

southern wisconsin
BIRD ALLIANCE



formerly Madison Audubon



SOUTHERN WISCONSIN BIRD ALLIANCE

Together with our members, we work to protect and improve habitat for birds and other wildlife through land acquisition and management, education, and advocacy.

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GOOSE POND TEAM
Mark Martin & Susan Foote-Martin
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COVER PHOTO: Tundra Swans | Arlene Koziol



A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION:

The bird alliance is alive and well in Southern Wisconsin

Last summer, while reviewing member suggestions and trying out new iterations of possible names, our Name Selection Committee hit upon “Bird Alliance.” It immediately became a favorite. BIRD centers the heart of our work, the reason the organization was created; ALLIANCE emphasizes the collaborative nature of conservation work, done *by* many and *for* many. Our organization strives to be welcoming, to build long-lasting partnerships that blossom from a shared love of nature.

While our committee worked hard, we remained in close communication with the growing number of other Audubon chapters who were changing their names. Our goals were largely the same: to find a name that better represents the work we all do. We were excited to learn that others had independently come up with names akin to “Bird Alliance” through their own methods. Sharing a similar name was not only appealing, it strengthened the idea behind a true bird alliance—a network of many conservation organizations around the country, coming together for birds.

The main challenge for us was to find the right geographic descriptor. The first name proposed to and approved by our members used “Badgerland,” a term common among businesses in our area to describe this part of the state. After that name was challenged and our board decided to modify our name, the committee went back to the drawing board. Our organization’s service area covers ten counties in the southern part of the state, and has always worked well beyond Madison. We wanted to take this opportunity to choose a name that would include our members and our work well beyond the city limits. Southern Wisconsin does just that—it includes the driftless region and the adjacent glacial plains, prairies, lakes, and

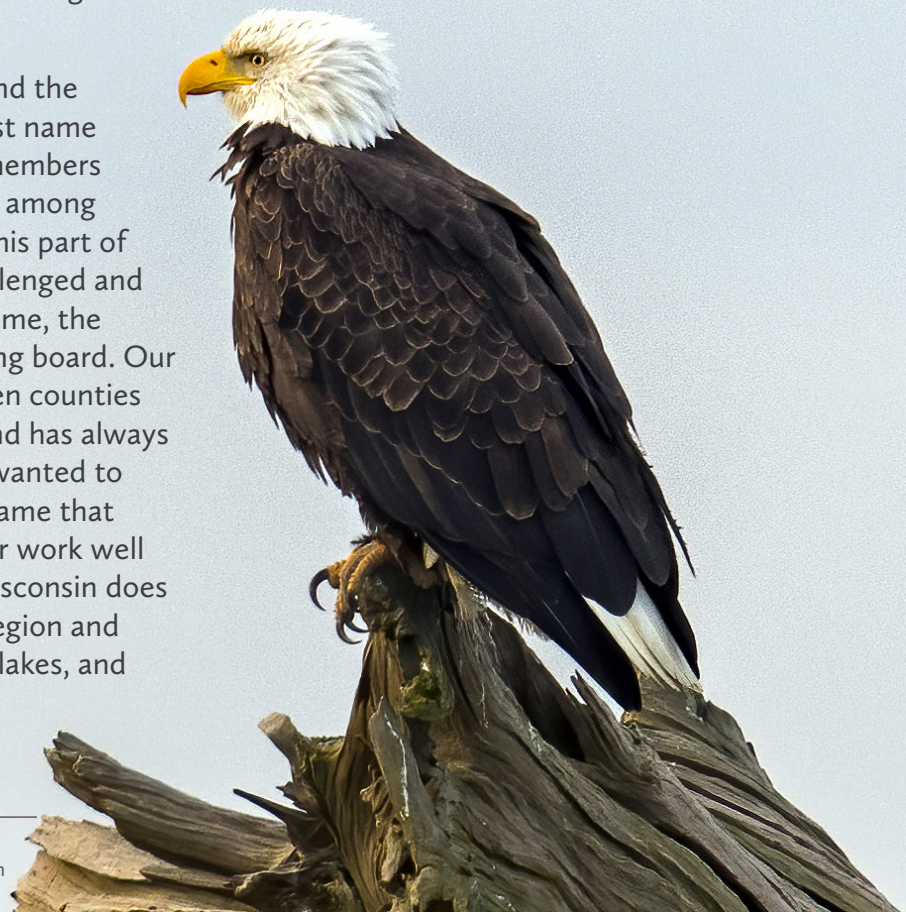
wetlands; it includes our sanctuaries in three different counties; and it includes the volunteers who monitor kestrel boxes and watch eagle nests all throughout our region.

Member feedback in January made it clear that “Southern Wisconsin” was the preferred descriptor for our service area. Our committee and board agreed, and on February 1, our membership voted to make it official.

We are so proud to be the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance (SoWBA).

Thank you to all of our members for your overwhelming support throughout the entire process of our name change. We can’t wait to unveil our new logo and website (plus plenty of cool new shirts, hats, and stickers) later this year!

