

Urban Bird Collective | MOU Savaloja Grant Report 2019

IN APRIL 2019 the Minnesota Ornithologists Union granted the Urban Bird Collective a \$3,500 Savaloja Grant to expand the core trainers for the Urban Bird Collective.



“Support from the Savaloja grant fund gave us a solid start to this wonderful project and outstanding group of individuals. We were able to use that support to talk with other organizations and develop partnerships and networking opportunities.”

~Monica Bryand

Our vision is to empower those individuals who are already immersed in their neighborhoods, have a strong connection to the people and the place

and an interest in the natural world, to lead others in exploring birds and nature close to home. Through this shared experience they will build community connections, increase awareness and stewardship of birds and nature and facilitate ongoing multi-generational participation in outdoor recreation – for the health of people and birds.

Our goal for 2019 was to expand the Collective to include eight additional minority leaders who were mentored by the existing eight leaders (Dan Hawkweiler, Heather Lou, Jae Hyun Shim, Hope Flanagan, Jane Shallow, Quantina Beck-Jones, Rofina Madadalutta and Elianne McMahon Miller) and the two original mentors (Monica Bryand and Joanna Eckles). Building a solid group of approximately 16 community leaders, we anticipated having three or more leaders at each walk we led, making the experience less stressful for the leaders while being more educational, fun and engaging for all. Four of the new cohort members were participants from our 2018 walks.

Our Approach was to continue to stay intentionally informal and outdoors as much as possible, while expanding our connections to other resources and networks. We still explored the question “What do you need to feel comfortable leading birding outings in your community?” This question was asked of both the first and second year leaders.

Leaders want:

- to become better birders
- to learn where to go and how to access and use existing resources
- to develop skills in leading others exploring birds and birding
- to create a safe and welcoming community to learn and grow with, to inspire and be inspired by others
- to get to know each other better and develop new friendships
- to learn more about plants, trees, insects and much more
- to explore more Twin City birding spots and greater MN hot spots

Our Timeline, Activities and Results

- Jan-Dec 2019 - monthly birding/dinner gatherings. We invited the second cohort in May 2019
- April 2019 - added the new cohort of leaders to the group
- April 2019 – began team-building. Connecting and meeting up in outdoor places. Ongoing.
- April through November 2019 met with other local organizations which included, the city of Saint Paul, MN River Valley National Wildlife Refuge (MN RVNWR), MN National Parks folks, Lower Phalen Creek Project.
- May 2019 – Planned five birding outings as part of the Twin Cities Urban Birding Festival. Unfortunately the Festival was rained out. We still led walks on these days with members of our networks and FB Group.
 - April 14th - kid session and walk at the MN RVNWR
 - May 4th Roberts Bird Sanctuary
 - May 10-12 - Warbler Weekend
 - May 23rd dinner and walk at the MN RVNWR
 - June 2nd South side Neighborhood
- Summer 2019 – continuing education and community building outings for Collective members
 - Leaders hosted walks for their friends and family
 - In August we participated as a group in the Pollinator Festival put on by the Native American organization the Lower Phalen Creek Project.
 - We worked with the National Parks Service to offer our group a kayaking trip down the Mississippi
 - Monica took several leaders and community members on a kayak trip to Pigs Eye Lake and she also took a group of Indigenous and women of color kayaking at Pickerel Lake
 - Several informal bird walks with leaders
 - Continue to build the Urban Birder's Collective Facebook community page as a way of connecting our target community.
- September and October 2019 -
 - met to defrief the spring and summer and plan for 2020
 - Met with the MN RVNWR to discuss partnering for a spring birding event. We have agreed to work together and build a partnership that will support the work of the



Urban Bird Collective and support their goal of bringing in a more diverse constituency to the center.

- o led four birding outings
 - Sept 14 - Roberts Bird Sanctuary
 - Sept 19th - led a trip to Sherburne Wildlife Refuge
 - Oct 6 - Old Cedar Ave Bridge
 - Oct 12 - invited members to the Hawk Ridge Gala and birding on Saturday
- November 2019 – met for dinner to assess collaboration so far and next steps. We all agreed to move to the next level and are working to become a 501c3 nonprofit organization
- December 2019- solidified our partnership with the MN River Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The Urban Bird Collective was given a prime spot to introduce our members to the Christmas Bird Count. We had the Black Dog Road area, much of it restricted (we were given special access) and we had 12 people attend, for nine of them, this was their first CBC.

