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Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz

An Intro into the Final Survey in 2016, and a Look at 2015 Results

by Alyssa DeRubeis

Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz, Minnesota Co-coordinator

We are now entering the third and final year of an international effort documenting a precipitously-declining species. Populations of the Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*) have dwindled to as low as 1% in the past half century. Why? Is it due to changes occurring in the boreal wetland breeding grounds, along spring migration paths, or in the forested floodplain overwintering range? Or is it a combination of all three? Biologists are trying to answer those questions and more. Of those three areas of use, which one do scientists know the least about? You guessed it: spring migration. As in the past two years, we need your help again this year to piece together this mysterious puzzle.

The Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz (RBSMB) is a three-year coordinated survey led by the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group (IRBWG), along with eBird, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. Participants will be collecting data throughout the migratory range of the species, extending from the southern United States through the Midwest and Atlantic Coast and all the way into Canada. The objectives of the RBSMB are to 1) determine important migratory stopover sites, 2) assess consistency of use and timing at stopover locations, 3) strengthen relationships with other conservation organizations and enhance the conservation of Rusty Blackbirds, and 4) increase awareness of Rusty Blackbirds among the birding community and general public.



One of the highlights of the 2015 blitz was this leucistic female Rusty Blackbird, found and photographed in Moorhead by Kara Susag.

So how can you participate? Simple: Listen and look for Rustys in Minnesota between March 1 and June 15, then report them to eBird.org. If you are unfamiliar using eBird, please contact me and we'll work together to make your observations count—see contact information in last paragraph. (Side note: Observations reported to the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

continued on next page

(MOU) database cannot be used by RBSMB scientists. However, eBird reports can be converted to the MOU database.) While the unofficial survey period for the state is mid-March through mid-April, arrival and departure dates of migratory birds are influenced in part by climate, which varies by year. Rustys seen and *not* seen during your searches should be reported, and remember that estimated counts are far more useful to researchers than leaving the number seen as “X.” Please use the “RBSMB” protocol next to the “Other” category on the Date and Effort page. It is important to submit *both* Rusty Blackbird success and Rusty Blackbird-less observations in addition to using the appropriate protocol because it tells scientists that there are Rustys in certain areas and that there are *not* Rustys in other areas, despite searches for them. This way, they can start figuring out why such discrepancies exist.

Like last year, RBSMB wishes to target “Areas of Interest” (AOIs) as outlined on this web page: <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/2015-areas-of-interest/>. Although the page has not been updated for 2016 AOIs, these sites are likely still Rusty hotspots. In Minnesota, the areas of

highest interest include Mississippi River Lock and Dam #4 and the Superior National Forest. Several AOIs also exist in the Twin Cities metro, as well as Rochester, Brainerd, and an area east of Fargo, North Dakota. The Minnesota state coordinators encourage you to explore these areas and to discover new AOIs. For other potential hotspots, read the “Results” paragraph below.

Uncomfortable looking for Rustys by yourself? Consider attending a birding trip. Experienced birder Craig Mandel will be leading several trips targeting Rusty Blackbirds and other early springtime migrants through the Minnesota River Valley National Wildlife Refuge. For details, please refer to the Calendar of Events page in this Minnesota Birding issue.

Now, on to the 2015 results, which are accurate as of June 1, 2015: One hundred and thirteen birders submitted 249 checklists containing 3,887 Rusty Blackbirds (excluding double counts or unspecified “X” numbers) during the spring in Minnesota. Of those, 75 checklists were listed under the RBSMB protocol, with an additional 58 checklists coming in under the protocol but reporting 0 Rustys. Including these Rusty-less reports,

the number of checklists increased by an impressive 121% from 2014 and 284% from 2013! Ten of the checklists counted 100 or more individuals, with the highest three being the following: 220 on April 22 in Two Harbors (Jim Lind), 200 on April 4 at Reno Ponds (Alex Johnson and Steven Houdek), and 189 on April 6 at Fig Lake Farm (Shawn Goodchild and Heather Hundt). Continent-wide, 4,756 eBirders submitted 13,540 checklists containing Rusty Blackbirds in the spring of 2015, and New York was again in the lead with 1,633 Rusty reports. It will be interesting to see how reports hopefully improve again in 2016.

If you’d like to learn more about how you can participate in the RBSMB, or if you’re looking for some pointers on Rusty Blackbird identification, visit the IRBWG website: <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/>. Also feel free to contact the RBSMB Minnesota state coordinators: Alyssa DeRubeis (alderubeis@gmail.com) and Brittney Yohannes (brittneylarson27@gmail.com). With your help, we can advance our knowledge in Rusty Blackbird migration ecology to save it before it sits alongside the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and Passenger Pigeon.

