

Bird City Wisconsin names new director

Dr. Bryan Lenz, 36, returns home to lead community recognition and avian conservation program;
Carl Schwartz will chair Steering Committee

Bird City Wisconsin has announced the hiring of Dr. Bryan Lenz as director of its program to recognize communities who work with their residents to make their neighborhoods a better place for people, birds and other wildlife.

A Milwaukee-area native, the 36-year-old Lenz is returning home after spending a decade in New Orleans while completing his Ph.D. at Tulane University. For his dissertation research he spent 16 months living in the Amazon where he examined the impacts of tropical forest cattle ranching on the mammal community, especially primates, while also recording raptor sightings and data on the tree community.

A long-time bird watcher, Lenz continues to serve on the board of directors and conservation committee of the Orleans Audubon Society. Lenz taught a course on primate behavior, ecology, and conservation at Tulane University and has published several academic papers on primates and raptors.

Lenz succeeds Carl Schwartz, 65, who has coordinated BCW's urban bird conservation and recognition program for the last five years. Schwartz in turn will succeed Andrew Struck as chair of the BCW Steering Committee. Struck will remain on the steering committee and continue to serve as the organization's treasurer.

Struck, president of the Milwaukee Audubon Society, a lead partner in establishing BCW in 2009, is also the planning and parks director for Ozaukee County, one of the first 15 communities recognized by Bird City and one of 14 High Flyer honorees among the 87 communities recognized since December 2010.

Bill Mueller, director of the Western Great Lakes Bird & Bat Observatory, is joining the BCW steering committee, and will succeed Barb Barzen, program and grants coordinator for the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin (NRF), who has served on the committee since its inception.

Bird City draws major support from NRF's Bird Protection Fund, and counts as its partners a number of state avian conservation organizations, including the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology and the Wisconsin Audubon Council.

Schwartz said the Steering Committee had conducted a national search for a new director and was confident that in Dr. Lenz they had found the right person to manage the growth of Bird City Wisconsin and to help inject fresh ideas into its conservation objectives.

In addition to his Ph.D. in 2013, Lenz earned an M.A. in biological anthropology from Tulane in 2008, a Master's in Science in primate conservation (with distinction) from Oxford Brookes University in England in 2004 and a B.A. in biological aspects of conservation (with distinction) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2001, along with a certificate in environmental studies.

Schwartz, who recently completed two years as president of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, also chairs the steering committee for the Western Great Lakes Bird & Bat Observatory and serves on the steering committees for the Great Wisconsin Birdathon and the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II. He retired in 2009 as senior editor for national and international news at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

Modeled on the "Tree City USA" program, Bird City Wisconsin has developed 22 conservation criteria across five categories. If a community meets at least seven criteria, it can be recognized as an official Bird City. Working through its web site, www.birdcitywisconsin.org, BCW has recruited

both public officials and interested citizens who belong to Audubon groups, nature preserves, bird clubs, natural history museums, conservation organizations and agencies, garden clubs, eco-minded businesses, and chambers of commerce that can be effective partners for developing and implementing Bird City strategies.

BCW communities each receive a special Bird City Wisconsin flag, plaque and two street signs to be erected at their boundaries, marking their conservation achievements.

Kim Grveles, who coordinates the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Bird Stopover Initiative, says the keen interest in birding in Wisconsin can be seen in the growing number of communities seeking "Bird City Wisconsin" status. In March, 160 supporters of Bird City's conservation efforts, including staff from the Department of Tourism and the DNR's Urban Forestry, Wildlife Management and Natural Heritage Conservation divisions, gathered in Oshkosh for a "Bird City Summit."

The conference followed on the heels of a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service report showing Wisconsin ranks second nationally in the proportion of citizens considered birders, with fully one-third of its residents 16 and older reporting they travel to watch birds, or actively watch and identify birds around home.

Melissa Hopkins, then director of Together Green for National Audubon, said of Bird City: "The efforts of Wisconsin conservation groups are proving that this is a model program worthy of replication at the national scale."

Schwartz said that in his new role he would be focused on seeing additional funding support for Bird City and working with groups in other states that are seeking to replicate BCW's success. Similar programs now exist in Indiana and Pennsylvania, and as part of National Audubon's "Bird Friendly Communities" initiative, Schwartz said he had been consulting with Minnesota Audubon, which will launch a program for that state in 2015.

The Bird Friendly Communities particularly emphasizes:

- Improved habitat conditions for breeding and migrating birds.
- Creating bird-safe buildings that reduce window collisions.