

Urban Bird Collective | MOU Savaloja Grant Report

In APRIL 2018 the Minnesota Ornithologists Union granted Monica Bryand and Joanna Eckles a \$3,100 Savaloja Grant to develop a “Train the Trainer” style program to help existing community members develop the skills they need to be confident leading beginning birding walks in their own neighborhoods. This cohort was quickly identified as the Collective.



“From someone who has worked on diversity and equity issues for decades, I can’t express enough how important this funding was to this group. MOU had faith in supporting a new way of bringing leaders into the birding community. You gave us space to be creative and engage family and friends to be a part of something bigger. It was really critical that we were given the freedom to create something new and needed as opposed to being asked to diversify another mainstream group.”

~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 is to support minority birders of all skill levels in leading birding and nature walks in their communities. These minority communities include Native Americans, People of Color, immigrants, LGBT communities and more.

Ultimately, we want all communities to experience the benefits of nature exploration and birding. And we recognize the unique challenges minority birders face in finding a welcoming place in the existing (predominantly straight, white) demographic that comprises the birding community in many places, including Minnesota.

We brought together 2 mentors and 8 emerging leaders from minority communities to share our passion for birds and nature, discuss issues of diversity and inclusion and create a safe and welcoming space to build leadership skills and deepen this conversation. By working with passionate leaders from within these underrepresented communities, we will increase the accessibility of birding and nature for all.

Our Approach was to stay intentionally informal and outdoors as much as possible, exploring the question “What do you need to feel comfortable leading birding outings in your community?”

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

Mentors:

Monica Bryand
Joanna Eckles

Leaders:

Dan Hawkwelter
Heather Lou
Jae Hyun Shim
Hope Flanagan
Jane Shallow
Quantina Beck-Jones
Rofina Madadalutta
Elianne McMahon Miller

Our Timeline, Activities and Results

- April 2018 – began team-building. Connecting and meeting up in outdoor places. Ongoing.
- April through November 2018 – Built a reference guide out of the “Bird Leader Tips” that came up naturally during our outings and conversations.
- May 2018 – Led five birding outings as part of the Twin Cities Urban Birding Festival.
 - May 12th - Minnehaha Falls and Crosby Park
 - May 15th - Minnehaha Falls
 - May 16th - Roberts Bird Sanctuary
 - May 19th - Theodore Wirth Park
- Summer 2018 – continuing education and community building outings for Collective members
 - Two of the leaders hosted walks for their faith communities
 - Monica took several leaders and community members on a kayak trip to Pigs Eye Lake
 - Several informal bird walks with leaders
 - One-to-one visits with leaders to debrief about the spring walks, identify any resources and identify barriers to their continued participation.
 - Established the Urban Birder’s Collective Facebook community page as a way of connecting our target community. Started page in mid-August and within a week had over 50 members. We are now at 118.
- September and October 2018 - led four birding outings
 - Sept 14th - Wood Lake Nature Center
 - Sept 16th - Theodore Wirth Park
 - Sept 22nd - Minnehaha Falls
 - Sept 23rd - Crosby Park
- November 2018 – met for dinner to assess collaboration so far and next steps, prepared results to share at MOU annual meeting



Urban Birding Festival walk – Crosby Farm

Connect with the Urban Bird Collective via Monica at mjbryand@gmail.com

SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

FROM THE BEGINNING we knew we were on the right path because of the community leaders that came together and the level of honesty, commitment and passion they were willing to share. They were proud to be part of this new group and wanted to make sure others knew about it and could somehow connect. It was important that we remained focused on the number one goal of making sure that “community” felt safe and welcoming during all our walks and gatherings. The mentors (Joanna and Monica) stressed that gaining new birding skills is a life-long process and that each person is starting wherever they are along their learning path. They provided many tips and resources during our outings as we focused not only on birding skills but also on the skills and considerations required to lead birding walks. This type of mentorship will continue to be a part of this group’s work going forward.