Junk Birds

by *Cindy Thury Smith*

All right, I admit it: Sometimes I refer to certain bird species as “junk birds.” Grackles, starlings, Rock Pigeons, House Sparrows. However, it was recently brought to my attention that every bird is a treasure in someone’s eyes. When I came across the following images of avian artwork, I had to rethink the term “junk birds.”

And I think you should too.

This small art quilt by Diane Rusin Doran, *Return of the Grackle*,



has won several awards. She combined many digital images then printed them out on silk and heavily quilted the resulting panels.



Here’s Canadian artist Michael R. Gaudet’s finely detailed painting titled *Chatty Starling at Halifax Wharf*.

Bird City: Making Communities Healthy for Birds and People

by Joanna Eckles

What would it be like if your community was bird-friendly? If the residents whittled away some of their lawn grass area in favor of native plants, created bird and pollinator gardens, and came together for the Christmas Bird Count every Minnesota winter? If our governments made their buildings bird-safe, actively encouraged “cats indoors,” and planted an array of beneficial plants in the parks? If all the schools incorporated birding and nature lessons and every child had easy access to a natural area to explore?

At Audubon Minnesota, we have been working to create bird-friendly communities through Project Bird-Safe, our Chimney Swift conservation program, and with our urban Important Bird Areas. We were also deeply involved in the effort to earn Minneapolis and Saint Paul Urban Bird Treaty status (since 2011) and to develop the Guide to Urban Bird Conservation. Now we are excited to be in the midst of launching Bird City Minnesota. This program is modeled after Wisconsin’s successful program which has recognized 91 Bird Cities since 2009 (www.birdcitywisconsin.org).

Bird City is a municipal recognition program and an education program at the same time. The goals of the program are to increase bird habitat, reduce threats, and engage people in bird conservation and outdoor recreation. To be designated as a Bird City, communities—whether they are cities, towns, or counties—take action towards these goals. They receive highly-visible public recognition (ex. highway signs, plaques, flags, website) as well as resources and connections



to help continue implementing sound bird conservation strategies into the future.

Where are we now? We began by tapping into the vast experience and guidance of Bird City Wisconsin’s leaders. We aligned our goals for Bird City with those of the Urban Bird Treaty and the Guide to Urban Bird Conservation. Additionally, we worked to connect our program with similar complementary initiatives locally such as GreenStep Cities. This amazing Minnesota program recognizes communities for establishing sustainable practices in their community development. By identifying GreenStep actions that are also bird-friendly, existing GreenStep Cities that apply to be Bird Cities can get credit for those actions in both programs.

At the end of 2014, we pulled together partners to talk over all of our ideas in development. Out of those initial discussions came two commu-

nities ready and willing to pilot Bird City in 2015—the cities of Hastings and Saint Paul. Amazing!

Since then, a small team has been shepherding the process with input from city staff and officials in the pilot communities. Both cities are now in the process of completing their Bird City applications and we hope to recognize them this coming spring.

With the basic plan and framework established, we are now beginning to talk with communities that are interested in joining the second phase of the pilot. Phase 2 will allow us to work with different communities as we continue to refine the program. It will also give us a basis for fundraising to support the program and participants long-term. For current program requirements, check out the table.

What can you do? If Bird City is a program you’d like to get involved with, here’s how you can help!

- If you’re interested in bringing Bird City to your community, let us know. While every city’s participation will be unique, it will typically require a partnership between the municipality and leaders in the birding and conservation community. The city completes the application by pulling together not only their actions, but those spearheaded by other groups as well. The more involved the wider community is, the better the results will be over time.
- Consider serving as a subject matter expert if you have expertise in a particular area. We’re putting

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Bird City,
continued from page 3

together materials and information on a variety of topics: native and beneficial plants, encouraging young birders, citizen science opportunities, controlling invasive species, keeping cats indoors, and reducing toxins. It is a long list of worthy subjects that help create bird-friendly communities.

For birds and for people a great quality of life comes from a combination of health, opportunity, and security. Bird City has the potential to pull together citizens, students, organizations, and municipal staff and officials with a shared purpose to improve quality of life for everyone. Together, we can transform the places where we live and work into habitats where birds, and people, flourish. We hope you'll join us!

Joanna Eckles is the Bird-friendly Communities Manager for Audubon Minnesota. She is developing the Bird City program and has coordinated Project BirdSafe, focused on reducing bird-window collisions, since 2007. She can be reached at jeckles@audubon.org or at 651-739-9332 ext. 111.

