MISSION
To conduct coordinated research, monitoring, and education that advances the conservation of birds and bats in Wisconsin and throughout the Western Great Lakes Region.

VISION
We envision a day when knowledge of birds and bats is widespread, decisions affecting them are based on good science, and citizens care about conservation and participate in it so that common species are kept common and imperiled populations are restored.

FOUNDER
Noel J. Cutright, Ph.D.

DIRECTOR
William P. Mueller

CHIEF SCIENTIST
Bryan Lenz, Ph.D.

ASSISTANT TO THE DIRECTOR
Michael Schlotfeldt

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Owen Boyle, Ph.D.
Zoe Finney
Glen Fredlund, Ph.D.
Charles Hagner
Bob Holzrichter
Joanne Kline

HEADQUARTERS
The Observatory is located near the shores of Lake Michigan in the town of Belgium, Ozaukee County, Wisconsin. Its headquarters occupy the rustic clubhouse of an 18-hole semi-private golf course that in 2009 was converted into the Forest Beach Migratory Preserve, 116 acres of grassland, wetland, and other habitats used by migratory birds. The preserve is owned and managed by the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust, the Observatory’s fiscal agent and partnering organization.
The Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory was founded by Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame inductee Dr. Noel J. Cutright.

In July 2010, he emailed the following message to friends and colleagues: “My dream is to turn the Squires Golf Course clubhouse in Ozaukee County that is owned by the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust into the building that would house the Midwest Bird Observatory. You are the first persons that I’ve shared this dream with. Reaction?”

The response was overwhelmingly positive, and Noel went to work contacting potential funders and supporters and refining the Observatory’s geographic focus and mission. By October 2010, the organization had become the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory, and the Riveredge Bird Club, now known as the Noel J. Cutright Bird Club, was sponsoring a Big Sit at Forest Beach to raise funds.

Noel penned the Observatory’s initial mission: “to advance knowledge of bird and bat populations and their conservation in Wisconsin and throughout the Western Great Lakes Region through coordinated research, monitoring, and education using good science.”

In its first years, the Observatory was successful in raising funds to conduct research and establish a headquarters in the former Squires clubhouse at the Forest Beach Migration Preserve. The headquarters now contains offices, a library, housing for interns, and educational displays.

In fall 2013, a steering committee was formed to undertake the planning of the Observatory’s future. Committee members were Dr. Owen Boyle, Dr. Glen Fredlund, Ozaukee Washington Land Trust Executive Director Shawn Graff (non-voting), Charles Hagner, Bettie Harriman, Observatory Director William Mueller (non-voting), Kate Redmond, Carl Schwartz (Committee Chair), and Joel Trick.

The steering committee analyzed the Observatory’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; drafted and adopted its mission and vision statements; set short- and long-term goals; and wrote a strategic plan. The committee also established four standing committees:

**DEVELOPMENT & FINANCE** To provide financial stability that will allow the Observatory to address both short- and long-term needs.

**GOVERNANCE** To create an organizational and governing structure that establishes the Observatory as the statewide and regional leader in advancing knowledge of bird and bat populations and their conservation.

**OUTREACH** To engage people in conservation action and outreach efforts that communicate the importance of bird and bat conservation and encourage them to participate in the protection of habitat.

**SCIENCE** To coordinate research, monitoring, and education that support and promote bird conservation in the Western Great Lakes Region.

Dr. Gary Casper joined the Science Committee in December 2014. Dr. Bryan Lenz, state director of Bird City Wisconsin, was hired as chief scientist in 2015. Julia Robson and Zoe Finney joined the board of directors in April 2016.

Noel devoted his life to bird conservation and citizen science. He served twice as president of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, he was the founder of the Riveredge Bird Club (now known as the Noel J. Cutright Bird Club), in Newburg, and he was instrumental in the creation of Bird City Wisconsin. He was also a co-author and senior editor of the first Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas.

Noel worked for We Energies as senior terrestrial ecologist for 29 years before retiring in 2006. He continued to serve We Energies in an emeritus position until his death in November, 2013. He served on the boards of many non-profit environmental organizations, including the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust, Riveredge Nature Center, Urban Ecology Center, Mequon Nature Preserve, and Wisconsin Society for Ornithology.