For more information on our new name, visit swibirds.org/new-name.





American Robin | Grayson Smith/USFWS Midwest

Cheers to another great year!

Last April, as the tree buds began leafing out and our beautiful songbirds were returning to Wisconsin, I remember thinking, “I am really going to take time to slow down and enjoy every moment of what is going to be a tremendous year.” Turns out I was partially right. The year went by way too fast, but it was indeed a fabulous, eventful year. Now, as I slow down to reflect on it, I’m reminded of all we were able to accomplish, thanks to the incredible support of members like you.

Let’s kick it off with the protection of more than 450 additional acres of land! That land will provide valuable native habitat for birds, including 374 acres at our new sanctuary property, the gorgeous and unique Fair Meadows. Our citizen science programs grew and flourished, with more volunteers, new areas served, and greater impact than ever before. Our youth education program was vibrant, fun, and reached tons of curious kids, providing inspiration and sharing joy. And we advocated broadly on behalf of birds, including successfully

defending Wisconsin’s first bird-friendly glass ordinance.

Of course, there’s our new name. We are grateful for the immense support we received throughout the process this past year. Though we did not foresee a challenge to the name we began using in September, the best way out is always through (thanks Robert Frost!), and we’re proud of how we professionally handled the issue. We also appreciate the opportunity to learn from it as we move forward. Here’s to bright days ahead as the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance!

2024 is shaping up to be just as, or even more, tremendous. Thanks in advance for making that possible. And don’t forget . . . slow down and enjoy every moment. 2024 might just go pretty darn fast.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Matt Reetz, executive director

2023 *BY THE NUMBERS*

893

citizen scientists

volunteered for our Bald Eagle Nest Watch, Bird Collision Corps, Kestrel Nest Box Monitoring, and Madison-area Christmas Bird Count programs.

1,343

community members

joined us to explore on a bird and nature outing, learn something new in an adult education course, or participate in a hands-on event, like kestrel banding and monarch tagging.

454

additional acres of land

now permanently protected by Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, bringing the total acreage of habitat conserved, restored, and managed for birds and other wildlife to 2,589.

66

free field trips

were offered in 2023. Many of these outings were led by volunteers, and some were made possible through partnerships with other local conservation organizations.

24

different classrooms

adventured outdoors, played fun learning games, and discovered nature with our education team (10 classrooms in the spring, 14 classrooms in the fall).

11

summer interns

experienced the rewarding, hands-on work involved in habitat restoration at our sanctuaries (six interns at Faville Grove, five through the Prairie Partners program).

1

new sanctuary

called Fair Meadows Sanctuary and State Natural Area, is now owned and managed by Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, the third sanctuary to join our land holdings.

2

sanctuary managers

and influential conservationists Mark Martin and Susan Foote-Martin were inducted into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame for their lifelong commitment to conservation.

A STARTING POINT

GARY & PENNY SHACKELFORD, Fair Meadows volunteer sanctuary managers
CHRIS KAPLAN, Fair Meadows land steward



Pileated Woodpecker | Gary Shackelford

“Momentous” might be the best word to describe 2023 at Fair Meadows. It officially became a Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance sanctuary in the summer, with previous owners Penny and Gary Shackelford now volunteer land managers. Chris Kaplan, who has participated in restoration and management at the property since the 1990s, will continue this work as SoWBA’s newest staff member—the sanctuary land steward.

Fair Meadows is a mosaic of wetlands, upland prairies, and oak-hickory woodlands, shaped with hills and kettles. Previous management has emphasized the control of invasive species. A major milestone in 2023 was the removal of the last of the hybrid cattails from all 30 acres of sedge meadows in the eastern section of the sanctuary. The success of these and other efforts has allowed the management balance to tip toward increasing diversity through interseeding, and the planting of trees, shrubs, and forbs. One hundred trees, including swamp

white oak, river birch, sycamore, and bur oak were planted into two acres of a wetland where 15 acres of black and green ash trees had been killed by the emerald ash borer. In the rest of the area, removal of invasive brush and reed canary grass is underway to restore sedge meadow and fen species that had been overtaken by ash and brush.

Another important feature of 2023 was drought. Only a few eastern prairie white fringed orchids bloomed in the wettest spots. Indian grass and big bluestem were shorter than usual, but some species thrived. In the prairies, wild bergamot and coneflowers prospered, and the wetlands displayed brilliant yellow swaths of bidens. A state threatened species, prairie Indian plantain (*Arnoglossum plantagineum*), suddenly expanded in three areas.

2023 was also a year of many firsts at Fair Meadows. We held our first Birdathon and our first Christmas Bird Count at the sanctuary. The



first bat surveys revealed over 150 bats using the barn. In the first bumblebee survey, Jay Watson of the Wisconsin DNR documented eight species, including a rusty patched bumblebee! Jay also found a species new to him, a golden-legged mydas fly (*Mydas tibialis*). The fly is not very common in Wisconsin, found only in the southern part of the state. It loves to visit rattlesnake master, which is the plant he found it on!