For initial recognition, communities fulfill eight or more of nineteen criteria including one required action and at least seven of eighteen Best Practices. Upon annual renewal the expectation is for Bird City communities to add more actions.

Required of all Bird City communities (complete 1 of 1)
Adopt an official resolution and hold a celebration recognizing International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD).
Category I: Educate and engage people in birding and conservation (complete at least 2 of 5)
Best Practice (BP) #1: Increase awareness of birds in your community.
BP #2: Involve residents in conservation and stewardship projects.
BP #3: Educate and engage underserved audiences (i.e. youth, elderly, minority, disabled).
BP #4: Promote citizen science monitoring and research.
BP #5: Ensure access to nature.
Category II: Protect, restore and enhance bird habitat (complete at least 3 of 7)
BP #6: Practice conservation planning.
BP #7: Create and protect habitat.
BP #8: Promote use of native and beneficial plant species.
BP #9: Control invasive and detrimental species.
BP #10: Create and protect nesting opportunities.
BP #11: Ensure best management of urban forests.
BP #12: Ensure clean water in natural waterways.
Category III: Reduce threats to birds (complete at least 2 of 6)
BP #13: Reduce collisions with windows.
BP #14: Reduce collisions with other man-made structures.
BP #15: Reduce light pollution.
BP #16: Reduce predation by free-roaming cats.
BP #17: Reduce the threat of pesticides and other toxins.
BP #18: Reduce climate impacts.

New MOU Members

- Ellen Baker, *Minneapolis, MN*
- Jonathan Beck, *Minneapolis, MN*
- James Burns, *Minneapolis, MN*
- Jane Dickerson, *St. Paul, MN*
- Susan Groff, *Underwood, MN*
- Heather Hundt, *Lake Park, MN*
- Barry Kazmer, *St. Cloud, MN*
- Meagan Keefe, *South St. Paul, MN*
- Dody Kettler, *Bloomington, MN*
- Jeanne Loesch, *Hastings, MN*
- Jon Mathson, *Eagan, MN*
- Julie McCormick, *Winona, MN*
- Mynatech, Inc., *Minneapolis, MN*
- Daniel Pakko, *White Bear Lake, MN*
- Phoenix Software Support
Minnetonka, MN
- Doris Rubenstein, *Richfield, MN*
- Tracy Sarel, *Eden Prairie, MN*
- Amy Simso Dean, *Minneapolis, MN*
- Siah St. Clair, *Brooklyn Park, MN*
- Lawrence Syverud, *Mounds View, MN*
- Russell Welch, *Rosemount, MN*
- Teri Wills, *Martinez, CA*
- Randy Wiltscheck, *New Ulm, MN*

MOU Calendar



March / April 2016

STATEWIDE

March 10-April 20:

Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz

Details: Look for Rusty Blackbirds anywhere in the state during spring migration and enter your sightings on eBird.org! The survey has been implemented to better understand this rapidly declining songbird. For more information, read the article in this newsletter or contact Minnesota blitz co-coordinator Alyssa DeRubeis at alderubeis@gmail.com.

AUDUBON CHAPTER OF MINNEAPOLIS

March 1: Birding Basics

Details: 7pm at Beth El Synagogue, 5224 W. 26th Street, St Louis Park, MN 55416. Presented by Clay Christensen.

April 5: Bird Conservation Management

Details: 7pm at the Brookdale Library, 6125 Shingle Creek Parkway, Brooklyn Center, MN 55430. Presented by University of Minnesota-Duluth professor Gerald Niemi.

CARPENTER ST. CRIX VALLEY NATURE CENTER

Information at www.CarpenterNatureCenter.org. RSVP for all programs at 651-437-4359. For Minnesota Campus events, meet at the Carpenter Nature Center at 12805 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings, MN 55033. For Wisconsin Campus events, meet at 300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI 54016.

March 4: Moonlight Owl Prowl & Snowshoe Hike, Wisconsin Campus

Details: 7-9pm. Cost: \$6 or \$4 for "Friends of CNC."

March 12 and April 16: Wisconsin Campus Guided Bird Hikes

Details: 8-9am. Cost: \$6 or free for "Friends of CNC."

March 25 and April 22: Minnesota Campus Public Bird Banding

Details: 8:30am-12pm. Donations of bird seed or suet appreciated.

April 23: Hastings Area Bird Festival, Minnesota Campus

Details: 8 am-4:30 pm. Includes youth "Big Day" birding competition, bird banding demonstrations, live raptor program, beginner birding class, and field trips to area hot spots. Any proceeds from the event will support K-12 environmental education programming and habitat protection at Carpenter Nature Center. Cost: \$5 or \$15 including a box lunch.

