FINAL REPORT

Grant Agreement #13-004W, "Black-crowned Night Heron Rookery Protection"

TO: Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund (ATTN: Maggie Cole)
FROM: Chicago Park District
DATE: 10/31/2013

Grant Agreement Number: 13-004W

Grantee name, address, and telephone number: Chicago Park District; 541 N. Fairbanks, Chicago, IL, 60611; (312) 742-4072.

Timeframe of the report: 10/4/2012 – 10/31/2014

Name and telephone number or email address of grantee representative completing the report: Jason Steger, Stewardship Coordinator, Department of Natural Resources, Chicago Park District, jason.steger@chicagoparkdistrict.com.

Project objective as described in the application and grant agreement: To protect young and fledgling black-crowned night herons that have fallen from the nest.

Completed project description: A Chicago Park District contractor installed a 1,500-foot perimeter fence to enclose an allée of trees. This enclosure helped protect fledgling black-crowned night herons from pedestrian traffic, including the pet dogs that are often walked in this area. The contractor furnished, delivered, installed, and maintained the fence, which was made of black PVC-coated, galvanized steel welded wire mesh.

5-10 digital images (color/black and white photos and slides are acceptable, though digital images are preferred) depicting the study species, project site, project activities, or other aspects of the project (See Appendix 1):

- Image #1: Black-crowned night heron fledglings on the ground (BCNH 1.jpg).
- Image #2: Black-crowned night heron fledglings on the ground (BCNH 2.jpg).
- Image #3: Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund sign (BCNH 3.jpg)
- Image #4: Black-crowned night heron nests and sign (BCNH 4.jpg)
- Image #5: Black-crowned night heron in tree (BCNH 7.jpg)
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For education of the general public:
A list of wildlife and/or native plant resources (by species) that benefitted from the project and how they benefitted:

- Fledgling black-crowned night herons benefitted from this project due to the fact that, if they fell from nests within the project area, they were protected from some potentially harmful outside factors because of the fence.

Specific audience affected: The specific audience affected was the community members who use this area.

Measurable outcomes achieved:
A list of products resulting from the project (See Appendix 2):

- An entry on Lincoln Park Zoo's blog discussing the black-crowned night heron: http://www.lpzoo.org/blog/nature-boardwalk-lincoln-park-zoo/black-crowned-night-herons-arrive-early.
- A story on WBEZ (radio and online): "Endangered herons make themselves at home in Lincoln Park" (May 17, 2013), http://www.wbez.org/news/endangered-herons-make-themselves-home-lincoln-park-107258.

Total project expenditures itemized to include the following:

- Name and address of vendor: Moore Landscapes, Inc., 1869 Techny Road, Northbrook, IL 60062-5450.
- Item description identifying details (if applicable): Purchase, delivery, installation, and maintenance of standard landscape protection fencing (height of 48;" opening size of 4"h x 2"w).
- Quantity purchased: 1,500 linear feet of fencing (enclosure).
- Date item purchased: May 2013.
- Project expenditures paid by funds other than Special Wildlife Grant Funds: $6,075.00 paid by the Chicago Park District.

Final Report for Grant Agreement #13-004W: APPENDIX 2

Mon, 03/19/2012 - 11:17am

Black-crowned night herons have returned to Lincoln Park! On Wednesday, March 14, we saw the first three adults resting in some trees on the island in the pond at **Nature Boardwalk at Lincoln Park Zoo**.

In previous years, adult black-crowned night herons have arrived at Nature Boardwalk around the beginning of April. However, in keeping with our months-long trend of seeing slightly offseason birds—probably due to the extremely mild winter—the herons have arrived considerably earlier this year. (A few juveniles seem to have spent the majority of the winter at the site.)

Scientists at Lincoln Park Zoo's **Urban Wildlife Institute** have studied black-crowned night herons near Nature Boardwalk for the last two years. Herons show high nest site fidelity, meaning they tend to return to the same place to breed year after year. Lincoln Park Zoo has records of them breeding in the area since 2007.