To plot our direction for the future, we took a hint from Google Maps—to get directions, one can't enter only the destination, one must have a starting point. So, we resumed photo monitoring at 26 selected sites. First, identify the habitat and the species that are living there, then use ongoing surveys to redirect or modify management.

Perhaps the best indicator of a bright future for Fair Meadows was the enthusiasm of the human visitors who arrived on ten tours—over 250 birders, conservationists, and lovers of the natural world. We look forward to so much more in 2024!

Above: Wintry vista at Fair Meadows Sanctuary | Gary Shackelford
Inset: Gary and Chris work to plant new trees | Penny Shackelford

2023 AT A GLANCE: FAIR MEADOWS

250 VISITORS
explored sanctuary lands

100+ TREES
planted into two acres of wetland

85 SPECIES
of native plant seed collected

30 ACRES
of hybridized cattails removed

25 ACRES
burned for management

NOTEWORTHY

A state-threatened species, prairie Indian plantain, flourished in 2023.

The rusty patched bumblebee and golden-legged mydas fly were found for the first time at the sanctuary.

American badgers were spotted on the trail cam, and Pileated Woodpeckers were found nesting in the woodlands.

KEY PIECES OF THE

DAVID MUSOLF & ROGER PACKARD, Faville Grove volunteer sanctuary managers
TUCKER SANBORN, Faville Grove land steward

We accomplished lots of brush and weed control at Faville Grove again this past year. We seeded new areas of prairies, savanna, woodland, and wetland with native species. New species from previous seeding projects showed up, and uncommon species appeared in new places. We had great volunteer help and another fun, engaged crew of six summer interns. We saw the departure of former land steward Drew Harry and the arrival of new land steward Tucker Sanborn. And we added another 80 acres to the sanctuary.

A key piece of the landscape puzzle, this new tract fills in the north end of Faville Woods to protect the entire woodland, as well as the southeast corner of Faville Marsh, now 80% protected. It includes 55 acres of rolling farmland that connects the west section with the Snake Marsh on Highway G. It's the 19th piece of property added to the sanctuary over the past 25 years, bringing the total acreage formally protected to nearly 1,000—a remarkable consolidation of land in an otherwise fragmented

landscape, and a boon to wildlife, like grassland birds, which need large, open habitats.

As soon as we could, volunteers, staff, and contractors began clearing the woods, marsh edge, and property-line fences of woody invasives that were crowding oaks and hickories and blocking long vistas. With volunteers and summer interns, we battled garlic mustard, Japanese hedge parsley and burdock on the new parcel. Late this fall, volunteers and staff burned through the new woodland acreage for the first time in living memory to discourage seedling buckthorns and to stimulate spring blooms. Next summer, we'll begin to tackle the reed canary grass on the marsh border, and eventually, we will restore the farm fields to prairie, but not before the invasives around the perimeter are well controlled.

Many generous donors participated in putting together the pieces of our landscape puzzle fundraiser—replacing the emergency funds we drew from to purchase the property and



PUZZLE

strengthening our position to secure more habitat for birds and other wildlife in the future. An image of the completed puzzle and a list of donors can be viewed by visiting swibirds.org/puzzle.

In addition to the funds raised through the puzzle campaign, we received \$200,000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a partner with Ducks Unlimited and other groups in a successful \$2,000,000 grant application for wetland protection in southeast and southcentral Wisconsin.

The actual, on-the-ground puzzle of restoring the Faville Grove landscape isn't yet complete and will take many more years, additional land acquisition, and careful restoration. Already, the landscape is becoming less of a patchwork and coming more clearly into view, with the contours of the moraines on the new property rolling seamlessly down to the marsh and the undulating, tawny prairies in the sanctuary beyond.

2023 AT A GLANCE: FAVILLE GROVE

PLUS SNAPPER PRAIRIE & HOPE LAKE BOG

80 NEW ACRES
added to the sanctuary

24 AREAS
burned between March and November

10 MILES
of new trails and firebreaks mowed

9 ACRES
planted with a diverse prairie mix

1 EAGLE NEST
newly found on sanctuary land

NOTEWORTHY

Significant year-over-year reductions were seen in garlic mustard and reed canary grass in many areas.

Several new plant species introduced into the sanctuary became established, including woodland phlox, woodland puccoon, and false mermaid-weed.

Many thousands of stems of invasive brush were cut and treated, including a half-mile of wooded fenceline and acres of willow shrubs.

Many acres of woodland, savanna, and wetland received supplemental seeding to enhance native diversity.

WHERE NATIVE SPECIES THRIVE



Prescribed burn | Mark McGinley

MARK MARTIN & SUSAN FOOTE-MARTIN, Goose Pond sanctuary managers
GRAHAM STEINHAUER, Goose Pond land steward
EMMA RAASCH, Goose Pond ecological restoration technician

There is nothing quite as awe-inspiring as spotting a new species at a place you thought you knew like the back of your hand. Moments like these are what make our sanctuaries so special, and lucky for us, we've experienced a fair share of them this year.