Urban Birding Festival walk – Crosby Farm

CBC participants-Black Dog Road

SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

We are incredibly thankful for the support given to our group. We were building off of a very successful first year with people who were passionate about birding, being outdoors and engaging with other diverse communities. Our initial thought for bringing on the second cohort was to develop an application and interview session. In order to keep the group moving in the right direction and build on the trust they were developing with each other we decided to ask them to invite someone they knew that was already interested and we would interview them to make sure they understood the commitment and expectations.



We now have 16 people that were invested in something that was going to grow and last. Our Leaders come from diverse communities and backgrounds. We have nonprofit leaders, social workers, organizers, artists, teachers, naturalists and more. They all brought their gifts to the organization and their willingness to share with each other and the broader community. 15 of the 16 identify as Indigenous or People of Color.

Building off of our first year Monica started to meet with other groups/organizations in early 2019 to start working on gaining new resources for the group and identify potential key partnerships. As mentioned previously, the MN RVNWR became one of our key partners. Monica and their staff met in March to discuss what a partnership could look like. They understood our need for separate space for our group to continue to solidify our core group of leaders. They were very understanding and incredibly supportive. They provided free meeting spaces, introduced us to

other folks at other refuges, worked on us with the Christmas Bird Count and will be a key partner in our 2020 bird gathering.

Monica has been protective of the group and its mission/vision and will continue to keep that front and center. While doing that, this core group of leaders is making space for those we've identified as our key constituents while exploring outside of our group. This year some in our group joined in at Warbler Weekend, Hawk Ridge, and Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. In 2020 we have a trip planned for Sax-zim Bog working with Clinton Nienhaus, we'll have another Hawk Ridge weekend, lead a walk or walks at Audubon's Warbler Weekend and more.

As we move into the next stage of becoming a formal nonprofit we will move thoughtfully and slowly. We will be working with Propel as our fiscal agent and resource goto. While Monica will take the lead with the organization, many of the leaders are stepping up to support the work. We have leaders working on planning trips, website, accounting, database management, planning walks, & communications, all in support of us being successful in meeting our mission/vision.

One change from our initial plan was for Monica and Joann to be the leads for this project. Because of some work and family changes, Joann was not able to help as much as she had intended. Nothing was dropped because of this change but there will be some adjustments to the budget.



“It is community, a sharing in nature's most beautiful places with people who are reflections of self. I am a birdwatcher and nature lover, but too often in the past felt like a stranger, vaguely unfulfilled though participating in the activities I love most. Now I am full.” Leader -Rofina Madadalutta

“ I am a birdwatcher and nature lover to the core and believe all should have access and feel welcome in the Beautiful outdoors.”~~Jane Shallow

“Thank you for creating a safe place for people of color to learn and value the precious gift of the birds. Everywhere I go, I look for the beauty that the birds bring to my life. There are so many stories in our traditions that are about the different kinds of birds and their place in the world. Migwech (Thank you) Just yesterday I was sharing what I have learned with others. This knowledge brings together the connectedness of all living beings.”~~Hope Flanagan

Future Plans Include:

- Meeting monthly to continue deepening our relationships and developing our birding skills

Exploring how to lead birding by kayak.

curriculum for youth.

- Work with several teachers in our group to develop

- Plan more trips in Greater MN, including Sax-zim, Hawk Ridge and North Ottawa Impoundment
- Developing a website to supplement the Facebook page and serve as a longer term solution to finding and connecting people.
- 1st Annual Urban Bird Collective Gathering May 16-17 - 2020
- Work on our 501c3 status

Closing thoughts:

“I’m thrilled at the growth of this organization and the honor of working with the cohort of leaders. I learn so much from them and proud of the impact they are making for diverse communities here in the Twin Cities.

I love sharing places or experiences with someone for the first time. When someone says, they didn’t know this existed or that it was so close to where they live, I know I’m on the right path.”

~Monica Bryand



We appreciate the support of the Minnesota Ornithologists Union in support this organization and helping us build a solid base for our continued growth.

THANK YOU.

We are grateful to Saint Paul Audubon for their support and serving as our fiscal agent.