Because of the Urban Wildlife Institute's long-term study, we'll be able to see how this historically mild winter and warm spring influence the timing of certain milestones in the birds' breeding season, such as evidence of the first hatchlings. We already know they're getting started earlier than in previous years.

Black-crowned night herons are endangered in Illinois. Lincoln Park Zoo works together with the Chicago Park District and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to ensure the birds have an opportunity for a successful breeding season in such a highly urban area. Last year there were about 400 adult black-crowned night herons at the population's peak. We'll have to wait and see what happens this year, but so far we're off to an early start!

Vicky Hunt

Source: http://www.lpzoo.org/blog/nature-boardwalk-lincoln-park-zoo/black-crowned-night-herons-arrive-early (Accessed 10/8/2013).

Endangered herons make themselves at home in Lincoln Park

May 17, 2013

Just south of Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo, there's a lovely promenade of trees, sometimes called an allee. This is a well-trafficked and noisy part of Lincoln Park, packed with joggers, soccer players and a perpetual stream of people walking their dogs.

It seems like an unlikely spot to find a species endangered in Illinois. But that's exactly what has happened.

I've come here to meet with Mason Fidino, who works at Lincoln Park Zoo's Urban Wildlife Institute. As coordinator of wildlife management Fidino keeps track of the fish, insects, mammals and birds that live near the zoo's boardwalk.

As far as I can tell, he has the coolest job in Chicago, though I can't absolutely swear to it. This guy actually gets paid to walk through Lincoln Park each morning, though he's not just taking a random stroll of course. Binoculars and iBird app in hand, he carefully keeps tabs on the number and species of birds in Lincoln Park, stretching from Diversey to North Avenue.

His route is very specific, and for good reason. When a colleague purchased an old book about Lincoln Park's migratory bird community from 1898 to 1903, they decided to update the data they discovered.

"And so we saw this information and we went, 'Wow, that's really cool! Let's do science with it,'" Fidino said. "And so now I'm kind of recreating these walks with a little bit more standardized methods now."

One of the biggest "celebrities" along Fidino's route is the encampment of over 250 black-crowned night herons at the allee.

They're a colony nesting species, Fidino said. They really prefer to be in close proximity to one another when they build nests and give birth.

The social pull must be strong. Because every day the population grows, and at last count there were over 440 of these endangered herons throughout the Lincoln Park Area.

"Prior to 2009 we only had a small number of night herons that nested here and this was only in the island and nature boardwalk," Fidino said.

Where they came from

To understand why these birds have taken up residence, first you have to understand where they came from. Several bird experts advise that I must talk to Walter Marcisz, a guy with some detailed information about this bird. Marcisz has monitored black-crowned night herons in the Lake Calumet area for several decades.

So here we are, 20 miles southeast of Lincoln Park, in an area known for its many years of industrial development—and the abysmal land and water quality that stemmed from that. Specifically, we're at Indian Ridge Marsh, stretching along Torrence Avenue between 116th and 122nd streets. We're here because this was the last significant nesting area of black-crowned night herons in the Lake Calumet area before they packed their bags and started their great migration to Lincoln Park.

Wetland grasses and spongy black earth give way to what I can only call "sink mud." Ahead, I see long, meandering stretches of water that seem to melt into a distant landfill and a lonely railroad track. To this girl from the Northwest side – this is like another land.

Black-crowned herons have lived here for at least a hundred years. That is documented by ornithologists. But Marcisz thinks it's likely the birds actually lived here for thousands of years. "This was a pristine wetland," he said. "It defies logic that they wouldn't have been here."

In the late 80s and early 90s, Marcisz would regularly get counts of 1,500 birds at a time. But the census count declined year by year and by 2000 or so, there were only a few hundred pair left. Then 200 pair, then 50 pair. And today? There are none.

So why'd they all go?

"A lot of the other herons that nest in this area are larger species," Marcsiz said, and they pushed black-crowned night herons out of the colonies. But in one sense the black crowned herons have an edge over the big guys.

"They are much more forgiving in terms of nest sites," Marcisz said. "They will nest in reeds above the water or [in] a number of other sites that other herons are not so tolerant of."

