

Urban Bird Collective | MOU Savaloja Grant Report 2023

In April 2023 the Minnesota Ornithologists Union granted the Urban Bird Collective a \$3,600 Savaloja Grant to support our pilot mentee project.



Urban Bird Collective is a local, BIPOC-led environmental stewardship organization that promotes outdoor recreation and healing for all, with a focus on BIPOC and LGBTQIA communities. We received our first grant from the Savaloja Program in 2018. The first grant supported our first 8 leaders. From there we have grown to 29 leaders, 22 of whom identify as BIPOC, that lead over 50 events, partner with over a dozen organizations and have over 600 people on our mailing list.

Our project this year expanded on our previous success. We created a BIPOC mentee cohort of six new leaders to build their birding identification skills and their ability to facilitate

bird walks and positive outdoors experiences for BIPOC and LGBTQIA participants. Developing new leaders allowed our current leaders to gain more advanced teaching experience while it developed non-birders identification and social skills.

We had BIPOC folks who were new to birding apply to be a part of the cohort. Questions on the application include things like; can they commit the time, did they have travel barriers, equipment barriers and why they wanted to be a part of this first cohort. We had 12 applications and we brought that down to six participants that represented various ethnicities, of the six, five also identified as LGBTQI. While all six were excited and all in, only five were able to participate at various levels throughout the last six months.

Some responses from mentees on what excited them about participating in the pilot project.

- “I would love get to know the land I live on and the birds that inhabit it. I am always looking for ways to get out and connect with community, especially outdoors.”
- “So far, I still know very little about birds, but I am very good at delving into a new subject and I've enjoyed everything I've learned so far through the Urban Bird Collective. I believe strongly in giving back to the community, I would love to get involved and be in a supportive role once I have more experience.”
- “What excites me most about this is being paired with somebody who knows how to bird and the different ways to do it. During the pandemic, I started appreciating seeing and hearing birds while walking. Still, I didn't know how to identify them, so it excites me to see that I have the opportunity to learn and then potentially flip the script and be the teacher as time progresses.”
- “I have a complicated history with birds. I have learned late in life to appreciate birds. Just prior to pandemic I became more interested in learning about birds, but that was interrupted. I look forward to the structure and support of mentorship with birding.”

This was a pilot program for us so we tried to learn and pivot as needed. We pivoted from offering only 1-1 opportunities to more group outing where mentors and mentees were paired up. We also opened up quickly to

offering opportunities for the mentees to invite their significant others and family members. While we had our official mentee cohort, we were exposing others to the wonders of birds and the outdoors. At first, we were just going to lend binoculars to the three that didn't have them but we wanted them to have their own so we purchased some that they could keep. We did not expense this to the grant since it wasn't in the original request.

Quote from a cohort mentee- "Wow, I'm happy I found this group," because I knew I would have felt much different as the only BIPOC person in a group and I didn't have to feel that way here. That is also a big reason why I wanted to keep coming back, because UBC consistently offers a welcoming environment to learn and engage without feeling like an outsider."

Our Timeline, Activities and Results

- April – recruited and finalized for the cohort
- Early May – launch dinner with mentees and mentors
- First trip with mentees. Attended Warbler Weekend with 5 of the mentees. They were paired up with various current UBC leaders.
- May-Nov. – mentees and mentors went on both solo and group events. Mentees and mentors spent over 130 hours together.
 - Theo Wirth
 - Hawk Ridge Trip
 - Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge
 - Annual UBC bird Festival
 - Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary
 - Many more....
- Sept-Nov – developed walk leader training
- Dec – UBC was excited to invite one member of the cohort group to join the UBC walk leader group. This mentee went above and beyond during the project timeline and she will be a great addition to our core group.
- Dec – because of scheduling issues we have not been able to have a full debrief but we will do that sometime in January.

Description	Amount	Actual
Compensation for time for lead organizer	\$300	\$300
Stipends for the UBC walk leaders (1-2 per walk) 2 X 15 X \$50	\$1,200	\$1,200
Stipends for new cohort members (1-2 per walk) 2 X 15 X \$50	\$1,600	\$1500
Snacks	\$200	\$200
Launch and debrief sessions	\$300	\$275.11
	\$3,600	\$3,475.11

Other Accomplishments in 2023:

- Hosted our 5th Annual UBC Bird Festival with over 125 participants, 72% identified as BIPOC and 92% identified as either BIPOC or LGBTQI.
- Hosted our 4th annual Birds of Ojibwe Legends – Walk leader and storyteller Hope Flanagan

- Urban Bird Collective leaders participated in 10 Christmas Bird Counts totaling over 500 hours in volunteer time. Those 500 hours only includes our walk leaders. UBC recruited another 50 volunteers to join us in the walks.
- Monica Bryand and other leaders continue to be resources for those needing to start the conversation on how to make their organizations (birding) more inclusive and less exclusive. We have worked with both Audubon Saint Paul and Mpls. on possible name changes. UBC joined the BIPOC advisory committee at the MN River Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- Added eight new walk leaders in 2023.
- Hosted our first BIPOC film event – *Hawker* with Shawn Hayes
- Worked with a new partner the Loppet to host walks and other events at Theodore Wirth Park.

SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

We are always thankful for the support from MOU. We are constantly building on a solid base of diverse BIPOC/LGBTQI leaders. We are in the 5th year of existence and have gone from 8 walk leaders to 27 walk leaders and now we have the next tier of leaders being trained. Our pilot cohort will continue to be offered special opportunities with UBC and have become family/friends. We felt the project was a success and will look for additional funding sources to offer this again.



Future Plans Include:

- Inviting one or more of the mentees to join the UBC walk leader group
- Expand our impact with the Winter Bird Counts
- Explore a deeper partnership with strategic partners
- Explore opportunities for our walk leaders to join boards, working groups or commissions that support the outdoors.
- Support BIPOC communities in need of healing justice opportunities to be out in nature
- In 2024, UBC will have its first fulltime Executive Director.

Closing thoughts:

The Urban Bird Collective appreciates the long-term support of MOU and the Savaloja Fund. The long-term investment helped us to slowly get our legs under us and build a solid base so that we can continue to have a positive impact on the outdoor and birding community.