



BELWIN CONSERVANCY

Inspiring through Nature

SAVALOJA GRANT Final Report 2019

On behalf of the staff and visitors at Belwin Conservancy, we extend our sincere thanks to the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union for supporting the enhancement of our Education Center Bird Sanctuary with a \$1,000 Savaloja Grant. This project will spark joy, curiosity and appreciation for birds and bird habitat by creating educational opportunities for the thousands of children and members of the general public that visit the site each year.

OBJECTIVE

At Belwin, we recognize the importance now, more than ever, of connecting people with their natural environment, allowing the beauty of native plants, wildlife, and healthy ecosystems to inspire all of us to become stewards of the land. It is clear from watching our visiting school children that birds are natural ambassadors, inviting even the most casual of visitors to connect more deeply with the ecosystem around them.

The goal of this project is to transform a degraded but frequently visited landscape into healthy habitat that once again encourages bird abundance and diversity, providing visitors with an easily accessible area for observing and learning about birds.

METHODS & PERSONNEL

After a cold and wet spring, Belwin staff prepared the bird sanctuary garden by removing unwanted vegetation and debris. They followed with limited plantings of native species, including several transplanted cedar trees, which play an important role in attracting birds by providing the forest edge and shrub habitat needed for shelter and perching areas. These plants also provide food and safe nighttime roosts for species like cedar waxwings, juncos, and blue winged warblers.



Before site prep began in earnest, the bird sanctuary area contained trees threatened by bark beetle and several undesirable plant species.



Belwin staff prepare the bird sanctuary site for native plantings in the summer of 2019.

Follow-up planting in the summer and fall was funded by the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union Savaloja Grant. Native shrubs, grasses, and forbs were chosen specifically for their potential to thrive in this part of Belwin and attract a variety of birds to the area. The seeds and plant stock purchased included Minnesota Native Landscapes' Native Songbird Mix as well as the following:

Shrubs:

Pin Cherry (*Prunus pennsylvanica*)
Black Chokecherry (*Aronia melanocarpa*)
High bush cranberry (*Viburnum trilobum*)
Blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*)
Wolfberry (*Symphocarpus occidentalis*)

Forbs:

Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
Spiderwort (*Tradescantia occidentalis*)
Cup plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*)
Spotted Mint (*Monarda punctata*)

The 3,000-square-foot area was surrounded by deer fencing in the fall, and we anticipate a flush of growth this spring.

Belwin staff involved with this project included Lynette Anderson, Interpretive Naturalist; Martin McGough, Land Specialist; Michael Oakes, Land Assistant; and Eric Palmen, Facilities and Equipment Specialist. The project was led by Justin Sykora, Belwin's Operations Director, with design and installation assistance from Josh Leonard, Saint Paul Public Schools' Belwin Outdoor Science Education Director.

LOCATION

One of the ways we fulfill our mission of "inspiring connections to nature" is by providing access to the natural world through public educational programs at our Education Center, located at 1553 Stagecoach Trail South in Afton, MN. This building and the parcel of land around it are also home to Belwin Outdoor Science (BOS), our longstanding partnership with Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS).



The bird sanctuary area is visible from the main room of the Education Center, where students gather each day before their outside instruction, and for lunch.

RESULTS

Through BOS, approximately 10,000 public school children (primarily from SPPS, though children from the Stillwater district also participate) visit the Education Center property each year. Of those, over 5,000 students spend focused, formal instructional time at the bird sanctuary site. Visible from all students' lunch tables, this area also provides ample opportunity for informal education, discussion, and moments of wonder.

Saint Paul Public School student demographics include:

- 79% students of color
- 34% English language learners
- 30% Special education
- 70% Free/Reduced lunch



At this point, the bird sanctuary is in a stage of transition. Until the new plant species are more fully established, the impact of this work will be only partly realized. However, even in its current raw state, the bird sanctuary is already creating learning opportunities. Because of its proximity to the building, the green fencing is an immediate discussion point. In calling attention to the project, it is helping students understand the idea that we need to proactively work to improve habitat for wild animals. So many students, and their adults, believe that "habitat" just happens, naturally. This serves to help remind all of us that protecting what we have is so important, because recreating "habitat" is no easy venture. Restoring areas requires intense physical and fiscal investment.

Once growth is thoroughly underway, we look forward to featuring this area in a future outreach event for the public, as well as continuing to feature it for our visiting BOS students.

Inspired in large part by the progress made on this project with the Savaloja Grant, the Saint Paul Garden Club has committed to providing an additional \$3,000 in funding for expanded native plantings that will attract birds to this area and another spot nearby. We are looking forward to installing those native plantings, made possible by this additional funding, later this spring. Thank you to the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union for making this high impact project possible!

Belwin Conservancy Bird Viewing Enhancement Financial Report

INCOME

Phase 1

Individual Gifts	\$1,122
MOU Savaloja Grant	\$1,000
Belwin In-Kind Match	Labor

Phase 2 (planned)

SPGC Grant (committed)	\$3,000
Belwin In-Kind Match	Labor

Total Income	\$5,122
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EXPENSES

Phase 1

Plant Materials	\$1,038
Interpretive sign	\$590
Labor	\$494
Belwin In-Kind Match	Add'l Labor

Phase 2 (planned)

Additional plant materials (planned)	\$3,000
Belwin In-Kind Match	Labor

Total Expenses	\$ 5,122
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