And so when pushed around by the big guys in this marshy neighborhood, black-crowned night herons made their nests in phragmites, a tall invasive type of water reed. All well and good for a while. But in recent years, the water level has fluctuated like crazy.

"If the water is too high, the nest gets flooded. If the water is too low and there's a drought, they're susceptible to predation. And to my way of thinking, that contributed heavily to their looking for a new site," Marcsiz said.

Okay, so the birds abandoned this marsh. But what makes Marcsiz think these are the same black-crowned night herons that ended up in Lincoln Park?

Here's one clue: Before the mass exodus, one evening he and others counted approximately 600 black-crowned night herons leaving the Calumet area, en masse, to feed. And they had another crew of observers set up in Lincoln Park, just waiting. About a half hour later the Lincoln Park crew observed about the same number of herons headed to Lake Michigan, apparently seeking fish.

"I guess in April there's a big run of alewives and that's mostly what they're bringing to feed their babies," Marcisz said.

And at some point some of these birds may have figured out there's an easier way.

"Common sense, right?" Marcisz said. "Why travel 20 miles when you can just set up camp right next to Lake Michigan?"

Advent of the citizen scientist

Back at Lincoln Park, I've noticed that these red-eyed birds are drawing big attention from park goers who aren't normally birders. A surprising number of passersby can tell me what type of birds they are and a little about their behavior. I've even run into a few of what I've dubbed, "citizen scientists." People who've taken it upon themselves to study these creatures in depth.

Eleven-year-old Hadrien is one. He's here for a school project but also hopes to become a nature photographer one day. He's been watching the herons build their nests.

"They actually grab the end of a branch that they want and they fly backwards," Hadrien said, "to try to rip it off instead of twisting it with their beak. Which I thought they would do."

Meanwhile, Jean Valerius has brought a pencil and an index card to the park. She's numbered each tree on the east and west sides of the allee and carefully records the numbers of birds she spots in each.

Not everyone, however, is quite so solicitous of these birds. Mariann Pushker, for one, is put out by all the droppings.

"They're ruining the park as far as I'm concerned," Pushker said. "I'm sorry that you're an endangered species, but go home!"

Pushker's friend Patricia McCloud is also annoyed but wants to know if the birds are endangered.

"I don't know," Pushker said. "I wish I had a BB gun. I'd shoot 'em at night."

For the next few months no one has to worry about droppings from under the nests. Because, as they've done for the past few years, the Chicago Park District has just fenced the area off to protect the fledglings, the baby birds, who sometimes fall to the path.

But fence or no fence, says Jean Valerius, you can still see a lot.

"Last summer when they were learning to fly, they kind of used this as a runway to take off," Valerius laughs.

Most park goers seem to find it quite a show. And it's one that will go on at least until August.

Source: http://www.wbez.org/news/endangered-herons-make-themselves-home-lincoln-park-107258 (Accessed 10/4/13).