INTERNATIONAL OWL CENTER

Address: 126 E Cedar St, Houston, MN 55943. Phone number: 507-896-6957.

March 4-6: 14th Annual International Owl Festival

Details: It's all owl everything, including live owl shows, trips, hooting contests, pellet dissection, kids' activities, art galleries, gift shops, meals, and presentations from award recipients. This year they are Pertti Saurola (Finland), Ronald van Harxen and Pascal Stroeken (Netherlands), Jim Duncan (Canada), and Jim Warren (North Carolina). Over 500 attendees were present in past festivals. Times, fees, and locations vary. For more information and to register, visit www.festivalofowls.com.

MINNESOTA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION/ MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY AUDUBON CHAPTER

April 23: 41st Annual Salt Lake Birding Weekend

Details: Bird trips take place in the prairies and wetlands of Big Stone, Lac qui Parle, and Yellow Medicine counties. Last year 90+ birders found 133 species, including 19 shorebirds, 24 waterfowl/grebes, Prairie Falcon, Say's Phoebe, and more. The event is free and no preregistration is required. For information on lodging/camping and meals, contact Ken Larson at 952-595-9265 (home), 612-210-8486 (cell), or e-mail at priariemarshfarm@comcast.net. More information and a map are available at <http://moumn.org/saltlake/>.

MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

All led by Craig Mandel. Unless noted otherwise, hikes start at 8am at the location's parking lot. For



questions, contact him at EgretCMan@msn.com or 952-240-7647. Many more events can be found here: http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Minnesota_Valley/Events.html.

March 19, April 2 and 11: Rapids Lake Unit Bird Hike (Carver)

March 28 and April 9: Bass Ponds Unit Bird Hike (Bloomington)

April 7: Wright County Birding Trip

Details: All day. For meeting location, contact Craig.

ST. PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

<http://saintpaulaudubon.org/events/calendar/2016-04>

April 20: Woodcock Courtship Flights

Details: 8-10pm. Meet at AHATS Hamline Gate 1 on Hamline & Ben Franklin Road, Arden Hills, MN 55112.

April 21: Woodcock of Rush City

Details: 8-10pm. For site directions, visit <http://saintpaulaudubon.org/events/2016/04/woodcock-of-rush-city>.

April 30: Nerstrand Big Woods' Birds and Blooms

Details: 8:30am-12pm. Meet at Nerstrand Big Woods State Park on 9700 170th Steet E, Nerstrand, MN.

VINE ARTS CENTER

2637 27th Avenue S., Minneapolis, MN 55406

March 19-April 9: At Home in a Wide Echoing Land: How Places Resonate as We Travel Earth Exhibit

Details: North woods-dweller and nature artist Tanya Beyer showcases her bird and nature-themed pieces. <http://www.vineartscenter.com/tanya/index.htm>.

ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

March 5 and April 2: Bird Walk

Details: 9am at Quarry Hill Nature Center. Led by Terry and Joyce Grier.

April 14: Woodcock Watch

Details: 7:30pm at Chester Woods Park. Led by Jim Peterson. Meet near entrance of park or in the horse corral parking lot.

April 23: Root River Park Bird Walk

Details: 7:30am at Heintz Center, Rochester. Led by Sandy Hokanson.

ADVANCE NOTICE

May 19-22: 19th Annual Detroit Lakes Festival of Birds

Details: Trips, workshops, socials, and exhibitors. For more information and registration, visit <http://www.visitdetroitlakes.com/events/festival-of-birds>.

GENERAL INFORMATION

To find local Audubon chapters and events near you, visit <http://mn.audubon.org/audubon-locations>.

For an extensive list of events hosted by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, visit <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/events/index.html>.



Cape May Warbler, by Earl Orf

Phenology Corner: Busting the Smith's Longspur "Fall-Only" Myth

by *Bob Dunlap*

It's difficult for Minnesota birders to shift their focus from the hoards of waterfowl that migrate through our state in March and April. And for good reason; ducks, geese, and swans are fairly big birds that stand out even from a distance, and for the most part they're easily identifiable. Especially for newer birders, studying waterfowl is an excellent and enjoyable way to get acquainted with the diversity of birds in our state. But perhaps you're one of those birders who has "been there, done that." You've seen all of our state's regular duck species (or at least the non-sea ducks), and you're up for a new challenge. Well, you might be surprised to learn that that challenge awaits you in some of the same locations where the waterfowl are amassing, albeit on drier land.

