

Message from the President

Female President

The year 2020 started with DVOC members electing the second female President to the club. As the elected President, I hoped to preside over meetings at the Academy of Natural Sciences attended by an increasing number of attendees gathered together for camaraderie and study of birds and ornithology.

Global Pandemic

That happened exactly four times, and then on March 17, 2020, Mayor Kenny announced the full shutdown of the city to non-essential workers due to the global Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic that was affecting thousands of people in our area. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued guidelines telling people to wear face masks, maintain six feet of distance between people and use hand sanitizer to slow the spread of the virus. The Academy of Natural Sciences shut down all operations and the club was left without a place to hold our meetings. The Council met and decided to cancel all meetings and field trips for the foreseeable future. Our birding community stayed home with face masks and hand sanitizer and waited.

The birds did not get the message about the pandemic and headed north. Birders slowly began to go out to their local patches birding alone or in small “bubbles” of people from their own households. And an amazing thing happened — the woods were filled with new birders — with folks that took to the woods just to get out of the house and started looking at birds.

Black Lives Matter

Then in May 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, the nation reacted to the death of George Floyd who was killed by a police officer in Minneapolis. Riots and demonstrations against racial injustice spawned the Black Lives Matter movement. And while the club was not directly affected by the movement, our members were involved in the movement in various ways. And then, the birding community was directly affected

when New York Audubon member Christian Cooper, who is Black, asked a white female dog walker to put her dog on a leash. The woman called the police stating that “an African-American man is threatening my life.” Our membership got involved to participate in Black Birders Week hosting and participating in various social media events. As club President, I issued a statement on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion that Council adopted and posted online. We took a hard look at our own membership demographics and continue to work toward attracting members from all communities.

Thank Goodness for Social Media

Even though we were told to stay away from other people, we found a way to stay connected through various social media platforms. Club members found updates on the DVOC website and Facebook pages. Birders kept in touch and alerted each other of rare sightings through the BirdPhilly Telegram apps. Various social media channels allowed for racial equality discussions. Club meetings resumed virtually through Zoom. And something interesting happened — club membership grew.

Conclusion

My two years as DVOC President were certainly unusual. I missed meeting in person at the Academy of Natural Sciences, our Annual Banquet and other live events. And even when we can go back, we have learned that we should continue to stream the meetings virtually so that members and birders outside of our area can join us for comradery and learning. We learned that social media really does work as a platform to engage new birders. And we learned that the club is stronger than a pandemic and more inclusive than in the past. We have grown, not just in membership numbers but also in our knowledge and understanding of how societal events impact all of us.

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