Even in the initial pilot phase, the establishment of this group had a major positive and supportive impact. The group, which we have come to call The Collective, first came together in April and quickly started to get to know each other and build relationships. One thing we identified at our fall debrief dinner was how important it was to get to know each other in a deeper way beyond birding in order to build trust. For leaders to feel comfortable inviting others to our various walks and outings, they needed to trust that their friends would be treated with respect and have a great experience.



Exploring how to lead birding by kayak.

The first walks led by Collective leaders were part of the Twin Cities Urban Birding Festival. These five walks in 4 locations in both Minneapolis and St. Paul were sparsely to moderately attended and provided a great opportunity to practice creating the space and leading the walks while seeing and enjoying and learning about the birds we saw. Throughout the summer we got together informally for walks and a little birding on the water by kayak.

As we moved into the fall, Collective Leaders invited both family and friends to 4 walks that were offered four locations. We rounded out the season by gathering for a group dinner to talk about the experience, the opportunities and challenges and mostly about how much more we want to do together to learn more about birds and get ourselves and others out to enjoy them.

Future Plans:

ONE LEADER SHARED that people didn't want to join the walks because while they really loved being outside, they weren't particularly interested in birds. We believe that expanding this community of diverse individuals is important and requires doing things differently.

In the future we discussed hosting hikes, bike rides or kayaking outings and using them to also share our passion for birds in a more informal way since wherever we go there will be birds to discover and enjoy together. They just don't realize yet how amazing birds are...



Other plans include:

- Meeting monthly to continue deepening our relationships and developing our birding skills
- Starting a small informal youth group to involve friends who are parents and were interested in birding opportunities for children
- Winter birding and hikes as we prepare for the spring migration
- Developing a website to supplement the Facebook page and serve as a longer term solution to finding and connecting people.
- Applying for additional grant funding to allow this year's leaders to lead the training of a new cohort of diverse leaders in the year to come.

Closing thoughts:



"A powerful memory I have was going to a birding festival in Florida. It was just me and one other person of color in the whole group. We quickly connected, making eye contact across the large gathering of people. She told me she had never seen another person of color that identified as a birder."

~ Rofina Madadalutta

"I never see anyone who looks like me or identifies like me when I go out hiking or birding. I feel like that lone snow goose in a flock of Canada geese and I am so thankful for this group."

~ Hope Flanagan

“From our very first group gathering I was struck by the clear need for a new approach to making birding and conservation an open and welcoming option for all individuals. It is a losing strategy to continue promoting birding from within the same confines and expect a different audience to show up. There are so many diverse people who share this passion for nature and birds but have all experienced similar feelings of being an outsider, of isolation or just plain racism when birding or enjoying the outdoors. This group trusted each other to honestly share experiences, ideas and perspectives while building community from within. By honoring and validating these perspectives, hopefully we can begin to create more and more safe and welcoming spaces where the joys of birding and nature can truly be shared by all.”



*An outdoor classroom - Roberts Bird Sanctuary -
Minneapolis*

~Joanna Eckles

WE APPRECIATE THE SUPPORT of the Minnesota Ornithologists Union in honoring the spirit of the need to train “lay” leaders to explore the birds in their neighborhoods with their neighbors as a step towards expanding and diversifying Minnesota’s birding community.

By providing interested leaders with basic skills through discussion, exploration and workshops specifically designed to prepare them to lead walks, we can not only get more people out to learn about and appreciate birds close to home but also serve communities that are often most underrepresented in birding and conservation.

THANK YOU.

In addition, we wish to thank the members of the Urban Bird Collective for the open discussion of race, gender, ethnicity, and nature ... gulls, manatees, eBird, pelicans, medicinal plants, fungi, dirt, and storytelling.