While searching for damselflies and dragonflies at Erstad Prairie, insect-loving field trip leaders and volunteers were treated to more than a diverse array of odonates when they identified the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly for the first time at the property. Otsego Marsh also added a federally endangered insect to its species list when U.S. Geological Survey

researchers reported the first observation of the rusty patched bumblebee.

We always look forward to the arrival of monarch butterflies at our prairies. Sanctuary staff, volunteers, and field trip participants tagged 750 monarchs for Monarch Watch, bringing our total tagged monarchs at Goose Pond to over 8,000 since 2012. With the help of volunteers, we also collected 152 pounds of pure live common milkweed seed—enough to fill 2,400 acres with the monarch's host plant.

Of course, monarch butterflies need more than a place to lay their eggs; they also rely on a variety of nectar sources to fuel their journey to and



Karner blue butterfly | Jim Otto



Four-spotted skimmer | Jim Otto



from Mexico. In 2023, we seeded 116 acres of sanctuary and partner land with diverse prairie mixes that will provide habitat and food sources for insects, birds, mammals, and more.

It's no secret that great things take time and hard work, and our prairies are no exception. Although plantings still provide resources in their first years, with the right care and management, they will continue to improve year after year. One way we maintain the openness and diversity of our prairies is the "prescribed" use of fire. This year, we burned 228 acres. In most years, we would burn more acreage in the spring, but the mild December weather gave us a record-breaking fall burn season of 126 acres. Despite our successful burn season, 85% of our total acreage remains unburned and will provide cover for wildlife this winter.

Through all of our achievements, there was one common thread: our remarkable and hardworking volunteers. Without their dedication, many new species would go unnoticed, our prairies would go unburned, and we could not collect nearly the amount of seed necessary to meet our restoration goals.

From the whole Goose Pond Sanctuary team, thank you for an awesome 2023!



Rusty patched bumblebee | Lainet Garcia Rivera

2023 AT A GLANCE: GOOSE POND

PLUS ERSTAD PRAIRIE & OTSEGO MARSH

1,656 HOURS
contributed by volunteers

750 MONARCHS
tagged at the sanctuary

228 ACRES
burned for management

204 SPECIES
of native plant seed collected

116 ACRES
seeded at sanctuary and partner lands

NOTEWORTHY

Several native insect species were found for the first time in 2023, including: a Karner blue butterfly at Erstad Prairie, a rusty patched bumblebee at Otsego Marsh, and a four-spotted skimmer at Goose Pond.

Many bird species were reported on eBird for the first time, including a Connecticut Warbler at Otsego Marsh.



MAKING MEMORIES

CAROLYN BYERS, director of education
MICKENZEE OKON, educator

When we look back on last year, it's a blur of memories: loading up our wagons and cars with totes filled with lesson supplies. Quick pre-lesson planning about how we would shift lesson plans to match each group's dynamics. Hosing down muddy parts from obstacle courses, or putting skulls back into our cabinet just so. Hearing a mountain of nature stories, and seeing small hands bringing us nature treasures. The noise of a class of kids sprinting across a field to their outdoor classroom, signaling the start of another lesson.

2023 was a great year for new lessons. We're especially proud of how much we've expanded our lessons about Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access in the environmental sciences. The kids we work with are diverse—from a variety of cultural backgrounds, with a variety of languages spoken at home. The lessons we teach them should reflect that diversity, too!

In the November 2023 newsletter, you heard about our lessons on Traditional Ecological Knowledge. We also created a week's worth of lessons to pair with Black Birder's Week. Our new lessons about LGBTQIA+ in nature teach about fish that change sex (sometimes repeatedly), bisexual bonobos, gender-fluid hummingbirds, and more (the term LGBTQIA+ encompasses many gender identities and sexual orientations, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual or agender). In November, we revamped our lesson about the deep connection Wisconsin Indigenous peoples have with wolves. And

in every lesson we're able to, we connect the science we're teaching with the work of an awesome scientist of color.

In the medley of memories, we have so many favorites, and we have shared here just a few. We hope you enjoy them as much as we did!

To check out the new lessons and many more, visit swibirds.org/free-lessons.

2023 AT A GLANCE: EDUCATION

730 STORIES
shared about nature and birds

618 HOURS
spent directly teaching kids

245 KIDS
engaged in our 2023 fall lessons

43 GAMES
played to help kids learn about nature

“ I love when kids bring in nature things to share with us. The kids are usually excited to share nature stories with us, but when there’s something they can bring in to show-and-tell, it’s extra special. Recently, a 4th grader brought in a bird wing for us to ID! He also brought rubber gloves ‘in case we wanted to touch the moldy parts.’ He enjoyed telling the whole class about how and where he found it, and loved hearing what we had to say about it. We think the wing belonged to a juvenile American Crow—but walking the kids through the whole investigation process was more exciting than finally making the ID. ”

—CAROLYN BYERS

“ New lessons are the best! It’s always a joy seeing kids get excited about the brand-new lessons we bring in. We work hard to make these educational lessons fun and exciting, and it’s rewarding when it all pays off. One moment that really exemplified this was when we updated our cicadas lesson to include a new game about the cicada killer wasp! It’s a super silly ‘run around screaming’ type of game where the teachers also get to get in on the action. ”

—MICKENZEE OKON

Our education program is possible thanks to support from the Caerus Foundation, Theda & Tamblin Clark Smith Family Foundation, and Jenni & Kyle Foundation.

