



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Photos** to accompany this article and a MS Word version of this press release are available for download at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1lhV1i2PBVxyoxGwNUtMMhJ6FJqSzREb?usp=sharing>

## **BIRDS GEORGIA WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS**

**(ATLANTA, GA) December 8, 2025** – Birds Georgia welcomed **three new directors** elected by members to the Board of Directors at their annual meeting on December 7. Susan Berthelot, Brett Howell, and Kim Payne were elected for three-year terms beginning January 1, 2026. In addition, Jennifer Johnson McEwen and Amy Beth Sparks will return to the Board of Directors for a second three-year term. Paige Martin, Jon Philipsborn, and Esther Stokes will return to the board for a special one-year term. Marc Goncher, Senior Counsel, Regulatory, for Chick-fil-A, Inc., will serve for a third year as Board Chair in the organization's 100th year.

**Susan Berthelot** is a retired corporate communications executive with over 30 years of experience, including senior roles at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Cox Enterprises, and Aon/Hewitt. Since retiring from a full-time corporate career in 2019, she has managed communications and outreach for MIT's Center for Gynepathology Research (remote role) and become an active volunteer with Birds Georgia. Throughout her career, she received more than 40 professional awards from organizations like the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and the Associated Press. She served on various professional boards starting in the mid-1990s and on the board of directors for the Atlanta nonprofit VOX Teen Communications twice (from 2009-2011 and 2015-2017). As a Master Birder and bird photographer, Susan is enthusiastic about sharing her love for birds and photography. She can be found birding at locations across the Atlanta area and beyond every week.

**Brett Howell** is a non-profit executive director and conservation entrepreneur with more than a decade of board-level leadership across nonprofit, corporate, and philanthropic sectors, known for helping boards move beyond ESG compliance to embed sustainability into strategy and growth. At the board level, Brett founded and chairs the Howell Conservation Fund, building a fiduciary board that has launched 15+ catalytic projects worldwide. Brett also serves as an executive director of the Atlanta Homeowners Association and advisor to the Loon Preservation Committee, and previously served on the board of AWARE Wildlife. While at Coca-Cola, Brett co-led the North American marine litter initiative under the company's World Without Waste strategy, recognized by the U.S. EPA as a national case study. As COO of OneReef, Brett scaled operations to conserve 350,000 acres of reef and secured \$500K+ in new philanthropic grants. As the first Walker Conservation Fellow at Georgia Aquarium, Brett pioneered entrepreneurial strategies for reef restoration, leading 20+ international seminars, co-directing market-based workshops, and building partnerships in Florida, Bonaire, Cuba, and Jamaica. This work was featured in Honored by The Explorers Club as one of the "Explorers 50: Fifty People Changing the World" (2022) and featured in The New York Times, The Guardian, BBC, NPR, and Nature.

**Kim Payne** is a nature enthusiast and amateur photographer. While maintaining an active career as a financial executive, she enjoys birding and photography — not only in her backyard and around Atlanta, but also while traveling across the United States and around the world. Her photography focuses primarily on birds, landscapes, and wildlife. A native of Atlanta, Kim earned her B.S. in Accounting from Florida State University before returning home to begin her career in corporate finance. She spent 28 years at Rent (formerly PRIMEDIA/RentPath), starting as an entry-level accountant and ultimately leading the organization as Chief Financial Officer for 13 years, including serving as Interim CEO. During that time, she also earned her M.B.A. from Kennesaw State University. Most recently, after more than two years as CFO at Hooters of America, Kim now provides financial consulting services. While at Hooters, Kim served on the Board of Directors of the Hooters Community Endowment Fund, a charitable organization that provides grants to nonprofits within the Hooters system, with a special emphasis on supporting the fight against breast cancer. Kim's lifelong love of photography and wildlife naturally led her to focus on photographing birds and wanting to learn more about them. This curiosity inspired her to complete the Master Birder program with Birds Georgia, deepening her knowledge and engagement with the organization's work.

"We are excited to welcome these exceptional leaders to the Birds Georgia Board of Directors," says Marc Goncher, board chair. "Susan, Brett, and Kim share a passion for conservation and diverse expertise that will strengthen our mission and help us make an even greater impact as we mark our Centennial year in 2026."

Additional Birds Georgia board members include Joshua Andrews, Bill Bell, Michael Chriszt, Bob Cooper, Courtenay Anne Dusenbury, Colleen McEdwards, Ellen Miller, Scott Porter, Sally Sears, and Wink Weinberg.

For more information on Birds Georgia visit <https://www.birdsgeorgia.org>.

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**About Birds Georgia:** *Birds Georgia is building places where birds and people thrive. We create bird-friendly communities through conservation, education, and community engagement. Founded in 1926 as the Atlanta Bird Club, the organization became a chapter of National Audubon in 1973, and continues as an independent chapter of National Audubon Society. Birds Georgia will celebrate the Centennial in 2026. Learn more at <https://www.birdsgeorgia.org>.*