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

Budget and expenses - Audubon Saint Paul severed as our Fiscal Agent

Original Budget

Description	Amount
Compensation for time for Monica	\$1100
Compensation for time for Joanna	\$1100
Stipends for Community Lay-Leaders (\$75 per leader)	\$600
Materials, transportation and refreshments for training workshops	\$300
	\$3,100

1. Actuals for the grant

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Reimbursement payable to Monica Bryand -total per grant (Meetings/resource materials)

\$300

- ☐ \$43.35 – Hawk Ridge purchase of warbler guides
 - ☐ \$53.44 – MNRVNR – Purchase of guides for raptors, butterflies, trees, water fowl
 - ☐ \$63.06 - MNRVNR – Purchase of guides for raptors, butterflies, trees, water fowl
 - ☐ \$118.68 – El Norteno – Final cohort dinner and debrief
 - ☐ \$30 – Field Guide to the Natural World Twin Cities
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Urban Birding Collaborative - Emerging Birding Leaders Tip Sheet

To lead people in the exploration of birding and nature, you need just a few basic things. You need your innate curiosity and your powers of observation. Tools of the trade like binoculars, books, apps and the internet are helpful but, when it comes down to it, not essential.

As each leader develops their own approach to connecting with their communities in leading birding walks we will build and expand upon this list of tips by sharing our own experiences and lessons learned.

Pre-preparation

How to get the word out about your walk? What do you want to call it? Where will you meet? What time? For how long? How will you describe it? Do you have a bad weather plan?

The day of!

- Be early. Be obvious. Be welcoming.
- Create a safe space by laying the groundwork
 - Prepare a general welcome (as part of our larger initiative to empower and support local leaders – we will work to create this together)
 - Prepare a personal welcome – a few sentences you are willing to share about what brought you here.

Laying out expectations

- Tell people the plan
 - A bit about the place
 - What makes it special
 - What you've seen there or would like to see
 - How far you'll be walking (time and distance) if applicable
 - What the terrain and conditions are like
 - Know how long it takes – is it out / back or a loop etc.
- Ask people what they are most interested in / looking forward to etc. What brought them here?

Leading

- Set up some ways of being together – suggest the group work together by:
 - Changing places at the front
 - Knowing that all eyes and ears are valuable for finding

- Helping everyone find what the group is looking at / helping smaller people see
- Assess the equipment
 - If you're providing binoculars or people brought their own, you'll want to know how to help people adjust them for the best viewing.
 - It's basically 3 steps
 - Adjust the barrels to the right width for your eyes
 - Adjust the eyepieces for glasses or no glasses
 - Adjust the two eyepieces for any differences between your eyes if necessary
 - Here's a nice 3-minute video from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkPzI-VPmo4>
 - Are there people in your group that don't have binoculars?
 - Do they want them?
 - Can anyone share?
- Don't leave the parking lot too quickly
 - Not only can your meeting spot be a good vantage point for birds (often edges of habitats which birds like) but it's a good time to practice spotting.
 - It's usually easier to spot birds with the naked eye and then find them in the binoculars
 - Things can look different once you put the binoculars up. If it's not in the field of view, re-find it with the naked eye and try again with the binoculars.
 - Noting obvious landmarks can help you get the binoculars on target (a cross branch, a flower, an object like a sign or light pole etc.)

Observation Power

To see and hear birds and wildlife you need to listen and look. Simple right? For loud and social creatures, it can take some thought and focus.

- Take time to settle into seeing and hearing.
- Stop periodically to quietly observe.
- Think about increasing your sphere of observation while decreasing your area of disturbance.

Pointing out birds

- When you spot a bird look immediately for landmarks to help describe where it is
 - The clock method imagines a clock face on the canopy of a tree and indicates where around that clock face the bird is sitting (at 12:00 = on top, at 3:00 = at the right edge and so on)
 - Natural or manmade objects can serve as starting places ("Go up from the broken branch" or "Look straight up from the picnic table" for example)
- Some leaders use a laser pointer to point to the branch or spot nearby (not directly at the bird!)

Bird Identification (by sight)

Be comfortable and confident that what you know is exactly what you need to know right now. Birding can be a lifelong hobby with endless opportunities for learning. Go out with curiosity and build your knowledge as you go.