Above: A child shows off a lovely leaf treasure; below: Mickenzee circles up with a group of kids after playing a game | Carolyn Byers

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN BIRD ALLIANCE SPRING 2024 FIELD TRIPS

Below are our upcoming field trips, courses, and programs. Each opens for registration six weeks prior to the event. You can find the full list of all field trips and events on our website.

Please register at swibirds.org/events for upcoming events that you wish to attend so we can share trip information, weather-related adjustments, and more.

Our free field trip program is made possible, in part, through funding from the Henry A. Anderson III Fund.

BEGINNERS BIRD WALK

Date: Sat., March 9, 9–11 AM
Location: Cherokee Marsh (Madison)
Led by: Mickenzee Okon

BIRDING AT THE NATURAL PATH SANCTUARY

Date: Sun., March 24, 9:30–11 AM
Location: Farley Center (Verona)
Led by: Kaitlin Svabek

BEGINNING BIRDERS: NINE SPRINGS

Date: Sat., March 30, 5:30–7 PM
Location: Nine Springs (Madison)
Led by: Anna Walther

BIRDING BY EAR: EVENING AT CHEROKEE MARSH

Date: Thu., April 4, 6:30–8:30 PM
Location: Cherokee Marsh (Madison)
Led by: Becky Abel & Kerry Wilcox

WOODCOCK AND SNIPE WALK

Date: Tue., April 9, 6:30–8:30 PM
Location: Faville Grove Sanctuary (Lake Mills)
Led by: David Musolf, Roger Packard, & Tucker Sanborn

HABITAT DIVERSITY AT FAVILLE GROVE WEST

Date: Sat., April 27, 7:30–10:30 AM
Location: Faville Grove Sanctuary (Waterloo)
Led by: David Musolf, Roger Packard, & Tucker Sanborn

BEYOND BACKYARD BIRDING: LAKESHORE NATURE PRESERVE

Date: Sun., April 28, 7:30–9:30 AM
Location: Lakeshore Nature Preserve (Madison)
Led by: Ashley Olah & Jenn Schneiderman

BUTTERFLIES AND BIRDS OF SPRING GREEN PRESERVE

Date: Sun., April 28, 10 AM–12 PM
Location: Spring Green Preserve (Spring Green)
Led by: Becky Abel & Mike Reese

SPRING BIRDING AT LAKESHORE NATURE PRESERVE

Date: Tue., April 30, 7:30–9:30 AM
Location: Lakeshore Nature Preserve (Madison)
Led by: Becky Abel & Roma Lenehan

BIRDING AT WYALUSING

Date: Sat., May 4, 5 AM–2 PM
Location: Wyalusing State Park (Bagley)
Led by: Quentin Yoerger

BIRDING BY BOAT: CHEROKEE MARSH SOUTH

Date: Mon., May 6, 5:30–7:30 PM
Location: Cherokee Marsh (Madison)
Led by: Becky Abel, Jeff Galligan, & Brenna Marsicek

EVENING SONGSCAPE WALK

Date: Fri., May 10, 7:30–9:30 PM
Location: Swamplovers Nature Preserve (Cross Plains)
Led by: Jim Berkelman

BIRDING MADISON SCHOOL FOREST

Date: Sun., May 12, 7–9 AM
Location: Madison School Forest (Verona)
Led by: Chuck Henrikson & Wade Mapes

BIRDING BY BIKE

Date: Wed., May 15, 5:30–7:30 PM
Location: McDaniel Park (McFarland)
Led by: Sprocket Hanks & Brenna Marsicek

JOIN US FOR A WARBLER WALK THIS SPRING!

CHEROKEE MARSH NORTH

Dates: Wed., May 1, 6–8 AM
Location: Cherokee Marsh (Madison)
Led by: Timothy Baker

UW-ARBORETUM

Dates: Thu., May 2, 6:30–8:30 AM
Location: UW Arboretum (Madison)
Led by: Paul Banas, Chuck Henrikson, Bob Honig, Wade Mapes, Shawn Miller, & Pat Ready

TURVILLE POINT

Dates: Tue., May 7, 6:15–8:30 AM
Location: Turville Point (Madison)
Led by: Quentin Yoerger

CHEROKEE MARSH SOUTH

Dates: Wed., May 8, 6–8 AM
Location: Cherokee Marsh (Madison)
Led by: Timothy Baker

UW-ARBORETUM

Dates: Thu., May 9, 6:30–8:30 AM
Location: UW Arboretum (Madison)
Led by: Paul Banas, Chuck Henrikson, Bob Honig, Wade Mapes, Shawn Miller, & Pat Ready

TURVILLE POINT

Dates: Tue., May 14, 6:15–8:30 AM
Location: Turville Point (Madison)
Led by: Quentin Yoerger

UW-ARBORETUM

Dates: Thu., May 16, 6:30–8:30 AM
Location: UW Arboretum (Madison)
Led by: Paul Banas, Chuck Henrikson, Wade Mapes, Shawn Miller, & Pat Ready

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN BIRD ALLIANCE SPRING 2024 COURSES & EXPERIENCES

Workshops and classes to expand your knowledge and build your skills

Registration opens to members six weeks in advance; remaining seats open to the public two weeks later.