In recognition of his many achievements in the fields of bird conservation, citizen science, and ecological restoration, on April 30, 2016, he joined Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and others in the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame.
You can find bird observatories around the globe. Some have been in existence for more than a century. Most usually do monitoring and research. The Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory, founded in 2010 by Dr. Noel J. Cutright, does those things, and more. Noel’s vision was for an observatory that would perform monitoring and research tasks, always in the context of good, applied science—and the “applied” distinction was meant to refer to our application of this work in the service of biodiversity conservation.

Bird observatories in North America are distributed rather sparsely. Some are located in coastal regions (Cape May, Point Blue Conservation Science, Gulf Coast); some are in the mountains or western states (Rocky Mountain, Klamath); and some are mid-continent (Black Swamp, Hawk Ridge, Whitefish Point, Rouge River, Missouri River, and now Western Great Lakes). Our location on the western shore of Lake Michigan fills a geographic gap and allows us to focus on conservation topics and projects unique to the Western Great Lakes region. We have also added a focus on bats.

Our offshore Lake Michigan waterfowl/waterbird monitoring and our shoreline Waterbird Watch are projects typical of bird observatories worldwide. We are deeply involved in the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II, a project Noel worked on until his death in late 2013. Our outreach activities and involvement in public education about threats to birds, through our participation in the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative (on its Steering Committee and Issues Committee), ongoing work on highway mortality and window collisions, and our participation in the highly successful Bird City Wisconsin program round out our wide-ranging emphasis on bird and bat conservation in the Midwest.

William Mueller, Director

Looking back now, some six years after the first discussion of establishing a bird observatory in Wisconsin, it is apparent to me that Dr. Cutright embarked on his last great project with a fierce sense of urgency. He undertook the project only after he had undergone surgery for what would be diagnosed as Stage IV colon cancer, which he would battle for four years and succumb to in November 2013.

In July of 2010, he circulated a “concept” for the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory, calling it “my dream and primary objective in life in the near future.” Its proposed mission: “to advance knowledge of bird and bat populations and their conservation in Wisconsin and throughout the Western Great Lakes Region through coordinated research, monitoring, and education using good science.”

When I look back at Noel’s “concept,” it is really quite amazing to see how much has come to fruition. He saw an opportunity to tie the Observatory to the just-established Forest Beach Migratory Preserve, headquartering in the old Squires Golf Course clubhouse. He saw the potential for playing a role in the state’s second Breeding Bird Atlas, which Observatory Director Bill Mueller has more than fulfilled. He wanted to partner with Bird City Wisconsin, and its state director, Dr. Bryan Lenz, has taken a part-time position as the Observatory’s chief scientist. Noel also foresaw both the need and opportunity for waterbird watches at Harrington Beach State Park, bird banding at Forest Beach, bat surveys, and coordination of bird-monitoring programs—all of which are underway.

Noel’s dream has been fulfilled, but it’s up to those of us still here to keep it alive and expand it.

Carl Schwartz, Board Chair
The Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory is engaged in many projects that are designed to improve our understanding of birds in order to increase the effectiveness of efforts to protect them. The Observatory employs varied data-collection methods to meet its research goals, always considering how data might be used to improve conservation outcomes, and firmly believes in the power of effective advocacy and outreach.

The Observatory recognizes the importance of both professional and citizen science, something that is evident in two of its current priority projects: the Midwest Landbird Migration Monitoring Network (MLMMN) and the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II (WBBAII). The MLMMN is an innovative partnership that will coordinate regional data collection and foster collaboration among professional scientists. The long-term goal is to build, for the first time, a detailed picture of the factors that influence avian survival during migration across the Midwest so that the MLMMN can guide conservation efforts aimed at helping birds during their remarkable migratory journeys.

The WBBAII, on the other hand, coordinates the work of citizen scientists. The Observatory is heavily involved in training the public to collect data for the Atlas, which is currently in the second year of what will be five years of data collection. The data gleaned from this research will tell us how the distribution of breeding birds has changed since the previous Atlas concluded in the 1990s. The WBBAII is only possible thanks to the incredible volunteers who collect data. (If you upload breeding-bird data to eBird, thank you!) The amount of data needed for an accurate picture of the distribution of breeding birds would be cost-prohibitive if its collection was solely up to professional researchers.

The Observatory also engages in direct data collection and conservation. The Waterbird Watch, conducted on the shores of Lake Michigan at Harrington Beach State Park, records the passage of over 150,000 migrating birds each spring and fall. In addition, we run a bird-banding program at Forest Beach Migratory Preserve each spring and fall, and coordinate data collection on American Kestrel nest boxes that the Observatory helped landowners erect.

