

Saw Mill River Audubon
October 4, 2021 Board Meeting Minutes (taken by Bill Kellner)
Meeting conducted via Zoom

Present (in bold type): **Erik Andersen, Cary Andrews, Ginger Bernardin, Earl DePass, Louisa Gagliardi, Phil Heidelberger, Rik Kaufman, Suzanne Kavic, Bill Kellner, Valerie Lyle, Michael Madias, Jr., Tom McEnerney, Ken Novenstern, Steve Rappaport, Tom Ruth, Lynn Salmon, Richard Saravay, Jean Sparacin, Jenni Stern, Larry Trachtenberg, Debbie van Zyl, Kathleen Williamson.** Executive Director Anne Swaim was also present.

Absent: Jean [online attendance compiled by Rik]

Meeting started at 7:00PM.

President's Report—Valerie Lyle

It was noted that a quorum was present.

Suzanne moved that the board of directors approve the minutes for the board of directors meeting held on September 13, 2021. Richard seconded this motion. The motion approving the minutes was adopted unanimously.

The Sept. 26 virtual gathering, held in place of our in-person Annual Dinner, was a successful event with 61 connections via Zoom. Anne distributed to the board a link to a recording of the gathering. We had a compelling presentation by our Larry Light Scholarship winner, Samuel Plyter, who described his experience at the Hog Island youth birding camp. Larry followed with a detailed and well-illustrated account of last May's SMRA trip to Yellowstone National Park. Kathleen said the Zoom program went very smoothly, thanks to Anne's expertise. Tom Mc pointed out that the Zoom annual gatherings have received more contributions to the Larry Light Scholarship Fund than the previous in-person annual dinners. It was suggested that we consider holding an annual virtual gathering in addition to the in-person Annual Dinner.

The board will not meet in November but each committee will hold a meeting during that month to plan for 2022 and set budget requests. Committee chairs are reminded to schedule these meetings if they have not already done so.

On September 22 Valerie sent an email memo to the board, which included a letter from Donna Lassiter in which Donna announced her resignation from the board of directors. Donna has also stepped down from her position as garden coordinator. As our current garden volunteers lack Donna's expertise, we are looking at options for managing the maintenance of the Pruyt gardens. We will need expert supervision for volunteer workdays at the gardens. We did a walk-through at the gardens with garden expert Hallie Wolf and we are going over Hallie's suggestions about how to manage garden maintenance. Suzanne will contact a friend who is a master horticulturist to see if she can provide any additional ideas. Suzanne will also look into working with the volunteers who maintain the gardens at Rockefeller State Park Preserve. An additional contact will be made by Rik to a friend who has recently been certified as a Master Gardener. Finally, Richard suggested contacting Carol Capobianco of the Native Plant Center at Westchester Community College for her input.

With Donna's departure we have two vacancies on the board of directors—one in the class of 2022 and one in the class of 2024. Bill and Steve have agreed to serve on the Nominating Committee again this year; Bill will chair the committee and will reach out to John Cavallero to see if he is willing serve again on the committee as the required non-board representative. The committee members will also query board members in the class of 2022 to confirm their interest in being renominated to serve on the board with an additional 3-year term; board officers will also be asked to confirm their interest in renomination for their positions.

Development Committee Report—Valerie Lyle

[Reference report Membership and Donation Report as of October 1, 2021]

With the current 582 SMRA chapter member households and 486 joint NAS/SMRA member households, total membership stands at 1,068.

Annual Fund donations year-to-date are at \$43,654. Annual Fund donations totaled \$63,351 in 2020.

Our quilt raffle raised \$1,125. We are very grateful to Jean for her work in creating the beautiful quilt.

The Endowment Fund has received a donation of \$9,500 from an employer matching grant following our anonymous donor's final 2020 donation.

Fundraising Committee Report—Louisa Gagliardi

We are hoping to begin online bidding at our silent auction this week. Board members will receive a notification as soon as the bidding is opened. The auction will remain open for bids until December.

Our fundraising calendar has been sent to the printer. We are hoping to receive our printed calendars within the next week or so.

Our fundraising Birdathon will be held this upcoming weekend.

Lynn announced that we have received another submission for our photo exhibition scheduled for February 2022 at the Hendrick Hudson Free Library in Montrose. We're working with the staff of the library to schedule a reception at the exhibit; we are looking at a date during the first week of February.

Finance Committee—Phil Heidelberger

As of October 1, 2021, the endowment portfolio balance was \$1,389,065, an \$84,282 (6.5%) increase above the January 1, 2021 balance of \$1,304,783 and a \$54,554 (3.8%) decrease for the month of September. There have been \$41,000 in withdrawals from and \$9,500 in additions to the portfolio so far during 2021. As of October 1, 2021, we are \$44,013 (33.4%) above our guideline to maintain two years of budgeted withdrawals in highly liquid assets such as checking and money market funds.

