

MOU Savaloja Grant  
2017  
Audubon Center of the North Woods (ACNW)  
Sandstone, MN

- 1) Project proposal and methods: The Audubon Center would like to establish a birding trail. The trail would be designed for beginning birders and feature life size cut out birds printed on aluminum, and mounted in trees in life like positions. Participants would walk the trail and for first time bird watchers we would stop at pre-defined points to have students find birds. For students with some birding experience they would refine their observation skills to find a bird in the habitat.



Once a bird is located, participants would have the opportunity to practice finding a bird in their binoculars and bringing it into focus. From there, we would work as a group to identify field marks, observe the shape, and if the bird is engaged in any unique behaviors (ex. walking headfirst down a tree trunk) that would help identify it. Then we would open our Field Guides (Golden Guide to Birds) and work together to narrow it down to family and eventually identify the species.

The goal of the project is to develop the skills necessary to observe and identify birds in their natural environment. With this increased confidence in observing birds, we believe these students will take an increased interest in the birds in their community. This will lead to increased awareness and appreciation of the birds they share their community with and hopefully conservation actions to make a positive difference for birds.



- 2) Personnel: The trail itself was established with help from students from White Bear Lake Alternative Learning Center as part of a service learning project. Jeff Tyson, Wildlife Coordinator at ACNW, selected birds to be featured on the trail and worked with Signs.com to have the birds

printed at life size on aluminum. Students from North Lakes Academy in Forest Lake participating in service learning projects helped select locations to hang the birds and did the physical mounting of the birds off the trail.

- 3) Outcomes: We were able to include 10 bird species on the trail. Birds that were selected were year round residents to Minnesota, that would be appropriate for our habitat. Birds included were Pileated Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Saw-Whet Owl, Ruffed Grouse, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Barred Owl, Northern Cardinal and Black-capped Chickadee.

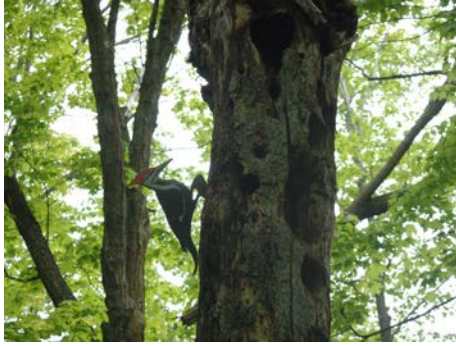


After some evaluation of field guides, we decided to switch from the Golden Guides we outlined in the proposal to Kaufmann guides. Kaufmann guides were more durable in the field and were as friendly to beginners as the Golden Guide.

We have just begun to use the birding trail with school groups late summer and into fall. It made its debut with Brainerd Alternative Education Center (14 students), and was also used with Ways of Wildlife Summer Camp (21 students), Kaleidoscope Charter School (27 students) and with students attending home school programming (17 students). Birds class is historically much more popular as a spring class than a fall class, so we anticipate much larger numbers in the spring.



The project had a few unexpected and exciting outcomes. First, staff started using their smartphones to play the calls of the birds on the birding trail to signal the students to start scanning the area for birds, rather than just stopping at pre-defined points on the trail. Students started picking up contextual clues from the call to determine where to look for the bird. For example, many woodpecker calls also feature drumming of the woodpecker, hoot of the Barred Owl signaled them to look up higher in the trees, and some students recognized the drum of the Ruffed Grouse.



Second, students started asking questions about the shapes of the bird wings and how woodpeckers use their tails. So, we started bringing biofacts (mounted wings and feet and tails, skulls) with us on the trail so they could touch a Pileated Woodpecker tail and feel how stiff it is and how woodpeckers prop themselves up on it. They also observed the rounded wing shape of many forest dwelling birds for maneuverability through the forest.

We have promoted the birding trail project both on our public Facebook page, as well as our alumni Facebook page. We have also submitted press stories to: Pine County Courier, Hinckley News and Moose Lake Star Gazette

Expenditures:

10 Bird Signs - \$403.21

18 Kaufmann Field Guides - \$227.34

11 7x35 Nikon Aculon Binoculars - \$769.45

Total: \$1,400.00