SAVING OUR SONGBIRDS TOGETHER: THREE WAYS TO HELP AT HOME

Learn how you can do great things for birds at your own home through gardening with native plants, preventing bird-window collisions, and drinking coffee that is bird-friendly. Taught by Amy Alstad, Brenna Marsicek, and Laura Rathmell. Co-hosted with Holy Wisdom Monastery and SOS Save Our Songbirds.

Workshop: MARCH 21, 9–11:30 AM. \$25/person.

PRESCRIBED FIRE WORKSHOP: FIRE ECOLOGY AND FIELD INSTRUCTION

This workshop is designed for people with little-to-no prescribed fire training and experience. Learn why fire is an integral part of Wisconsin's natural communities. Participants must attend both portions to become a new Goose Pond burn volunteer. Taught by Emma Raasch and Graham Steinhauer.

Workshop: MARCH 23, 1–3 PM. Demonstration: MARCH 23, 3–5 PM, or next good weather day. \$20/person.

BIRDING 101 (4-PART SERIES)

Get to know the birds you'll find in and around Madison through this class geared toward adults. Learn the skills important to identifying bird species, and then practice those skills with new birds each week. Parts 1 and 4 are held at the UW–Arboretum; parts 2 and 3 will be held via Zoom. Taught by Chuck Henrikson and Jeff Galligan.

Classes: APRIL 6, 13, & 20, 8–10 AM. Trip: APRIL 27, 8–10 AM. \$20/person.

LEARNING THE ROPES OF eBIRD MOBILE (2-PART SERIES)

Learn the main functions and tools of the eBird mobile app! This course will cover how to submit observations, discover birding hotspots, and explore recent sightings all from your phone. The first part is an online course held on Zoom and the second part is a field trip to practice skills at Lake Farm County Park. Taught by Megan Heneke.

Class: APRIL 10, 6–7:30 PM. Trip: APRIL 13, 9–10:30 AM. \$20/person.

BIRDING BY EAR: LEARNING TO IDENTIFY BIRDS WITHOUT USING SIGHT

Discover the amazing world of bird song, calls, and sounds! The course includes instruction followed by an outing to practice skills at the Aldo Leopold Nature Center. All birders are welcome, including individuals with blindness or low vision. Taught by Kerry Wilcox. Co-hosted with the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Class and Trip: MAY 4, 8 AM–12 PM. \$20/person.

Register and find more information at
swibirds.org/events



Blue Jay | Pixabay

A SEASON FOR THE

BRENNA MARSICEK, director of communications & outreach

Each year, the number of passionate and engaged citizen scientists who participate in our programs grows, as does the positive impact of those programs. Bald Eagle Nest Watch, Bird Collision Corps, and the Kestrel Nest Box Monitoring Program all went above and beyond our expectations, thanks to our amazing volunteers and partners—see our previous newsletters and website for more information.

But in December, one program stands out. Amidst the holidays' hustle and bustle, Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is a wonderful reminder of the benefits of slowing down to enjoy nature and community with many birders in southern Wisconsin. Bonus: it benefits science.

CBC is the longest-running citizen science program in the country, beginning in 1900 by an ornithologist as a way to reframe how the public thinks about birds (instead of something to shoot,

something to observe). Since then, National Audubon has led the overall effort, and there are thousands of counts that are conducted each year between December 14 and January 5 that are coordinated by local birders. Data are used by scientists to answer all sorts of questions about bird populations and dynamics.

Our area has a plethora of Christmas Bird Counts, including 12 within our chapter boundary. Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance runs the Madison-area CBC (which last year had the 14th highest number of volunteers, out of 2,625 CBCs!). This year, we created opportunities for birders to get involved with CBCs conducted at each of our sanctuaries: Faville Grove is part of the Waterloo circle, Goose Pond is part of Poynette, and Fair Meadows ran their own count.

In addition, there were also counts done in Baraboo, Clyde, Columbus, Cooksville, Mount



Searching for birds at Faville Grove during the 2023 Waterloo CBC | Brenna Marsicek

BIRDERS

Horeb, Pardeeville, Randolph, and Richland Center (results of each below). Many of you have been involved in at least one of these counts, and some birders participate in multiple CBCs.