Finally, the Observatory is involved in a significant project that is currently at the data-analysis stage. In recent years, the Observatory conducted a series of flights over western Lake Michigan to examine the distribution of birds offshore. This research, conducted in conjunction with similar data collection across the Great Lakes, is an important first step in filling a significant gap in our understanding of how birds use coastal waters. The knowledge gained will ultimately prepare us for the coming conversations on the siting of offshore wind projects.

Bryan Lenz, Ph.D., Chief Scientist
Recent Work

The initial geographic focus of the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory has been Wisconsin, but the Observatory’s work is expanding into the greater Midwest. The Observatory has been able to accomplish much so far. Here are some highlights.

MIDWEST LANDBIRD MIGRATION MONITORING NETWORK
Recognizing how important well-coordinated observers, researchers, and decision makers are to understanding migratory connectivity, the Observatory has laid the foundations for a formal landbird monitoring network. In January 2014, the Observatory hired Dr. Amber Roth to draft a strategic action plan that identifies priority migration needs in the eight states of the Upper Midwest, to lay out a network of monitoring and research capacity to address those needs, and to coordinate the creation of the MLMMN. Dr. Roth, then at Michigan Technological University, shepherded the development of the plan, published in February of 2015. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has approved a $98,000 grant to fund Dr. Roth’s position through 2017 so she can oversee the plan’s implementation.

WISCONSIN BREEDING BIRD ATLAS II
Dr. Cutright was a driving force in launching the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II, and the Observatory has been involved at every step of the five-year, $1 million project. Observatory Director Mueller serves on four of the six standing committees and has traveled more than 2,000 miles while helping lead 33 Atlas workshops all over Wisconsin since October 2014. A second round of presentations is underway. Results from the first season of the Atlas were excellent. Seven hundred observers surveyed 2,600 Atlas blocks and submitted 23,900 checklists, documenting 1.7 million birds. Atlasers recorded 229 species, almost as many as were recorded in five seasons of the first Atlas (239), and confirmed breeding by 212 species. Eight of the species had not been confirmed during the first Atlas: Bufflehead, Eurasian Collared-Dove, White-eyed Vireo, Great Tit, Kirtland’s Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Whooping Crane, and European Goldfinch.

OFFSHORE WATERFOWL/WATERBIRD SURVEYS
The Observatory received funding to conduct five years of waterfowl/waterbird surveys over Lake Michigan via aircraft. The surveys focused on assessing the distribution and abundance of birds in deep waters up to 10 miles offshore, to assist long-term planning for offshore wind-power installations. Survey data may also help assess waterfowl numbers for management and harvest. Final reports for Phase 2 (2013-14) have been submitted. Director Mueller and Dr. Jill Hapner, of Geobotany Systems Consulting, are working on GIS and mapping for the project. At this time, the Great Lakes Commission will not fund additional offshore surveys, so the Observatory is seeking funding elsewhere.
WATERBIRD WATCH
From September 1 to November 20, 2015, the Observatory conducted the Waterbird Watch as part of its ongoing effort to monitor birds migrating along the western shoreline of Lake Michigan. Counts were undertaken on 67 days at Harrington Beach State Park, in Ozaukee County. Coverage totaled 400 hours. Altogether, 164,991 individuals of 162 species were seen, including 64 waterbird species. A paper describing 2014-15 results appears in the winter 2015 issue of *The Passenger Pigeon*, the quarterly journal of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. The watch began in 2012.

BANDING STATION
Forest Beach Migratory Preserve is an ideal location for bird banding, as much remains to be learned about how avian species utilize the newly restored habitats. The Observatory's last three banding seasons there have gone extremely well. Last fall’s busiest day saw 78 birds banded, and seasonal totals included more than 450 in fall 2014, 350 in spring 2015, and 375 in fall 2015. Led by banding supervisor Stephanie Beilke, master bander Al Sherkow, Debbie Hartmann, and Vicki Piaskowski, three teams will cover two days each week this spring.