Treasurer's Report—Tom McEnerney

[Shared report on screen: Operating Revenues and Expenses for the 9 months ended September 30, 2021]

Revenues for the first 9 months of the year are almost \$5,000 ahead of budget, primarily due to higher donations.

Donations are higher primarily due to \$3,000 of one-time gifts and \$1,900 of Annual Dinner donations consisting of deposits that people donated to SMRA in lieu of refunds.

Expenses for the first 9 months are almost \$2,000 over budget due primarily to bird seed costs being \$3,800 over budget. The resulting net operating deficit of \$32,600 is about \$3,000 better than budget due to the higher revenues. Unbudgeted expenses were about \$13,000 and the total cash expense in excess of revenues was about \$45,700. This expense was covered by \$41,000 of withdrawals from the endowment and \$3,900 of unbudgeted revenues. This resulted in a decrease of about \$800 in the checking account balance since the beginning of the year.

On page 2 of his report, Tom reviewed the items of unbudgeted revenues, consisting primarily of an unemployment insurance refund and Larry Light family donations that have not yet been deposited into the Larry Light Fund.

Unbudgeted expenses consisted primarily of \$8,800 of Pruyn House repairs, including the replacement of the in-ground oil tank and interior painting.

Page 2 of Tom's report also included revenues, expenses and profit for bird seed sales for the last three years. Bird seed profits fluctuate from year to year based on the weather and the timing of seed purchases. Revenues for 2020 and 2021 are higher than prior years, apparently as a result of people spending more time at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Although seed costs are over budget this year, revenues are projected to be over budget as well, resulting in profits being at or close to budget.

Pruyn House Report—Ginger Bernardin

Pruyn House expenses are budgeted for typical costs of running and maintaining a home. Special projects are considered off-budget items; these expenses are subject individually to board approval.

In 2016 under the supervision of former SMRA president Robert McCrillis, an engineering survey was done for Pruyn House that listed short and long-term maintenance. The Pruyn House Committee has been utilizing this report to plan a sequence of maintenance work and will meet to discuss which projects to take on in 2022.

One project we are considering is dealing with the roof, which is now 33 years old. Although there are no major leaks, it is covered in moss. The flat breezeway was identified as a potential problem in the 2016 report; we may need to address this in 2022. We have solicited three quotes for roof replacement, ranging from a low bid of \$15,000 to a high of \$25,500.

Pruyn House Report cont'd—Ginger Bernardin

We have 12 leaky single pane windows. We already have some quotes for windows but plan to get more.

Another area that we may want to address in 2022 is the driveway, which is also in need of repaving.

Phil asked about the possibility of installing solar panels on the new roof. Anne mentioned that a previous analysis—done several years ago when we were considering major reconstruction of the Pruy House—showed that the building is well aligned for solar panels.

Phil mentioned that Twin Belle Plumbing was consulted on the possibility of installing an air-source heat pump system at Pruy House. The contractor pointed out that the building's underfloor radiant heating would make installing this kind of system very difficult and costly.

Bird Seed Sale—Ken Novenster

Our third Saturday seed sale for October is scheduled for the 16th. Four volunteers are requested to help load seed in customers' cars. (Several board members stepped up at the meeting; Ellen will compile a list of those who have signed up.)

Our September seed sale was a big success; many thanks to all our volunteers and customers. Running the entire sale at the seed shed made for a smooth operation. We're still compiling final revenue numbers. A goal for the future is to reach out to a younger clientele. We have a loyal customer base but it is definitely on the older end of the age spectrum.

Executive Director's Report—Anne Swaim

Our grant application in the amount of \$3,000 to purchase and set up streaming wildlife cameras in Pruy Sanctuary has been submitted to Con Edison and we have received encouraging feedback that it is likely to be approved. We are planning to stream video of our bird feeders on YouTube and the camera feed could then be available for virtual classroom lessons.

The board of directors at the meeting held on Sept. 13, 2021 approved bowhunting of deer by SMRA-vetted hunters in our Brinton Brook, Pruy and Choate Sanctuaries during the portion of the NYS bowhunting season from November 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021. Hunting in Brinton Brook is limited to the portion of the sanctuary outside the Village of Croton-on-Hudson. All hunters who were approved for hunting in the 2020 season are planning to return this year. Signs will be posted in the three sanctuaries informing visitors about when and how bowhunting will take place with an example sign shown to the board.

The Rewilding School's addition of our Pruy Sanctuary to its programs has gone smoothly. The school is running its Wildings Program for 2, 3 and 4-year olds accompanied by a parent or guardian at Pruy. For the upcoming winter season, sessions will be limited to Thursdays and Fridays only.

The Rewilding School wants to schedule an open house at Brinton Brook on the afternoon of Sunday, Oct. 17 for recruiting purposes and there were no board concerns with this happening.