It is really incredible to see all the combined results of all of these counts. And you never know what you might see or not see. Multiple areas reported Yellow-rumped Warblers this year. Baraboo had a Gray-crowned Rosy Finch! A meadowlark was in Mount Horeb. This event is made for curious and community-minded folks, and it is an absolute delight.

The morning of the Madison count on December 16, I paused my baking and prepping and spent an hour at Door Creek Park. I didn't see a single other person while I slowly walked the woods, greeting each White-breasted Nuthatch that *yank*-ed nearby, and smiling at the Brown Creepers that beebopped around me. I left the woods with a list of 16 species, a curiosity of what other Madison birders had found, and a rejuvenated feeling in my heart.

2023 AT A GLANCE: CITIZEN SCIENCE

908 HOURS
spent surveying by Bird Collision Corps

356 BIRDS
banded at our Kestrel Nest Boxes

204 NESTS
monitored for Bald Eagle Nest Watch

NOTEWORTHY

Window treatments were applied at Holy Wisdom Monastery and American Family Insurance, resulting in reduced collision rates at those sites.

Eaglet fledging rates return to normal after the 2022 Avian Influenza outbreak.

Southern Wisconsin Christmas Bird Counts

Results from all the 2023 circles within our organization's service area

Location	Date	Species	Birds	Counters	Hours	Coordinator
Baraboo	Dec. 27	61	13,510	61	178	Scott Swengel
Clyde	Jan. 2	51	5,057	13	75	Steven Greb
Columbus	Dec. 19	37	3,894	11	31	Louise Venn
Cooksville	Jan. 1	64	7,835	13	40	Quentin Yoerger
Fair Meadows	Dec. 19	27	351	17	68	Penny & Gary Shackelford
Madison-area	Dec. 16	94	45,943	228	402	Brenna Marsicek
Mount Horeb	Dec. 31	56	6,905	57	101	Kerry Beheler
Pardeeville	Dec. 18	54	4,815	21	51	Brian Doverspike
Poynette	Dec. 30	68	8,829	52	67	Mark Martin & Susan Foote-Martin
Randolph	Dec. 18	40	3,866	8	26	Jon Roti Roti
Richland Center	Dec. 16	58	7,246	27	80	Eric Volden
Waterloo	Dec. 14	70	11,680	50	64	Karen Etter Hale
Totals			119,931	558	1,182	



Male American Redstart | Pixabay

STRONG START FOR '24

JOHN MINNICH, financial manager

2023 was a good year, which brought growth and change to our organization. Because of increased acreage and need, we added new staff at our sanctuaries. Our citizen science programs continue to grow, bringing in more volunteers than ever.

Our sanctuaries saw significant growth, with the addition of land to Faville Grove and the acquisition of an entire new sanctuary, Fair Meadows Sanctuary and State Natural Area. We employed 11 full-time restoration interns, and we continued year-round management of over 2,000 acres of bird and wildlife habitat. Our education program added and strengthened relationships with local teachers, and got kids outside to experience birds and nature firsthand.

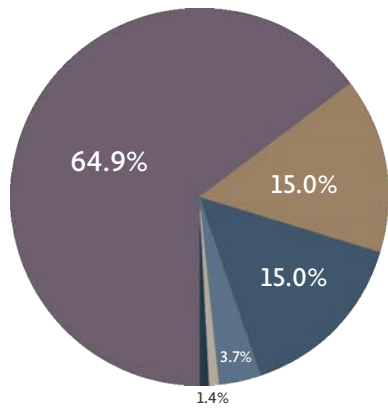
Our members and friends stepped up to make all this possible—we received gifts from more than 1,500 unique donors. In addition to longtime supporters, we were glad to welcome 373 new donors to the flock; it's gratifying that so many of you care about our work.

The graphics on the opposite page summarize

our operating income and expenses, and financial position.

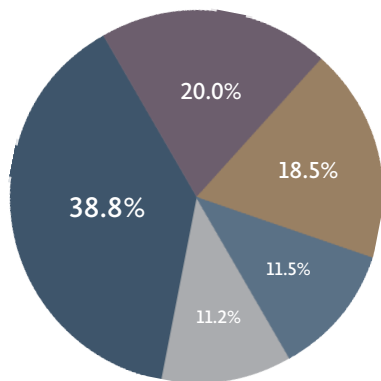
- **Program** expenses include everything you read about in other sections of this newsletter—restoration work at Goose Pond, Faville Grove, and Fair Meadows sanctuaries; reaching area kids with our education program; as well as other volunteer-driven citizen science projects like Bald Eagle Nest Watch and Bird Collision Corps. Our programs are why we're here.
- **Administration** includes finances, human resources, communications, and board support.
- **Fundraising** includes communicating with current donors, while looking for new donors and funding opportunities.

We ended 2023 in a good position to continue our work in 2024. Thanks so much for your ongoing support and for helping us to fulfill our mission.



