



BIRD CITY WISCONSIN: Making our communities healthy for birds ... and people

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“Bird Cities” total in Wisconsin reaches 50

11 new communities recognized, and all 15 inaugural sites renew

Bayside, Wis. -- Bird City Wisconsin announced today that in awarding recognition to 11 additional communities, its collaborative program for urban bird conservation had reached the 50 mark. That's the number of cities, villages, towns and counties statewide it has honored for their highly public commitment to working with their residents to create a better place for people, birds and other wildlife.

Simultaneously, the two-year-old program announced that all 15 of its inaugural communities, recognized in December 2010, had successfully renewed their recognition for 2012.

The newest Bird City communities range widely and include the cities of Bayfield, Fond du Lac, Horicon, Oconomowoc, Oconto and Wausau; the villages of Plover, Fox Point and Whitefish Bay, and Marquette County. Also recognized was the community of "Sauk Prairie," with Sauk City and Prairie du Sac submitting a successful joint application.

Each will be presented with special Bird City Wisconsin flags, plaques and street signs at ceremonies to honor their conservation achievements.

The renewal process also saw 5 of the 15 original communities win "High Flyer" honors for meeting a more extensive set of conservation criteria. They included the cities of Stevens Point, Green Bay, Muskego, Oshkosh and Ozaukee County. The remaining 10 received the "Sustained Flight" award for their renewed commitment; they included the cities of Mequon, New London, Lake Geneva, Brookfield and River Falls; the villages of Bayside, Chenequa, Hales Corners and Williams Bay, and the Town of Manitowish Waters.

The Milwaukee Audubon Society partnered with other Wisconsin conservation organizations in 2009 to launch Bird City with an initial planning grant from *TogetherGreen*, an alliance between the National Audubon Society and Toyota.

"Birds are a vital component of a healthy ecosystem in our local communities and they provide environmental, as well as economic benefits," said Flo Miller, TogetherGreen co-director at Audubon. "As an early supporter of the Bird City Wisconsin program, Audubon and Toyota applaud the Wisconsin elected officials, citizens and volunteers who have made it possible for 50 towns across the state of Wisconsin to reach Bird City designation. The efforts of Wisconsin conservation groups are proving that this is a model program worthy of replication at the national scale."

Modeled on the "Tree City USA" program, Bird City developed 22 criteria across five categories, including habitat creation and protection, community forest management, limiting hazards to birds, public education, and recognition of International Migratory Bird Day. If a community meets at least seven criteria, it becomes an official "Bird City."

Wisconsin boasts 182 Tree Cities, ranking third in the nation, in a program that began in 1976.

Environment for the Americas, which coordinates International Migratory Bird Day events across two continents, said recently of Bird City Wisconsin: "One of the requirements to become a Bird City is hosting an IMBD event. In just two years, the state has become a leader in promoting bird conservation actions and community education."



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In making today's joint announcements, Bird City coordinator Carl Schwartz said the program was continuing to surpass its goals for growth and that efforts to gain Bird City status were under way in about three dozen additional communities.

"We are particularly encouraged by the 100% renewal rate, the number of "High Flyers" and the large number of additional conservation steps undertaken by those achieving "Sustained Flight," Schwartz said. "Wisconsin communities are paying increased attention to habitat preservation and to combating bird fatalities caused by domestic cats allowed to roam outdoors, and by window strikes."

Noel Cutright, founder of the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory, added that the BCW program "provides an excellent vehicle for communities to harness the human connection with birds -- reaching beyond bird watchers to new and essential audiences."

Bird City's recognition program is tailored to fit communities of all sizes, and accepts applications for initial certification three times each year, with the next deadline July 1. Recognition is renewable each year and runs from April 1 to March 31. Those communities announced today have been awarded recognition through March 31, 2013.

Schwartz said the Bird City project was using its web site, www.birdcitywisconsin.org, to reach out across the state and guide communities through the application process. The site walks birdwatchers, natural landscaping advocates, foresters, parks directors, city planners and other interested officials and public citizens through the application process, and includes how-to details on implementing new conservation strategies. It also features details on how each of its current communities earned their recognition, providing tips for those who will follow.

In 2010 and 2011, Together Green granted Bird City a total of \$51,000 to launch and expand the project. The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin recently donated \$10,000 and has pledged to raise \$20,000 a year over the next two years through its Bird Protection Fund in support of Bird City Wisconsin. The Bird City partnership also includes the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, the Madison Audubon Society, Wisconsin Audubon Council, Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, Riveredge Bird Club, and Aldo Leopold Audubon Society.

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About TogetherGreen

Audubon and Toyota launched the five-year *TogetherGreen* initiative in 2008 to build the promise of a greener, healthier future through innovation, leadership and volunteerism. For more information, visit www.togethergreen.org.

About Audubon

Now in its second century, Audubon connects people with birds, nature and the environment that supports us all. Our national network of community-based nature centers, chapters, scientific, education, and advocacy programs engages millions of people from all walks of life in conservation action to protect and restore the natural world. Visit Audubon online at www.audubon.org.

About Toyota

Toyota (NYSE: TM) established operations in the United States in 1957 and currently operates 10 manufacturing plants, including one under construction. Toyota directly employs nearly 30,000 people in the U.S. and its investment here is currently valued at more than \$18 billion, including sales and manufacturing operations, research and development, financial services and design. Toyota is committed to being a good corporate citizen in the communities where it does business and believes in supporting programs with long-term sustainable results. Toyota supports numerous organizations across the country, focusing on education, the environment and safety. Since 1991, Toyota has contributed over half a billion dollars to philanthropic programs in the U.S. For more information on Toyota's commitment to improving communities nationwide, visit <http://www.toyota.com/community>.