

# Westwood Hills Nature Center

## Kindergarten Winter Birds Program

### 2019 MOU Savaloja Grant

### Final Report



In 2019, Westwood Hills Nature Center was awarded \$3023 from the MOU Savaloja to bring all the kindergarten students in the St. Louis Park schools out to the nature center for our Winter Birds program. The grant money was used to cover the per student program fee and the cost of bussing students between their respective schools and the nature center.



### Site

Westwood Hills Nature Center is a 160 natural area owned and operated by the City of St. Louis Park. It features marsh, woods and restored prairie and 3 miles of hiking trails. The park is home to a variety of wildlife including deer, foxes, mink and otters.

Westwood has recorded 205 species of birds since phenology journals were first kept for the site in 1976. It's a popular destination for birders, especially during spring migration.

### Project

The goal of the Winter Birds program is to provide education about bird migration, adaptations and species diversity, to teach basic bird identification and observation skills, and to help students develop an appreciation for the birds commonly found in their neighborhood and throughout Minnesota during the winter.

The program starts with an indoor introduction explaining why some birds leave Minnesota and why some stay for the winter (those who are able to find food). We use some of our taxidermied birds as we talk about what a few specific species eat. We then play a game to practice bird ID. We use a PowerPoint presentation with pictures and calls from 7 common winter species (black capped chickadee, white breasted nuthatch, blue jay, cardinal, hairy woodpecker, crow and great horned owl). We discuss what each bird eats and a little bit about how it behaves or might be observed in winter.



After the game, students watch a puppet show which deals with the adaptations (beaks) that our winter birds have for finding and eating food. The main character is a robin who decides to stay for winter. The robin soon discovers that it cannot obtain its food (worms) because the ground is frozen. A woodpecker, cardinal and blue jay try to share their food with the robin, but they observe that the robin has a “wimpy beak” and can’t eat the same food. The Robin learns from a Great Horned Owl that its beak is actually “special” or well-adapted for eating worms. Westwood uses puppetry extensively in our programming with preschool and lower elementary students. It’s a very effective tool for teaching kids about abstract concepts (in this case adaptation) and making that concept “come alive”.



After the puppet show students head outside to hike with a naturalist. While hiking, we watch and listen for the birds we just learned about. If we don’t find many birds, we will look for: old nests, woodpecker holes, owl pellets, tracks, etc). Though bird identification is often a part of the hike, what we really emphasize is the act of observing and the excitement of looking for birds.

## Big Picture

We requested funds from the Savaloja Grant program because currently only a limited number of kindergarten classrooms in the St Louis Park school district attend the Winter Bird’s program. Out of the four elementary schools in the St Louis Park school district, two schools typically have the less money available for field trips: Aquila and Peter Hobart. These are also the schools with most diverse student populations.

### St. Louis Park elementary schools Student Demographics:

	White	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino	Two or More	Asian	American Indian/Alaska Native	Hawaii/Pacific Islander
Aquilla:	44.1%	25.3%	13.6%	11.8%	4.8%	0.4%	0%
Peter Hobart:	48.9%	20.0%	11.8%	12.6%	4%	2.3%	0.4%
Susan Lindgren:	56.7%	22.5%	8.3%	7.9%	4.1%	0.6%	0%
Park Spanish Immersion:	68.2%	16.2%	9.2%	4.3%	1.8%	0%	0.4%

One of the long term goals of Westwood is to close this equity gap and to have all SLP students visit the nature center at least once a year per grade. Receiving the grant money is a first step towards closing that gap. Ultimately we will need to secure a permanent funding source. There have been preliminary talks between staff, the school district and other community interests but nothing firm established yet to date.



## Budget

<b>Expenditures</b>				
<b>Program Fees</b>				
School	# of students	Program fee	Total	<i>Projected total*</i>
Aquila	100	400.00		
Susan Lindgren	80	320.00		
Park Spanish Immersion	80	320.00		
Peter Hobart	100	400.00		
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$ 1,440.00</b>	<b>\$ 1600.00</b>
<b>Bus fees</b>				
Aquila	2	366.50		
Susan Lindgren	2	366.50		
Park Spanish Immersion	2	366.50		
Peter Hobart	2 +1 with wheelchair equipment	550.50		
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$ 1650.00</b>	<b>\$ 1423.28</b>
			<b>\$ 3090.00</b>	<b>\$3023.28</b>

\* this is the amount requested in our grant proposal