- Study up on some birds you might expect
 - Does the location have a bird list? Lists are helpful in narrowing down a smaller set of expected birds
 - eBird (<https://ebird.org/>) is a very powerful resource for this job
 - Using the “explore” feature you can “browse a hotspot map” here <https://ebird.org/hotspots> and look at what is being reported at your destination.
 - OR you can create a custom checklist
 - Find the spot you are visiting (in most cases)
 - Set a date range
 - Create a printable checklist – amazing!
 - That gives you a “likely birds” list which helps with identification
 - Here’s an example for TS Roberts Bird Sanctuary in Minneapolis based on reported sightings for the month of May over the last 10 years <https://ebird.org/printableList?regionCode=L355484&yr=last10&m=5>
 - If your spot is not an eBird hotspot, create a list from a nearby location especially if it has similar habitats.

- Observe intentionally – talk through the basics in your own head and with your group
 - Habitat – where is the bird hanging out? Ground? Trees? (Top, middle, low?), Wetland, Water, Grassland. Etc.
 - Size – how big is it? (compared to a robin for example)
 - Behavior – what’s it doing? Flitting around like crazy? Sitting still? Singing at the top of a tree? Bobbing its tail? Scratching on the ground? Creeping up a tree trunk?
 - Lookalikes – Does it remind you of any other birds you know? Ex. Robins are thrushes as are Bluebirds and several others. That shape and impression can get you close.
 - Details – What does it look like – body, legs, feet, beak and also “field marks” which are the colors and patterns we often try to describe first.
 - If you have a good view and its cooperative, look carefully from “head to toe”
 - Learning the parts of the bird can help you be systematic and descriptive <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/bird-id-skills-field-marks/>

Bird Identification (by sound)

Learning bird sounds is incredibly helpful for identification. You often hear a bird before you see it, or the song can confirm your ID or it can alert you to a particular bird that you might want to spend time looking for. It is a cumulative skill that builds upon itself.

Learning Bird Songs

- Start where you are.
 - Go outside and just listen.
 - What birds do you hear that you already know?

- Start there each time you go out. Listen. Check those familiar birds off your mental checklist. You'll soon hear one you don't know. Try to learn it. Day after day, season after season, you'll pick up so many sounds this way. It'll change your world.
- Song learning tips
 - Phonetic units (or mne-mon-ic pronounced nə'mänik/ *def.* a device such as a pattern of letters, ideas, or associations that assists in remembering something).
 - Bird names that represent their song
 - (Black-capped) [Chickadeeee-dee-dee](#)
 - (Eastern Wood) [Pe-weeee](#)
 - (Eastern) [Phoe-be](#)
 - Words that represent the song itself
 - Conk-a-ree ([Red-winged Blackbird](#))
 - Who cooks for you? ([Barred Owl](#))
 - Cheerily cheerily cheer up cheerily ([American Robin](#))
 - A phrase that calls to mind a rhythm or cadence
 - Oh Sweet Canada Canada Canada ([White-throated Sparrow](#))
 - Birdy Birdy Birdy ([Northern Cardinal](#)) sung by both male and female
 - Comparative ideas that bring the song to mind
 - A squeaky wheelbarrow ([Black and White Warbler](#))
 - Dropping ball ([Field Sparrow](#))
 - Descriptive words
 - Flute-like (thrushes)
 - Abrupt (some flycatchers)
 - Ascending (ex. [Northern Parula](#))
 - Gurgling (ex. [Brown-headed Cowbird](#))
- Notes (ha ha)
 - There are SONGS (generally - but not always – more musical and associated with breeding and generally - but not always - sung by males)
 - And there are CALLS which are generally shorter with less of a pattern but can be extremely helpful for identification.
 - For example, a [Scarlet Tanager](#)'s song can be confused with several others but it's "chick-burr" call is diagnostic.
 - Listen carefully for interspersed or associated calls.
 - Some birds have very few sounds and others have a huge repertoire...