



Staring Lake Nature Center
Nature / Discovery / Adventure
Eden Prairie, Parks and Recreation

SAVALOJA Grant Report 2022



Submitted by Stan Tekiela and Kerry Flynn

Overview

On behalf of the naturalist staff and students that attend programs at the Staring Lake Nature Center in Eden Prairie, we thank the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union for supporting the enhancement of our educational efforts with an \$1850 Savaloja Grant. This grant money went towards the education of three Eden Prairie schools 3rd grade classes on raptors in general, focusing specifically on owls.

Staring Lake Outdoor Center is located on the Northern Shore of Staring Lake in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Here, we provide nature-based programs, activities, and outreach to nearly 2,000 children annually. The elementary schools in Eden Prairie are made up of 40-50% students of color. They often come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with little to no access to the outdoors. We hope to include even more local schools interested in our program offerings in the near future.

This grant has provided the means to increase the reach of our developed owl program by creating an owl outreach program in three elementary schools, to over 350 third-grade students of Eden Prairie, Minnesota; each school having between 110-130 third graders. The existing Staring Lake Outdoor Center owl program consists of owl biology and anatomy, feather collection and identification. Further instruction includes a PowerPoint describing the owl species found in Minnesota, and what makes owls unique. This program also provides a pellet dissection activity. Trays, tweezers, magnifiers, dissection charts and owl pellets are provided to each student.

The goal of these comprehensive programs is twofold: to encourage a development of interest in birds, especially owls, and to establish a deeper respect and understanding of the world around them, which will ultimately lead to a greater appreciation of habitats and preserving the natural world.

Results

By the end of January 2023, all three schools have been visited and their programs provided. May 9th-10th two of our Naturalists traveled to Oak Point Elementary and taught five 3rd grade classrooms about raptors, focusing specifically on owls and the dissection of their pellets. Our second programming took place on October 4th-5th at Highlands Elementary, educating their five 3rd grade classrooms. Our final visit took place on January 9th and 10th, 2023. On average, 100-130 students attended each visit, for a total of around 350 students further educated on owls and raptors.

During these programs, Naturalists traveled to the 3rd grade classrooms, something we had not been able to do since the beginning of the pandemic. Here, children were gathered in groups of 2-3 classes. We began with a PowerPoint describing the different types of raptors and what sets them apart from other bird species. The presentation then transitions to owls and their unique properties. During this PowerPoint presentation, artifacts are passed around to provide a more hands on experience. After their initial introduction, trays, tweezers, and owl pellets are handed out to every student, each student receiving their own, personal pellet. They are also provided with a bone identification key and students are encouraged to identify the different bones they discover. This dissection time is also an excellent opportunity for students to ask questions about the PowerPoint, as well as the bones they are finding.

When presenting and dissecting, one thing noted that could be improved would be the location of the dissection. Our first school's presentation and dissection took place in their cafeteria. The second school's presentation was done in a classroom and we moved outside for the dissection. It was observed that the dissection activity went more smoothly outdoors. When dissecting, there can be a slight smell to the pellets, as well as loose material, such as feathers and fur surrounding the bones. Inside, the smell was amplified to the students and the excess fur and such got everywhere. When outside, the smell was never mentioned due to the circulation of the air, and students were less bothered by the loose material, allowing for better focus and learning. In the future, I would attempt to find an outdoor location at all schools during the dissection portion. This could be thwarted due to the weather, but, when possible, I find it to be the best solution.

Conclusion

Staring Lake Outdoor Center has a solid 30-year history of environmental education, which we strive to continually build upon. With the assistance of this grant, we were able to expand the reach of our developed owl program into an owl outreach program in elementary schools, exposing students to the power of nature and circle of life and thus installing another step in the growth of our program offerings, especially regarding youth education. We hope that by providing these third-grade students with a hands-on presentation and engaging scientific lab, we helped to instill a better sense of understanding and respect for owls, birds, and nature in general.





Summary of Expenses

Description	Quantity	Cost	Total
Owl pellets provided for dissection, and a Naturalist lead presentation	100-110 Students	\$5 per Student	\$550
Owl pellets provided for dissection, and a Naturalist lead presentation	125-130 Students	\$5 per Student	\$650
Owl pellets provided for dissection, and a Naturalist lead presentation	125-130 Students	\$5 per Student	\$650
Total Granted			\$1850