**Update on OFO’s equity, diversity and inclusion activities**

**June 2022**

When we look at the list of initiatives we’ve worked on with regard to equity, diversity and equity (“EDI”), it’s hard to believe that Ontario Field Ornithologists (“**OFO**”) has been on this journey for less than two years.

**How it all began**:

In the summer of 2020, the OFO Board responded to Black Birders Week, and related conversations about diversity in the birding community, by recognizing the need to take actions to make OFO more inclusive and welcoming to its members and Ontario’s birders from all communities. At the September, 2020 Annual General Meeting (“**AGM**”), OFO’s [Statement on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](http://www.ofo.ca/site/content/equity-and-diversity) (“**EDI**”) was presented to our membership, stating key principles and objectives. Within a few weeks, an EDI Committee was formed to advise the Board on EDI-related issues. This committee is currently comprised of 14 volunteers. This group comes from diverse backgrounds and brings diverse perspectives.

A related group called “**Enable by OFO**” was later formed that includes members of OFO, Toronto Ornithological Club (“**TOC**”) and Birds Canada. Its purpose is to help make birding more accessible for people with disabilities, the current focus being mobility challenges.

**Why EDI?**

In short, OFO’s message is that if you’re interested in birds, you are welcome to join regardless of your background or experience level in birding, and that we aim to make OFO inviting for all. Our updated [Mission Statement](http://www.ofo.ca/site/page/view/aboutus.mission) states that we aim to be “an equitable and inclusive organization”. We believe that enhancing these attributes will help lead to increased diversity in our membership and leadership.

**Key actions to date**:

* In December, 2021, OFO launched its Free First Year Membership programme. This allows people who’ve faced barriers to join for free for their first year. These barriers may relate to factors such as Financial; Gender; Language; Religion; Race; Being a Newcomer to Canada; Sexual Orientation; Disability, etc. So far, 56 new members have joined under this offer.
* A Welcoming Committee organizes online meetings especially for new members in order for members to feel that they’re part of a community. Virtual meetings and webinars allow members from across the province to attend. In addition, a members’ section has been introduced to *OFO News*.
* At the suggestion of Enable by OFO, a well-attended webinar was held in April as an introduction to hawk watching. A listing of hawk watch sites that are accessible for people with mobility challenges is being assembled.
* A [Code of Conduct](http://www.ofo.ca/site/content/code-of-conduct) was developed so that all OFO members can feel safe from discrimination and harassment at OFO activities. An [Incident Report](http://www.ofo.ca/site/incident) form was created in conjunction with this.
* A Land Acknowledgement now exists on the “[upcoming trips” page](http://www.ofo.ca/site/Tripsupcoming) of OFO’s website. It recognizes the Indigenous peoples who have nurtured this land of Ontario for thousands of years. Site-specific Land Acknowledgements are given for many of our field trips.
* We’ve added fuller descriptions for Field Trips including information on accessibility, washroom availability, and public transportation options to trip destinations. Where possible, loaner binoculars are available for these outings.
* Guidelines for both new and existing field trip leaders have been updated to help leaders intentionally deliver welcoming and inclusive outings.
* OFO’s first ever Pride Month programming took place this June with two walks, both of which were joint events with local clubs. Look for more programming in future for the LGBTQ2S+ community.

**Some current projects**:

* A key project from Enable by OFO is a joint initiative with TOC and Birds Canada to thoroughly evaluate 10 birding locations for accessibility and to make that information available on an interactive map.
* The co-editors of our publications, *OFO News* and *Ontario Birds,* are continuing efforts to source articles and photographs by or about women and other under-represented groups from the birding community.
  + If you have ideas for articles or would like to contribute an article or refer someone, the co-editors can be reached at [ofonews@ofo.ca](mailto:ofonews@ofo.ca) or [ontariobirds@ofo.ca](mailto:ontariobirds@ofo.ca) respectively.
  + Two members of OFO’s EDI Committee, one of whom has worked in EDI professionally, have begun working with the *OFO News* team to provide an EDI lens for this publication.
* A survey will be going out shortly to learn more about the diversity within our membership, and to help source contributions for our publications that better represent that diversity.
* We hope to form working relationships with Indigenous groups as opportunities arise.
* The Annual Convention being held at Point Pelee in September will feature a diverse roster of speakers. As well, the OFO Birdathon next year will have a different look to it.

**A note about gender equity:**

This topic has come up in some of the feedback we’ve received. We note that women are well represented in our leadership, especially on OFO’s Board and its EDI Committee. However, when we think of gender equity, we believe this discussion needs to include not just men and women, but also trans, non-binary, and other gender identities. As well, when we speak of better reflecting the diversity of our membership in our activities, gender balance is only one aspect of diversity.

**Support for OFO’s EDI activities:**

OFO’s Board is fully supportive of our EDI activities. Almost all of the above initiatives have involved some combination of EDI Committee members, Board members, and co-editors of our publications.

We are always open to constructive feedback. We most appreciate direct feedback via email or phone, and contact information is available [here](http://www.ofo.ca/site/Board).

EDI is an ongoing initiative. We welcome and invite your involvement because it is only through the ongoing efforts of volunteers that OFO can continue to improve.

In the meantime, good birding!

Jack Alvo (he/him)

Board Member with responsibility for EDI