

Urban Bird Collective | MOU Savaloja Grant Report 2020



IN APRIL 2020 the Minnesota Ornithologists Union granted the Urban Bird Collective a \$2,696 Savaloja Grant to continue diversifying the MN birding community.

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 2020 was to continue to diversify Minnesota's birding community through an innovative process. While we recognize the value and importance of bringing birders of all backgrounds into existing organizations and events, we also recognize that in many cases, these settings may not feel welcoming to all. We are working to build our own safe space while bridging mainstream birding communities.

As you can imagine our plans drastically changed due to COVID 19, the murder of George Floyd and the Christian Cooper incident in New York. With COVID, we needed to do things a little smaller, move to more virtual events and adapt to the use of technology. The George Floyd and Christian Cooper incidents gave us the opportunity to educate organizations and individuals. Education doesn't just happen once, it's a long-term process. Monica was able to be a resource for many birding organizations but let them know that this needed to be a long-term commitment and would take resources.

One big goal we had was to host a Gathering at our partner organization the MN River Valley Wildlife Refuge in May. While we couldn't host our planned event with 100 participants, we were able to build on the infrastructure we need to eventually make this annual event happen in 2021.

What we accomplished:

- Our leaders made 8 exploratory outings to various parts of the Wildlife Refuge to get better acquainted with the main birding hotspots and trails
- Our leaders hosted five small walks on the weekend the Gathering was to take place
- Dudley Edmundson and Monica Bryand collaborated to do a Zoom event on May 16th, highlighting the struggles of black, indigenous and people of color to be out in nature. While our target audience were members of the Collective, we were joined by employees of many of the parks around the Twin Cities
- Introduced

25 individuals to the MN RVNWR through our revised gathering and additional walks throughout the year

- Urban Bird Collective leaders participated in six Christmas Bird Counts totalling over 150 hours in volunteer time
- Monica Bryand and other leaders became resources for those needing to start the conversation on how to make their organizations (birding) more inclusive and less exclusive
- Deepened existing relationships/partnerships and explored and developed new relationships

Our Timeline, Activities and Results

- Jan-Dec 2020 - monthly birding/dinner gatherings. We had to move some of these online and did some small walks in place of a formal dinner
- Jan 2020 took eight members of the Collective to Sax Zim Bog for a weekend birding trip
- April 2020 – 8 exploratory walks at various areas at the MN River Valley National Wildlife Area
- April through November 2020
 - met with existing partner organizations and new folks which included Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Three Rivers, the MPLS Parks Foundation BIPOC Outdoors Twin Cities
- May
 - Took a small group of leaders to Red Wing for an informal Warbler Weekend
 - Walk at Roberts Bird Sanctuary
 - May 16-17 hosted walks at the MN RVNWR
 - May 16th – talk with Monica Bryand and Dudley Edmundson
- Summer 2020 – all of our work moved to smaller groups and/or virtual events
 - 8 walks
 - videos and educational posts on our FB page
 - Worked with the Westside Community Organization on their outdoor event
 - Shot video for our FB page
 - Several informal bird walks with leaders
 - The Collective became a go to place for folks looking to address race issues in their organizations
- September and November 2020 -
 - Led 6 small walks at the MN RVNWR (Bass Ponds, Old Cedar Ave Bridge and the Visitor Center)
 - Collective leaders led a walk for the Saint Paul School PAK Club, Youth looking to explore the outdoors, Youth were majority youth of color
 - Two virtual presentations on ducks and winter birding
- December 2020
 - Expanded our partnership with the MN River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, while we couldn't expand our CBC event we did continue to research our area and had 9 folks join us at our Black Dog Road Area
 - Participated in 5 additional CBC's, our leaders volunteered over 125 hours and traveled to Duluth, Sherburne County, Afton, Stillwater, and Redwing, our plan is to bring in new folks in 2021 once COVID is contained.
 - Worked with Lower Phalen Creek Project (Native Organization) to do a Birding while BIPOC event and survey their area near the Mississippi

SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

We are very thankful for the ongoing support that we've received from the Savaloja Fund. We have built a strong base of leaders and have built on our reputation as an organization folks can come to for advice and guidance on equity and inclusion in the birding community.

As we mentioned, this year we had to be creative in how we continued to meet our goals while staying safe and making sure people followed COVID guidelines. We did this at a time when the work that we did was needed more than ever. Black, Indigenous and People of Color were hurting more than ever, including our leaders in the Collective. While we were looking to create safe space for others, we needed each other as we all navigated the heightened social unrest, rise in white supremacy and the attacks on the Asian community due to COVID 19.

While we started the year with 15 leaders, a few of them had to take a smaller role due to COVID and were not able to participate in any of the walks. Our hope is that they will be able to join back in the summer/fall of 2021.

Building off work the past two years, we continue to deepen our existing partnerships and develop new ones. While we value the space we are building for BIPOC and LGBT birders, we also see value in continuing to build bridges in the mainstream birding community.

Moving into the next stage of becoming a formal nonprofit has gone a little slower due to COVID and the civil unrest and changes in funding priorities of some foundations. We are working with Propel as our fiscal agent and resource got o as we build our infrastructure.



Future Plans Include:

- Meeting monthly to continue deepening our relationships and developing our birding skills
- Expand our impact with the CBC
- Explore more work with the Lower Phalen Creek Project
- Explore a relationship with Sherburne National Wildlife Area, we would support connecting BIPOC communities in the Saint Cloud Area
- Support BIPOC communities in need of healing justice opportunities to be out in nature
 - Hybrid Annual Urban Bird Collective Gathering at the MN RVNWR May 15-16 - 2021
- Work on our 501c3 status

Closing thoughts:

The Work of this organization is needed now more than ever.

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

THANK YOU.

“Support from the Savaloja grant fund continues to be important funding for the Collective. Funding helps us bring new BIPOC birders into nature while supporting our leaders.” ~Monica Bryand

<i>Description</i>	Amount	Amount Spent
Compensation for time for Monica	\$800	\$800
Stipends for the cohort walk leaders during the year. 12 X \$100	\$1200	\$1275
Food and materials throughout the year and small honorariums for special guests	\$300	\$0
Purchase video and camera equipment for	\$200	\$162.05
Fiscal Sponsorship Fee	\$196	\$196
Total:	\$2,696	\$2433.05