2023 INCOME

Contributions from Individuals.....	\$689,903
Grants & Government Contracts.....	\$159,728
Investment Distributions.....	\$159,121
Sales, Land Rent, & Other.....	\$39,588
Community Shares of Wisconsin.....	\$7,663
National Audubon Support.....	\$6,968
TOTAL OPERATING INCOME	\$1,062,971



2023 EXPENSES

Sanctuary management.....	\$373,956
Education.....	\$193,700
Administration.....	\$178,642
Advocacy.....	\$111,491
Fundraising.....	\$108,709
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	\$966,498

2023 STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

ASSETS

Cash.....	\$698,252
Accounts receivable.....	\$92,355
Prepaid expenses.....	\$14,936
Investments.....	\$6,046,980
Lease asset.....	\$181,398
Property & equipment (net).....	\$9,044,446
TOTAL ASSETS	\$16,078,367

LIABILITIES

Accounts payable.....	\$23,231
Accrued expenses.....	\$15,647
Lease liability.....	\$181,931
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$220,809

NET ASSETS

Without donor restrictions.....	\$10,092,566
With donor restrictions.....	\$5,195,628
Board-designated.....	\$569,364
TOTAL NET ASSETS*	\$15,857,558
TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS:	\$16,078,367

*Most assets are sanctuary lands.

For our financial policies and details of our financial health, visit swibirds.org/financial-reports. A final financial audit will be available in summer 2024.



Female American Redstart | Pixabay

YOUR SUPPORT FOR

A big thank you to those who made an extra commitment to bird

The Conservation Leaders Donor Recognition Circle

Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance has launched a special membership level to celebrate some of our most dedicated donors. Our Conservation Leaders Donor Recognition Circle allows us to honor those members who make significant annual gifts toward our mission. With annual gifts of \$1,000 or more, Conservation Leaders provide essential lift and support to local bird and land conservation and keep our organization soaring. As additional thanks, we offer special benefits to these generous leaders including:

- Small-group wildlife experiences, such as bird banding, bird releases, and more;
- Annual Conservation Leaders guided bird tour at a SoWBA sanctuary (Fair Meadows, Faville Grove, or Goose Pond) with Executive Director Matt Reetz and sanctuary staff; and
- Annual Conservation Leaders event with Executive Director Matt Reetz and board members.

All supporters who donate/have donated \$1,000 or more between November 1, 2023 and December 31, 2024 will be renewed as active members of the 2024 Conservation Leaders. Note: you can give anonymously and still be in the circle. Learn more at swibirds.org/giving-circle or contact Becky Abel, director of philanthropy, at 608-255-2473 x5 or babel@swibirds.org with questions.

Special thanks to our inaugural group of Conservation Leaders (based on 2022 and/or 2023 giving):

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BIRDS IS INCREDIBLE

conservation and Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance this past year!

The Kestrel Legacy Circle: ensuring a future for birds

Your love for birds and nature can shape the future. Naming Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance in your will or estate honors your commitment to our natural world for generations to come—and it's easy to do. The birds you love will continue to thrive in southern Wisconsin landscapes beyond your lifetime, made possible through your forethought.

Members of the Kestrel Legacy Circle have named our organization in their will or estate, thereby strengthening our work and mission well beyond their lifetimes. We are honored by and like to recognize people who have made this commitment to local birds and lands. For more, visit swibirds.org/legacy or contact Becky Abel at 608-255-2473 x5 or babel@swibirds.org. Join us in chirping out a big THANK YOU to our Kestrel Legacy Circle members!

American Kestrel | Mick Thompson

Anonymous Donors

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Want to simplify your giving? Join our Frequent Flyers flock!

Frequent Flyers are a group of dedicated supporters who sustain our work with regular, recurring donations. This provides predictable revenue, helps balance our resources throughout the year, and reduces fundraising expenses—which means we can do more to celebrate and protect birds!

Frequent Flyers enjoy the convenience of distributing their giving throughout the year and saying goodbye to renewal deadlines. When you join the Frequent Flyers, you can select the frequency and amount of your automated contributions. Help us fly high at swibirds.org/flyers!

And thank you to our current Frequent Flyers flock, marked with an "FF" on the next pages!

2023 DONORS

Your commitment to birds and conservation is amazing. We are grateful to all of our supporters, but due to space constraints, only donors who gave \$100 or more are listed here in the printed edition. To see the full list of 2023 donors, visit swibirds.org/2023-donors. Thank you!

FF = Frequent Flyer recurring donor | K = Kestrel Legacy Circle member

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Thank you for your generosity and understanding!*

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Black-capped Chickadee | Brenna Marsicek

Your vote counts!

The board of directors provides our organization with financial oversight and strategic direction. Three current members are seeking to renew their terms: Patrick Eagan, Jeff Galligan, and Darcy Kind.

Now is officially the time for members to vote! Please take a moment to read the candidate statements and cast your ballot. To do so, visit the link at right, or return this ballot by mail. Ballots are due by **Monday, March 11 at 11:59 PM Central Time**. Thank you!

Your name: _____

Renew all candidates

OR

Vote by candidate:

Patrick Eagan (2-year renewal)

Jeff Galligan (3-year renewal)

Darcy Kind (3-year renewal)

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