

Minnesota Ornithologist's Union – Savaloja Grants Program

Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter 2012 Grant Report

Background

In the spring of 2012 the Minnesota Ornithologist's Union granted the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter \$1,000 through its Savaloja Grants Program to help fund one of MRVAC's main initiatives for 2012 - the donation of binoculars to support youth birding programs in the Minnesota River Valley. Receiving the Savaloja grant from MOU was critically important to the success of the initiative. By providing matching funds to other funding secured by MRVAC, the Savaloja grant doubled the impact and made it possible for a total of 40 binoculars to be donated to birding programs at Lowry, Richardson and Dodge nature centers.

Grant Funded Activities

Upon receiving the Savaloja grant in March of 2012, MRVAC reached its fundraising goal for binocular purchases for 2012. Binoculars were purchased through Eagle Optics in late March and distribution to Lowry, Richardson and Dodge nature centers took place in early April. The binoculars arrived just in time for the rush of summer programs visiting the nature centers, coinciding with the start of the end of the school year.

Lowry Nature Center

Lowry Nature Center's bird programs offer numerous opportunities for both youth and adults to utilize binoculars. Total binocular usage (both existing binoculars and new ones donated by MRVAC in 2012) totaled 546 people – 461 students and 85 adults. The binoculars were used as part of full-day educational bird programs that incorporated bird banding and observation; habitat hikes; observation of live captive raptors and participation in nature-themed games incorporating scientific observation techniques.

MRVAC's donation of 15 binoculars in 2012 gave Lowry the opportunity to engage more students than they had anticipated for the year, especially during hikes and feeder observation sessions. Lowry typically has 45-90 students at one time, divided into groups of 15 students per staff naturalist, so the additional binoculars reduced the need for students to share binoculars and heightened students' experiences observing birds at the nature center.

“The students loved using binoculars today during their all-day bird study at Lowry. Some students said it was their first time using binoculars! Thanks again for this valuable tool for introducing youth to birding,”

- Diane Rowse, Interpretative Naturalist, Lowry Nature Center

Dodge Nature Center

With expanding classroom sizes throughout the metro area, Dodge Nature Center has been facing ever increasing numbers of students visiting the nature center at one time. The 10



Two boys at Dodge Nature Center practice their birding skills. ©Dodge Nature Center

Kingbird binoculars Dodge received from MRVAC this past year provided opportunities for student visitors to feel connected to their nature experience and have the opportunity to learn about bird species surrounding the center.

“Providing children with closer access to nature and animals through safe observation is valuable for our educators. This would not be possible without your generous support. The binoculars received from the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter have been greatly appreciated.”

- John Chandler, Development Director, Dodge Nature Center

Throughout 2012, binoculars at Dodge served 386 individuals.

Participating students ranged from 3rd-8th graders in both summer camps, spring break camps, classroom visitations and staff and volunteer trainings.

Richardson Nature Center

Hundreds of elementary school kids visit Richardson Nature Center on a daily basis and most of their time is spent outside in woodland, wetland, and prairie habitat where binoculars help students get the most from their nature center experience.

“We have found that the greatest benefit of the binoculars is they help participants engage in the act of personal discovery in nature.”

- Michael Gottschalk, Outdoor Education Supervisor,
Richardson Nature Center

Binoculars are used by nearly every kind of group visiting the nature center, from scout groups, birthday parties, senior groups, summer camps, free public programs on the weekends and casual birders in the Wildlife Viewing Room. Walk-in visitors enjoy using the binoculars to get a closer look at the wide variety of animals attracted to backyard pond and bird feeder area throughout all four seasons. Over this past year a favorite location to visit with binoculars was Hyland Lake Park Reserve’s osprey platform.



Donation of binoculars by MRVAC board member, Shannon Martin, to Richardson staff. © MRVAC

“This spring, our binoculars allowed hundreds of visitors to get a clear view of Hyland’s nesting Osprey pair and their two chicks. The level of connection between our visitors and wild raptors was clearly enhanced and solidified by this chance to view them up-close.”

- Michael Gottschalk, Richardson Nature Center

Budget Expenses

Item	Cost	# Purchased	Total
Eagle Optics Kingbird 6.5x32 Binoculars	\$119.99/each	20 binoculars	\$2,399.80
Shipping	\$15.81/order	1 order	\$15.81
Total Cost			\$2,415.61

Conclusion

Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter truly appreciates the support of MOU and its Savajola Grant Program. Through MRVAC and MOU's combined funding we were able to connect more young people to birding in the Minnesota River Valley area and build the capacity of local nature centers to offer successful youth birding programs. MRVAC greatly values MOU's support of our work and we look forward to future combined funding opportunities.