Final Report for Grant Agreement #13-004W: APPENDIX 1

- Image #1: Black-crowned night heron fledglings on the ground (BCNH 1.jpg).
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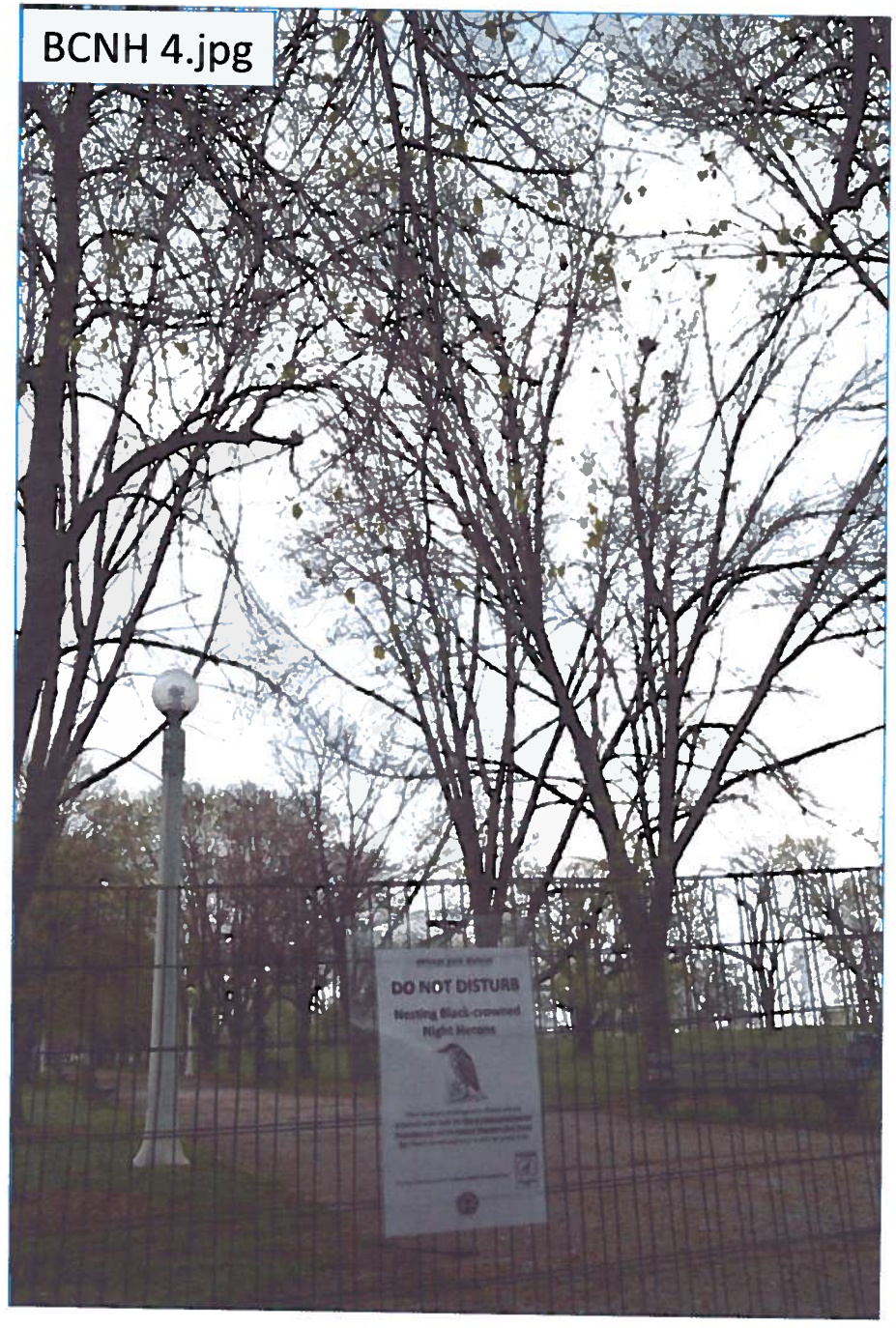
BCNH 1.jpg

BCNH 2.jpg

BCNH 4.jpg



BCNH 3.jpg

BCNH 7.jpg

BCNH 8.jpg

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
FY13 WILDLIFE PRESERVATION FUND GRANT PROGRAM

PAYMENT REQUEST CERTIFICATION

Grantee Information

Grantee Name: Chicago Park District
541 N Fairbanks
Chicago, IL 60611

Grant Agreement #: 13-004W

Amount of
Reimbursement Requested: $ 2,000.00

I certify that the goods or services specified on this request for payment were for the use of this agency and that the expenditure for such goods or services was authorized and lawfully incurred, that such goods or services meet all the required standards set forth in the grant agreement to which this request for payment relates, and that the amount shown below on this request is correct and approved for payment.

By: Barbara E. Wood (Signature) Date: 10/31/13

Name: BARBARA E. WOOD Title: Dep. Director DNR

Grantee F.E.I.N. / TIN: 36-6005822

Attach copies of vendor billings, proof of payment, and other necessary documentation and send the Request for Payment Certification to:

Maggie Cole
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
2050 W. Stearns
Bartlett, IL 60103
Telephone #: (847)608-3100 x-2049
E-Mail Address: Maggie.Cole@Illinois.gov

For DNR Use Only

Approved
for Payment: _____
Signature

Name:

Date: _____