AMERICAN KESTREL PARTNERSHIP
The American Kestrel is experiencing long-term declines not only in Wisconsin but also throughout North America. Because existing data are insufficient for understanding the causes, the Observatory joined the American Kestrel Partnership, spearheaded by the Peregrine Fund, and quickly surpassed a goal of erecting and monitoring 100 nest boxes in Wisconsin. The Observatory now collects data from more than 170 boxes in eight counties. Volunteers with Madison Audubon Society, coordinated by Brand Smith, program coordinator, and Mark Martin, resident manager of Goose Pond Sanctuary, have put up, maintained, and monitored the majority of the boxes from which the Observatory obtains data. Existing boxes are being incorporated into the program, and additional boxes are being constructed and will be erected and monitored.

HIGHWAY 49 MITIGATION PLAN
Along with many partner groups and agencies, Observatory Director Mueller contributed to a wildlife mitigation plan for State Highway 49 where it crosses the northern end of Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, east of Waupun. The plan was prepared in February 2015 for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 3, by Marcel P. Huijser and James S. Begley, of Montana State University. The document was published the fall 2015 issue of *The Passenger Pigeon*, the journal of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology.
BAT SURVEYS AND EDUCATION
A state wildlife grant was obtained to assist with bat surveys and public workshops and presentations from 2010 to 2012. Almost 30 workshops were held at nature centers and state facilities in eastern Wisconsin in 2012. Bat surveys (using the AnaBat acoustic monitoring device) were conducted by both volunteers and paid surveyors who followed water-based routes for the Batlas Project of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

CHIMNEY SWIFT MONITORING
Director Mueller and Nancy Nabak, Bird City Wisconsin coordinator for the City of Green Bay, presented a poster on monitoring Chimney Swifts in the Green Bay area at the 2014 Midwest Coordinated Bird Monitoring Partnership Workshop in Port Washington.

LONG-TAILED DUCK STUDY
Former Observatory intern Andrew Limmer, then a senior at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, reviewed the current situation of the Long-tailed Duck using offshore waterfowl survey data, Christmas Bird Count records, and harvest data.

PROJECT NIGHTHAWK MONITORING
The Common Nighthawk is thought to be declining but is inadequately monitored by programs such as the North American Breeding Bird Survey. A nocturnal survey targeting the species (along with Eastern Whip-poor-will) was initiated in the northeastern United States in 2005. Wisconsin, through the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, joined the effort in 2007 and mounted an intensive annual survey the following year. While the survey appears to be effective for monitoring whip-poor-wills, it is inadequate for nighthawks. During the summer of 2012, the Observatory asked cooperators to submit records of nighthawks observed anywhere in Wisconsin. Data are still being assembled.

SCHUCHARDT FARMS SURVEY
In the summer of 2011, the Observatory performed a wildlife assessment and field survey of the 205-acre Schuchardt Farms property in the City of Sheboygan as part of a conservation plan. Observatory biologists documented important wildlife habitats and identified the importance of both preserving habitat connectivity and controlling invasive plants as the property is developed, managed, and restored.

ABOUT CARL SCHWARTZ, BOARD CHAIR
Carl chairs the Steering Committee for Bird City Wisconsin as well as the Observatory’s board. He also served for five years as project coordinator of Bird City Wisconsin. He is immediate past president and serves on the board of directors of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology; he also is editor of its monthly newsletter, The Badger Birder. He is program chair for the Noel J. Cutright Bird Club, in Newburg. He also is past president of the Friends of the Cedarburg Bog, a member of the American Bird Conservancy, National Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, International Crane Foundation, the Southeast Wisconsin Invasive Species Consortium, Gathering Waters, the Door County and Ozaukee Washington Land Trusts, and the Horicon Marsh Bird Club. He retired in 2009 as senior editor for national and international news at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, where he had worked since graduating from the University of Illinois in 1971.
Outreach and Public Events

BIRD CITY WISCONSIN
Observatory Director Bill Mueller serves on the Steering Committee of this thriving six-year-old partnership, which works to ensure that Wisconsin’s urban residents maintain healthy populations of birds and grow an appreciation for them.

MIDWEST AERIAL INSECTIVORE WORKING GROUP
Director Mueller is the co-chair of this working group, which is a part of the Midwest Coordinated Bird Monitoring Partnership.