At the previous board meeting, Anne described the virtual meeting held by the Federated Conservationists of Westchester County (FCWC) and the five Westchester County Audubon chapters with County Executive Latimer to discuss issues related to the Westchester County Parks. Meeting attendees made several requests of the County Executive, including making information available in advance about upcoming large maintenance projects in the County parks. To date, the County Parks Dept. has not adequately responded to the requests for greater transparency. There has been some progress with the posting by Parks of a webpage listing contacts for each park. We will continue to do follow-up with County Executive Latimer and Parks.

SMRA provided digital hosting for the virtual New York State Ornithological Association Annual Meeting held on Oct 2. Suzanne attended the meeting and reported that the Zoom technology worked extremely well and that the meeting was a great success.

Executive Director's Report cont'd—Anne Swaim

A pending project is installing signs for Discovery Spots at Pruyn. (See the minutes of the board of directors meeting held on April 5, 2021 for more details about this project and for information about the grant from the National Audubon Society, which will cover our expenses.)

Advocacy Committee Report—Tom Ruth

The Advocacy Committee is working on objectives that we laid out at the recent board of directors' retreat. Rik will meet with the Yorktown Cure100 group to plan collaborative efforts, with a focus on carbon footprint calculation for our organization. Jenni is exploring the issue of habitat management at our larger corporate parks and campuses. Bill is working on a committee site visit to a large, ground-based solar installation. The Committee's next Zoom meeting is scheduled for Nov. 8.

At last month's board meeting, Tom reported on the proposed Pocantico Lake Subdivision in Mt. Pleasant. The developer wants to build 31 houses on a parcel adjacent to the lake. The town's Planning Board has ruled that a full environmental impact statement will be required. The Advocacy Committee will continue to monitor the process.

The Audubon New York Council will hold an in-person meeting along with Audubon Connecticut on Oct. 29–31 at Southbury, CT. Richard and Tom are planning to attend. Please contact one of them if interested in going.

Sanctuaries Committee Report—Michael Madias, Jr.

The bench donated by Nancy Heppner has been installed in our Graff Sanctuary. Nancy's generous donation covers material costs for the bench and plaque as well as installation costs.

SMRA participated in the annual Hudson Valley Ramble last month by hosting a walk at our Brinton Brook Sanctuary. This was an enjoyable event that was well-attended.

Phil and Michael met with principal Eric Stone of the Rewilding School to discuss work for Rewilding School families to do at Brinton Brook Sanctuary. We are planning to have volunteers spread wood chips on October 9 that will be delivered to the sanctuary.

Another volunteer activity planned for Rewilding School volunteers is working with Eric Stone to install bamboo screening for the school's camp site in Brinton Brook. Eric will make sure that no live bamboo is used to prevent inadvertent spread of this invasive plant.

We are also working with Chappaqua Boy Scouts to do more volunteer work at Pruyn Sanctuary.

Programs and Field Trips—Debbie van Zyl

Renowned author David Sibley will be the featured guest at a live Zoom presentation hosted by all five Westchester Audubon chapters on Oct. 12. The topic will be Sibley's recent book, *What It's Like to Be a Bird*. We currently have 541 registrants.

The board was notified about a birding trip to Cape May for Nov. 5–7. We're planning to visit a site where owls are banded and hope to participate in this activity. This trip is now fully subscribed.

Our outdoor field trips are still limited to a maximum attendance of 20. Please see SMRA's online calendar for the schedule of our Small Group birding walks for October and Nov.

We're looking forward to our Zoom presentation on Nov. 11 featuring Peter Post and his nature photography. Peter will provide tips and tricks for capturing outstanding images of wildlife.

Our annual Members Best holiday season event is scheduled for Dec. 16. We'll feature nature photography from SMRA members as well as some holiday treats. As of now, a decision has not been made about whether this will be an-person or virtual event because the Croton Library is not yet scheduling large person events.

Programs and Field Trips Cont'd

Kathleen reported on the upcoming Nature Book Club meeting. We'll discuss *World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds* by Scott Weidensaul at our Zoom session on Nov. 16.

Newsletter—Anne Swaim

The deadline for the winter issue is Nov. 1. This issue will cover December, 2021 and January and February, 2022.

Valerie expressed interest in having the newsletter publish an article on the problem of outdoor lighting and its impacts on wildlife, including birds and insects. A general discussion of this issue followed. Cary mentioned that the Croton CAC has been looking at this problem. Erik described the situation at the new athletic fields in Yorktown, which have lighting that is much brighter than necessary and is not compliant with current standards for shielding lights. Erik and Bill mentioned work on this issue done by the International Dark Sky Association.

New Business—Valerie Lyle

Rik raised the concern that the pandemic-related growth of outdoor dining venues has led to excessive use of propane heaters and attendant fossil fuel consumption.

To raise awareness of the problem of plastic pollution, Kathleen suggested that we look at promoting an exhibit of art-work made from discarded plastic. Tom R. suggested the exhibit space in Rockefeller State Park Preserve as a possible venue.

Adjournment—Valerie Lyle

Cary moved that Valerie adjourn the meeting; Ginger seconded this motion. With all present voting in favor, Valerie adjourned the meeting at 8:19 pm.