

Urban Bird Collective (UBC) is a Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)-led environmental stewardship organization founded to promote outdoor recreation and healing, with a focus on BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities. We grew out of a need to see more BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ people out in nature, and to create inclusive spaces for these communities because they often do not feel safe or welcome in outdoor spaces.

Our primary goal is to see a sustained increase in BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ people's participation in birding activities and to build authentic relationships with program participants. We also challenge other birding and outdoor organizations to be more inclusive. UBC leaders serve on the boards of many organizations including Saint Paul and Minneapolis Audubon, Hawk Ridge, Great River Passage Conservancy, Bell Museum, MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Mississippi Parks Connection, and Minneapolis Parks Foundation. We need these other organizations to help make outdoor spaces more inclusive, too.

Our secondary goal is to actively engage in the environmental movement. We are passionate about birdwatching and the protection of the environment, and we incorporate environmental education and stewardship into all programming components. In addition to learning about birding and gaining an appreciation of natural spaces, our participants are also engaging in physical activity outside in fresh air throughout the year (we host walks and other activities year-round). This activity is good for the physical health and mental well-being of our participants.

In addition, UBC supports the leadership development of its 34 volunteer leaders. This is such a powerful community, and we hold special space just so leaders can get to know and trust each other more and support each other in gaining more skills and in helping the organization meet its goals and fulfill its mission.

Our vision is to empower individuals to learn bird identification and gain appreciation of natural spaces by offering guided nature walks in parks and recreation areas, and in urban and suburban neighborhoods. We want people to get curious about nature and to be environmental stewards of their own backyards, and we want all communities to feel the benefits of being out in natural green spaces in Twin City neighborhoods and beyond. Through these walks, UBC also brings people to the conservation conversation – and they are often people who have not been a part of that conversation.

In 2024-25, we plan to increase our capacity and serve more people through our community events/tours around the Twin Cities. Since our inception we have reached more than 1,600 people through our programming. We currently provide support for 40–50 events each year, reaching more than 600 people annually. We would like to increase that number to 70-90 events this year, which will enable us to engage more than 800 people in 2024.

Four projects that we will work on this year include:

UBC supports the MN Winter Bird Counts each year, one of the largest community science events around the world. UBC walk leaders volunteer more than 700 hours annually in a three-week period. UBC has been instrumental in recruiting new and diverse volunteers for the counts, infusing winter bird counts with new people and new energy. UBC will explore opportunities to support more Saint Paul circles.

UBC also is collaborating with the Fish and Wildlife Service, the City of Saint Paul, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Three Rivers Park District to conduct chimney swift conservation

work/swift monitoring in the summer of 2024. While we are starting this as a pilot project in 2024 we want to build off the work in 2024 and continue this important work.

The goal of this project is to engage new birders from diverse backgrounds (BIPOC, LGBTQ+) in urban bird conservation through a Chimney Swift roost monitoring program. This outreach and engagement effort will also generate valuable data on Chimney Swift roosting locations and phenology and help inform a planned long-term Chimney Swift monitoring program.

Our project will identify, map, and monitor Chimney Swift nests and roosts in the Twin Cities metro area. The majority of swift roosts and nests are in older buildings and houses, concentrated in urban areas. Once identified, swift roost locations can serve as community gathering sites for Swift Night Out events, to engage urban communities and reach new birders.

UBC is also helping with conservation work at Pig's Eye Regional Park in partnership with Saint Paul Audubon and the Great River Passage Conservancy. In 2024 UBC has a goal of engaging up to 100 new folks to Pig's Eye Park. UBC believes that it takes years and even decades to make an impact so we will continue to engage folks in 2025 and beyond.

UBC couldn't do any of this work without our leaders. Our leaders come with a continuum of bird ID skills so we want to offer opportunities to not only enhance and gain new skills we believe deepening their relationships with each other is critical to our success.