

Board of Directors Candidates 2025/26

PRESIDENT - 1 year term

Kiki Sonnen



Kiki Sonnen, a life-long resident of St Paul, has been involved with our Chapter since the 1970s. Her career included community organizing, running community-based social service programs, being elected three times to the city council, and serving as community liaison for the Ramsey County Sheriff's office by tracking neighborhood crime trends.

Now retired, Kiki's interests are sketching, wood carving, birding, studying American History. She is also in her 49th year of continued efforts to secure improvements, clean-ups, habitat restoration, and security for the herons and egrets of Pig's Eye Park.

VICE PRESIDENT – 1-year term

Debbie Brown



Debbie describes herself as an "Army brat" who continued moving around as an adult. She has lived on both coasts, in Texas, Germany, and southwest Africa, and St. Paul for the past 14 years. "I am not an expert birder, but I have strong interests in nature, conservation, birds, and all animals," Debbie said.

Professionally, Debbie is a certified industrial hygienist and safety professional. She worked for the government and the private sector for 25 years before starting her consultancy several years ago. Debbie has volunteered with our Chapter for several years. She is co-chair of the Conservation Committee. She is instrumental in getting volunteers involved in hands-on activities such as habitat restoration, park cleanups, and nest box maintenance.

TREASURER - 1 year term

Neil Carlson



Neil serves as our Chapter's treasurer and has been on the Board for several years. Growing up in 4-H in Southwestern Minnesota, Neil developed his love for the outdoors while attending conservation camp at Lake Itasca. In 2022, he became a Master Naturalist and volunteers at the Three Rivers Parks District. He especially enjoys observing the Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets at the Marshall Terrace rookery.

Neil is a member of the In Focus Camera Club. With the help of others, he has self-published several nature photography books. He also writes Sci-Fi stories in his spare time. Neil works as a public health specialist for the Environmental Health and Safety Department at the U of M. He also serves on the Pesticide Safety and Environment Education Advisory Board.

SECRETARY- 1 year term

Amanda Rice



Amanda has advocated for the outdoor environment for as long as she can remember. After pursuing an education in biology and environmental health, she has worked to keep laboratory and manufacturing employees safe for 20 years. In 2022, she completed the Big Woods, Big River naturalist training with the University of Minnesota Extension program.

Since then, she has renewed her passion for conservation and habitat restoration through volunteer events. Some of those events included birding education, which has led to her interest in serving as secretary for another year on the Saint Paul Bird Alliance board.

BOARD MEMBER- 2-year term
Monica Bryand



Monica is the founder of Urban Bird Collective, a non-profit community-based organization that provides safe and welcoming spaces for BIPOC and the LGBT community in the Twin Cities. Her career includes working for philanthropic foundations, community-based organizations, and consulting agencies. Monica also works as a scorer, announcer, and support staff for the U of M's athletic department.

In addition to these jobs, Monica volunteers on many environmentally focused non-profit boards. She is the Co-Chair of the Bird Alliance's Conservation Committee. She has served on our board for several years.

BOARD MEMBER - 2-year term
Craig Cox



Craig grew up in Saint Paul and has spent 40-plus years working to protect natural resources with a particular emphasis on water and wetlands. He worked for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the National Academy of Sciences, the Senate Agriculture Committee, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Soil and Water Conservation Society, and the Environmental Working Group.

His work gave him the experience of seeing how good policy can intersect public lands, agriculture, and the environment for the greater good. Craig became hooked on birding when watching Cedar Waxwings feeding in a meadow on the North Shore. Now, binoculars are always with him, including in his fishing vest, when he pursues his other passion – flyfishing for trout. Now retired, he is volunteering with the Saint Paul Bird Alliance. He has served on the Board and as Secretary and is now chairing our chapter's grants program.



Board members- 2-year term
Lucas Lin

Lucas is an avid birder and wildlife photographer currently studying at the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry. His interest in birding was first piqued when, as a college student, he glimpsed a flock of cranes at a Wisconsin marsh in the spring of 2022. They were Whooping Cranes! Since then, his curiosity has blossomed into a passion for birdwatching and wildlife photography, leading him on birding trips nationwide.

Throughout his adventures, Lucas has used his passion for birding to raise awareness about the diversity and beauty of birds and the habitats we depend on.

BOARD MEMBER - 2-year term
Owen Stefanich



Owen is an avid birder who first became interested in birds during high school. He spent many hours birding the Pacific Northwest before he came to Northfield to study biology at St. Olaf College. During his freshman year, he founded an on-campus Audubon chapter, the Bird Alliance of St Olaf. This chapter leads weekly bird walks and advocates for environmental policy and habitat restoration.

This summer, he will work at a MAPS Station, monitoring bird populations in south-central Minnesota. In the coming fall, he will study abroad but participate as a Board of Directors member via Zoom.