>

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- <https://news.wttw.com/2022/04/15/over-200-birds-are-suspected-have-died-avian-flu-chicago-area-forest-preserve>

### **Proposed Next Meeting**

July 2022– Zoom videoconference? The date is TBD.

### **Adjourn**

**Motion:** Adjourn the meeting.

Moved: Bob Fisher

Seconded: Charlotte Pavelka

Action: Approved

Meeting adjourned at 2:47 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Vera Leopold  
Secretary*

## Treasurer's Report - BCN Meeting – April 2022

### 1) Membership Report

2022 membership paid by 20 organizations/1 individual. 1 Individual outstanding. 1 Reciprocal organization.

### 2) Treasurer's Report

| 2022 Income                              | Budget YE 22         | YTD                |  |
|--|----------------------|--------------------|--|
| Dues:                                    | \$ 2,070.00          | \$ 2,035.00        |  |
| Donations - General:                     | \$ 100.00            | \$ 219.11          | Mchenry Audubon \$150, David Johnson \$15, Bob Fisher \$35, Casey Guernsey \$19.11 |
| Donations - Paypal prior yr transfer     | \$ -                 | \$ 77.92           |  |
| Annual Transfer to Trends from General:  | \$ 500.00            | \$ 500.00          |  |
| Total:                                   | <b>\$ 2,670.00</b>   | <b>\$ 2,832.03</b> |  |
| 2022 Expenses                            |                      |                    |  |
| Program Expenses                         |                      |                    |  |
| Trends Communication                     | \$ 2,000.00          | \$ -               | Up to \$5000 was approved at Oct '21 Mtg; \$0 Paid to Date                         |
| Monitor Training & Recognition           | \$ 500.00            | \$ -               |  |
| Website Redevelopment                    | \$ 3,000.00          | \$ -               | Approved at Oct '21 Mtg  |
| BCN Web Site Hosting                     | \$ 600.00            | \$ -               |  |
| Dues/Fees to other organizations         | \$ 200.00            | \$ -               | IEC \$150, Chicago Wilderness \$50   |
| Administrative Expenses                  | \$ 150.00            | \$ 18.00           |  |
| Transfer from General to Trends Analysis | \$ 500.00            | \$ 500.00          |  |
| Total:                                   | <b>\$ 6,950.00</b>   | <b>\$ 518.00</b>   |  |
| 2022 Net Income                          | <b>\$ (4,280.00)</b> | <b>\$ 2,314.03</b> |  |
| Checkbook balance -4/6/2022              |                      | \$9,726.44         |  |
| Trends Analysis Reserve:                 | \$ (673.40)          | \$ 1,326.60        |  |
| General Funds Balance                    | \$ 5,465.84          | \$ 8,399.84        |  |
| Total Balance                            | <b>\$ 4,792.44</b>   | <b>\$ 9,726.44</b> |  |