

Minutes of the American Birding Association Annual Member Meeting

Friday, December 6, 2024

Zoom Conference call

The annual meeting of the members of the American Birding Association (ABA) was held at 4:00 PM Eastern Time on Friday, December 6, 2024 using Zoom. Approximately 240 people were present including 191 by proxy.

In attendance from the Board of Directors were Chris Sloan (Chair), David Bates, Julie Davis, and Jean Iron.

In attendance from the ABA Staff were Wayne Klockner (Executive Director), Kelly Smith, Greg Neise, Frank Izaguirre, Ted Floyd, Carl Bendorf, Maggie FitzGibbon, LeAnn Pilger, Katinka Domen, and John Lowry.

Introduction

The meeting was called to order by Chris Sloan and moderated by Wayne Klockner, who welcomed members and reminded attendees they were muted. Questions were encouraged via Zoom chat to be addressed during a 15-minute Q&A session following formal adjournment.

Remarks by Board Chair, Chris Sloan

Chris welcomed current and former board members and noted the business portion would be brief, followed by updates from Wayne Klockner

Board Candidate Slate

The following individuals were proposed for a first three-year term on the ABA Board:

1. **Gates DuPont** – PhD candidate in Ecology at Princeton University; originally from Massachusetts.
2. **Susan Soloyanis, PhD** – Geologist and geophysicist and active birder based in Cascade, CO.
3. **Jean Iron** – Veteran nature guide and retired school principal from Ontario, Canada; long-time ABA supporter.
4. **George Armistead** – Principal of Hillstar Nature, a nature-oriented travel company, author/co-author of birding books, and former ABA staffer from Philadelphia.

Motion to approve the board slate was made by **Carl Bendorf** and seconded by **Julie Davis**. No immediate questions or comments were raised about the slate. Board Chair **Chris Sloan** initiated the vote to approve the new board slate. The motion passed successfully. 191 votes were cast with over 95% of voters approving the Board slate.

Chris explained that some board candidates had already been serving on an interim basis, as allowed by ABA bylaws. With the above vote, interim members are now ratified by the full membership.

Chris expressed appreciation for the new board members and shared optimism about ABA's future:

- The organization is in strong financial health.
- The board is highly engaged, signaling good governance and organizational strength.

Wayne then introduced Birding editor Frank Izaguirre, who then introduced the Meeting's special guest, 2024 Bird of the Year Artist – Natasza Fontaine.

Highlights from the Interview with Natasza Fontaine:

- **Artistic Inspiration:** Natasza incorporated a sonogram into her illustration to emphasize the importance of birdsong in conservation. She underscored that the loss of bird species also means the loss of natural soundscapes.

- **Birding by Ear:** Natasza primarily birds by sound, often identifying species through their calls and songs before spotting them visually.
- **Notable Discovery:** Natasza made a rare ornithological find — a hybrid bird involving an Inca Dove, based on an unfamiliar vocalization she noticed. Her deep familiarity with local bird sounds led to this significant observation, which she later wrote about in *Birding* magazine (September issue).
- ABA editor **Frank Izaguirre** praised Natasza's attentiveness and skill, calling her ornithological discovery during her tenure as Bird of the Year artist a rare and impressive event. Natasza has been invited to become a regular contributor to *Birding* magazine and will be given her own column starting next year — a surprise announcement made during the meeting.

Executive Director's Report

Wayne Klockner presented a summary of accomplishments in 2024. These included:

Digital Media & Online Presence

- **Website:** Over 250,000 visitors in 2024; currently being redesigned for improved navigation and aesthetics.
- **Rare Bird Alert:** 1.7 million views and one of the most popular offerings.
- **“What’s This Bird?” (Facebook/YouTube):** Highly popular community-driven ID forum.
- **Podcast:** Nearly 500,000 downloads in 2024.
- **Flight Calls e-newsletter:** Weekly email newsletter reaching members and the wider public.

ABA Community Platform

- A members-only digital forum (web + app); ~30% of members have signed up to use the forum. This forum provides opportunities to share photos, sightings, and engage with fellow birders.

Birding Magazine (8 issues/year):

Popular features: *Bird of the Year*, gardening, and travel content.

Notable 2024 highlights:

- Natasza Fontaine's Golden-winged Warbler cover.
- Peter Kaestner's milestone of 10,000 bird species.
- 40+ bylines by young birders and alumni of ABA youth programs.

North American Birds (NAB) (2 issues/year):

- Technical focus on bird distribution and trends.
- Praised by eBird's Marshall Iliff as irreplaceable.
- The *Flamingo Edition* documented a rare irruption.
- 10 new regional compilers recruited to support ongoing NAB efforts.

Community Weekends

- Purpose: "*Put a face on the ABA*" and meet birders where they are.
- Format: Free public bird walks, programs, and social gatherings over a weekend.
- 2023-24 Events held in 5 cities with support from Vortex Optics and OM System, and local partners.

Young Birder Programs

- **World Series of Birding (Cape May):** ABA's "First Cycle Eagles" team won the *Carbon Footprint Cup* by birding by bicycle.
- **Camp Colorado** and **Camp Delaware Bay:** Week-long traditional camps were fully subscribed.

- **Camp Surfbird (San Diego):** New long-weekend camp with the San Diego Bird Alliance that was fully subscribed.
- **Acadia Adventure (Maine):** For pre-teens + guardians — fully subscribed.
- **Scholarships** enabled wider participation.
- **Publications:** Youth have contributed to *Birding* and also published *The Fledgling* (available for download).
- **Mentoring Program** included more than 65 participants in 2024 with a focus on photography, art and journaling. This program was supported by a generous gift from Owen Deutsch & Rona Talcott.

ABA Travel Program

- The ABA continues to offer birding travel experiences for members. 2024 destinations included Argentina, Newfoundland, Hawaii, and Belize.

2024 ABA Awards Announcement

ABA annually recognizes excellence in birding, ornithology, conservation, and service with a slate of awards. 2024 honorees were:

Roger Tory Peterson Lifetime Achievement Award

- **Peter Kaestner** – Honored for reaching 10,000 bird species seen, and for being a long-time ambassador for birding.
- **Tom Johnson (posthumous)** – Celebrated for his many contributions to ornithology during a career tragically cut short.

Chandler Robbins Award for Education and Conservation

- **Mary Gustafson (posthumous)** – Honored posthumously for her impact in bird conservation and educational outreach.

Claudia Wilds Award for Distinguished Service

- **Julie Davis** – Recognized for her leadership as Acting Executive Director of the ABA and long-standing board service.

Ludlow Griscom Award for Regional Ornithology

- **Brian Patteson** – Renowned pelagic bird guide based in North Carolina honored for his pioneering contributions to the study of seabirds off the mid-Atlantic coast.
- **Ned Brinkley (posthumous)** – Celebrated Virginia-based ornithologist who documented Virginia's birdlife, Atlantic seabird rarities, and fostered the next generation of birders.

Betty Petersen Award for Conservation & Community

- **Christian Cooper** – Widely recognized birder, author, and host of National Geographic's "*Extraordinary Birder*", praised for his role in building a large and inclusive birding community.

Robert Ridgway Award for Ornithological Publication

- **Amar Ayyash** – Honored for his acclaimed **Gull Guide**, a culmination of years of dedication and field work.

Meeting Adjourned

Chris Sloan officially closed the formal session of the annual meeting and thanked all attendees. Wayne and Chris then held an informal Q&A session with attendees and answered questions raised in the Zoom chat during the meeting.