WISCONSIN BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

PRESENTATIONS
In addition to helping lead 33 workshops for the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II since October 2014, the director also made 14 presentations, including the following:
- Ecology of Chimney Swifts, Sheboygan Audubon (2/12/16)
- Nest boxes and volunteering, Friends of Cedarburg Bog (2/20/16)
- State of the birds, Fond du Lac Audubon (3/11/16)
- Offshore waterfowl research and monitoring, Wehr Nature Center (3/18/16)
- Importance of Lake Michigan shoreline restoration efforts to birds, with Shawn Graff, annual meeting of Great Lakes chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration (3/28/16)
- The Long Walk, Benjamin F. Goss Bird Club (4/19/16)
- Wildlife habitat conservation initiatives along western Lake Michigan, with Shawn Graff and Dr. Gary Casper, Clean Rivers, Clean Lake Conference (4/30/16)

PUBLIC EVENTS
The Observatory hosted a number of successful public events, including the following:
- Big Sit: Fourteen birders recorded 55 bird species from the Bill Cowart Memorial Hawk Watch Platform at Forest Beach Migratory Preserve during the seventh annual count, hosted by the Noel J. Cutright Bird Club on Sunday, October 11. Team members tallied 70 species the year before, topping the previous record of 59 set in 2011.
- Treasures of Oz: Visitors to Forest Beach Migratory Preserve on June 20 enjoyed docent-led birding hikes, a live raptor show, presentations, exhibits, and a silent auction. Steve & Friends provided music. Smokin’ Joe’s BBQ/Chuck’s of Thiensville provided the food.
- International Migratory Bird Day: At Forest Beach Migratory Preserve on May 16, events included guided bird hikes, a photography workshop led by Kate Redmond, a live raptor exhibit, and “For the Birds,” featuring tours, locally built bird houses, a silent auction, a luncheon, and an address by Carl Schwartz on the state of the birds.
- Dedication of Noel’s Knoll: Observatory supporters, work colleagues, and friends and acquaintances of Dr. Cutright gathered at Forest Beach Migratory Preserve on October 12, 2014, to remember his life and to dedicate a grove of six trees that he had purchased: sycamores, tulip trees (yellow poplar), eastern redbuds, and an Ohio buckeye. He remembered the species fondly from his childhood in southern Ohio.
Since 2010, the Observatory has received grants, individual donations, in-kind gifts, and endowment donations totaling $530,408.81. Donations were received from a total of 430 individuals, governments, foundations, and organizations.

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Donations by calendar year:

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How to Donate

The Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory is soliciting partners, sponsors, and donors for several major coordinated research, monitoring, and education projects, including the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II, the Midwest Landbird Migration Monitoring Network, the American Kestrel Partnership, the Waterbird Watch, bat monitoring, the banding station, and others. By donating, you show support for the Observatory’s goal of advancing the conservation of birds and bats in Wisconsin and throughout the western Great Lakes region.

The Observatory is in the process of incorporating as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with a board of directors and scientific advisory committee.

In April 2016, the Observatory finalized an agreement with the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin to establish the WGLBBO Fund, a permanent endowment fund supporting the mission of advancing the conservation of birds and bats in Wisconsin and throughout the western Great Lakes region through coordinated research, monitoring and education. The WGLBBO Fund is managed by the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin. Contributions are tax-deductible and can be made to the Observatory or by sending a check directly to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, Attn: WGLBBO Fund, P.O. Box 2317, Madison, WI 53701 or by donating online at www.wisconservation.org.

You can also help ensure the Observatory’s future work by including it in your estate plans. Bequests of any size are gratefully accepted. To leave a bequest to the WGLBBO Fund, simply incorporate the following language in your estate plans: “I give [describe the gift] to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin [federal tax ID 39-1572034], a nonprofit corporation organized and existing under the laws of Wisconsin and with a principal mailing address of P.O. Box 2317, Madison, WI 53701. This gift shall be designated to the WGLBBO Fund.”

Donations to the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory are tax-deductible through our fiscal agent and partnering organization, the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust, Inc. For more information on how to make a gift or a bequest, contact the Land Trust at mschlotfeldt@owlt.org or (262) 338-1794.
Contact Us

Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory

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Belgium, Wisconsin 53074

Phone: (262) 285-3374
(414) 698-9108

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To learn more about the Observatory, its research projects, and volunteer opportunities, and to get driving directions to the Forest Beach Migratory Preserve, visit our website.

www.wglbbo.org

Like us on Facebook: facebook.com/wglbbo
Follow us on Twitter: @WGLBBO

Ozaukee Washington Land Trust

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Photos by Kate Redmond, Stephanie Beilke, and Zoe Finney.
Entrance-sign artwork by Don Rambadt, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.