

**Minnesota Ornithologists' Union – 2013 Savaloja Grants Program**  
**Minnesota Ornithologists' Union, James Ford Bell**

**Museum of Natural History**  
**10 Church Street Southeast**  
**Minneapolis, MN 55455**

**A Report Submitted by:**

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Introduction on Request for Funding:

The Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society (MHAS) is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to biodiversity conservation and the enrichment of individual experience of nature and outdoor learning. As a chapter of the National Audubon Society, our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats. MHAS received financial support (\$1,404.00) from the MNOU Savaloja Grants Program in 2013 to purchase 12 entry-level quality binoculars, 12 field guides, and 12 field notebooks as equipment for our Young Naturalist Program which is expanding to include education on bird identification and scientific monitoring basics.

The MHAS works with local and regional partners to provide the following:

- Manage a 466 acre preserve called the Neilson Spearhead Center
- Host a nature camp called "The Young Naturalist Program" each summer where kids get a hands-on nature experience
- Host educational events to connect people with nature
- Advocate for local conservation of important habitats and ecosystems

MHAS owns and manages the Neilson Spearhead Center (NSC) – an environmental science facility located southwest of Bemidji, Minnesota and includes a 466-acre tract of intact forests and wetlands that surrounds Spearhead Lake. The NSC is protected through a perpetual conservation easement with the Minnesota Land Trust.

The MHAS chapter is organized and managed by a board of directors and which oversee programming and projects facilitated by partners and citizen volunteers. Today the NSC property remains in MHAS stewardship and the title ensures protection remains in place regardless of future land ownership. MHAS stewardship responsibility includes maintaining the integrity of the natural communities present on the NSC property and providing opportunities for experiential education and research. Educational programming centers on the Young Naturalist Program for youth grades 2 -12. In the YNP, students hike the Center's trail network, canoe the spring-fed waters of Spearhead Lake, identify plants and animals in woods and wetlands, and learn ecology by playing games, listening to stories, and crafting art.

Funding Purpose and Goal:

MHAS sought financial support from the MNOU Savaloja Grants Program for the amount of \$1,404.00 to purchase 12 entry-level quality binoculars, field guides and field notebooks needed for its Young Naturalist Program (YNP) with the goal of expanding the YNP to include education on bird identification and scientific monitoring. MHAS was first organized in the 1970's, and has traditionally focused on introducing primarily young adults to the natural world without the use of specialized equipment. Since that time, students and naturalists have begun to utilize a variety of electronic devices to facilitate enhanced learning opportunities. The time was long overdue for the organization to acquire a quality set of binoculars literally to bring natural phenomena closer in view, whether it is a bark-crawling, brown creeper or the cryptic stinkbug upon which they sometimes feed. The addition of a set of binoculars, identification aids and notebooks is considered an essential capital asset believed fundamental to increase environmental awareness by youth and adults alike through facilitating the fascination and wonder of birds and their habitat by future generations.

Location and Timeline:

The YNP is operated at the Neilson Spearhead Center (NSC); an environmental science facility located southwest of Bemidji, Minnesota and that includes a 466-acre tract of forest and wetlands that surrounds Spearhead Lake. The NSC is protected through a perpetual conservation easement with the Minnesota Land Trust. Activities held at the NSC are coordinated out of the Lehman Lab, a 3-season educational facility closed during the winter months. The Lehman Lab has a capacity to serve approximately 20 children during any event.

The NSC outdoor facility and property is open year-round to provide volunteer-supported educational opportunities. During summer periods only, MHAS contracts local naturalists to lead the day-to-day week-long sessions as part of the Young Naturalist Program. In 2013, a variety of nature-based education was delivered to children ages 7 to 17 during the annual seasonal program June to August.

Activities and Outcomes:

The NSC's Young Naturalists 2013 Program sponsored a total of 8 separate week-long outreach sessions serving a total of 65 students ranging from grade 2 through 12. Though student registration varies seasonally, the NSC's YNP includes on average more than 100 students per year, not including attending teachers, parents and other adults. In addition to the YNP, approximately 75-100 citizens visited the NSC to partake in hiking and other nature-based activities facilitated by the extensive trail system and pristine conditions of the lake and surrounding wetlands and upland forests. More than 100 members contributed to the financial support of MHAS in 2013. The MHAS worked with local advertisers to promote publicizing monthly meetings of the Bemidji Bird Club and other environmental education activities. Although the bird club meetings were held primarily indoors during this first year, plans are established to provide field trip opportunities for members and non-members to conduct bird-watching related outings. Naturalist instructors provided an orientation field use of binoculars during one of the 8 weekly YNP sessions. In 2014-15, MHAS, through its YNP at the NSC will be in a good position to sponsor regular birding educational field trips by providing free use of binoculars and guides. These trips will include bird identification and monitoring as part of an expanded curriculum provided to children and adults at the NSC. Programming for 2013 was published on the MHAS website: <http://www.spearheadmhas.org/>, and included description of MNOU and its support of the NSC in providing funding to purchase the related bird-watching equipment.

Grant Funds Expenditure:

Item	Quantity	Total Cost
Redfield Rebel Compact Binoculars (8 x 32)	12	\$911.89
Student Field Guide to Eastern Birds	12	\$214.98
Student Rite-in-Rain notebooks	14	\$132.30
Soft-side Coolers (for storing binoculars, field guides, and notebooks)	2	\$38.59
	Total	\$1259.17
(balance applied to purchase companion audio CDROMs)	Balance	\$144.83



No additional funds were requested for the 2013 funding cycle. In fact, financial savings were realized in the purchase of the binoculars through a local vendor. MHAS approached Gander Mountain of Bemidji for a total sales contribution equaling 10% of the total purchase costs, and in which they generously provided. This savings resulted in a net balance of unspent grant dollars of an amount sufficient to purchase companion audio CD recordings of bird songs and calls. We hope that MOU will consider future similar proposals by MHAS to continue expanding its YNP bird-related educational programming. MHAS seeks supplemental financial support annually through member donations and fees as well as from its regional partners.

Future Actions and Commitments:

The winter of 2013-14 and its subzero air temperatures resulted in low numbers of observations of birds as reported through the 2013 annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count for the Bemidji, MN count circle. Results were similar for the Itasca State Park count circle. Both counts reported fewer participants than in previous years. It's anticipated that MHAS can play a positive role by facilitating participation in local area count circles with the provisioning of birding equipment and community outreach to solicit involvement by new individuals (members and non-members) who have not participated in previous year's counts. The MHAS will continue to provide bird-watching and related educational trips with hopes of extending the regional message on the need to conserve and monitor populations of resident and migratory bird species.