Smith's Longspurs are the challenge to which I'm referring. This arctic-breeding songbird migrates through our state in both spring and fall. Historically, birders have looked for this species most often in mid-October in the western third of Minnesota, but recent records from several central and eastern counties in southern Minnesota from late March through early May suggests that we might reconsider our autumnal western bias.

All longspurs are grassland birds, and Smith's Longspurs are no exception. They tend to favor the shortest grasses, and in their wintering grounds in the southern Great Plains this often equates to airport runways and pastures. Since airports are usually off-limits to birders, and pastures are generally privately owned and fenced off, we need to look elsewhere if we are to find these birds in Minnesota. The grassy berms of some sewage ponds offer suitable habitat, but contain their

own sets of security issues and access concerns. This leaves our natural grasslands, the prairies. But the prairies of Minnesota are largely tall-grass prairies, and the vegetation of a mature tall-grass prairie is generally too tall and lush to attract Smith's.

However, one of the methods for maintaining a healthy prairie is to mow or graze the grass from time to time, and if this is done in the fall, short stubble is all that will remain the following spring. Prairie grasses of this height are conducive to attracting Smith's Longspurs. And as many of our waterfowl production areas and wildlife management areas contain tracts of prairie, these managed lands could attract a flock of northbound Smith's Longspurs in spring if conditions are right. Mowing is most often implemented in the first couple years of a newly restored prairie, thus if you come across a mowed prairie in the fall it would behoove you to return there the following spring. A call to your local Department of Natural Resources office or US Fish and Wildlife Service headquarters might provide you with information on what areas will be mowed or grazed each fall.

If Smith's Longspurs are present, either as lone individuals or in small groups (but flocks of up to 100 have been observed), they're usually most obvious when they're in the air. Their twittering flight calls are often described as "slower and lower" than the rattles of Lapland Longspurs (which are also migrating north through Minnesota at this time and can be found in the same short grasses as Smith's), closer in similarity to the rattling flight calls of Brown-headed Cowbirds. In addition, Smith's Longspurs do not give the single-note "dew" calls of



Lapland Longspurs, so if you are only hearing rattle calls without these notes the birds deserve more scrutiny.

Once flushed, birds in the air might circle high above your head for a minute or two before landing back in the short grasses. Be sure to closely watch where the birds land, and then slowly work your way to that area. With a little luck, you'll spot a few individuals hopping among the stubble and be able to study them at fairly close range. As May approaches, the males attain the vibrant ochre-yellow underparts bold black-and-white head patterns of breeding plumage as they begin to serenade the prairies with their short warbling songs.

As with many birding challenges in Minnesota, this one takes patience and persistence. In some years, the migration window might occur from late March through mid-April, and in others it might begin in mid-April and persist through the second week of May (there are even late-May records from the northern half of the state). Thus if you're serious about seeing a Smith's, many visits to a mowed prairie in spring are probably in order. Any don't be surprised if you see a few other birders in the area with their scopes pointed toward the nearby ponds, wondering why you aren't doing the same.

Minnesota Birder Bio: Laura Coble



Name: Laura Coble

Born: I was born in Canby, Minnesota, and grew up in Lake Andes, SD.

Currently living: Cannon Falls, Minnesota.

Occupation: I was an instrumental

music teacher in Grosse Pointe, MI.

Serious about birding: Since I retired and moved to Minnesota.

Favorite bird or bird family: Wood-Warblers.

Favorite places to bird in Minnesota: Frontenac State Park, Hok-si-la Park, Miesville Ravine, Lower Spring Lake Park, Lake Byllesby area, and 180th Street Marsh.

Favorite place to bird outside of Minnesota: South Dakota.

Birding style (i.e. by yourself, with others, etc): By myself or with birding friends.

Best advice on how to be a better birder: Bird with expert, experienced birders and go on guided bird trips to learn more about habitat, bird songs, bird behavior and field marks for mak-

ing correct bird identifications.

The main attraction or joy of birding: Searching Minnesota woods, prairie, marsh, and other habitats, enjoying the birds I expect to observe, and knowing I may get a surprise or two!

Interests and hobbies when you're not birding: I volunteer at Carpenter Nature Center, helping with cleaning the raptor mews weekly, as well as doing cleaning/feeding for the reptiles, amphibians and a rabbit once a week. I also visit residents in the local senior care center, and lead a sing-a-long with them. I was able to re-establish the Red Wing Christmas Bird Count in 2007, and we just successfully finished our ninth year thanks to our excellent birder teams. I also enjoy reading, including books about birds and birding.

What new bird you would like to see the most: Boreal Owl



Black-capped Chickadee, by Marcia Johnson

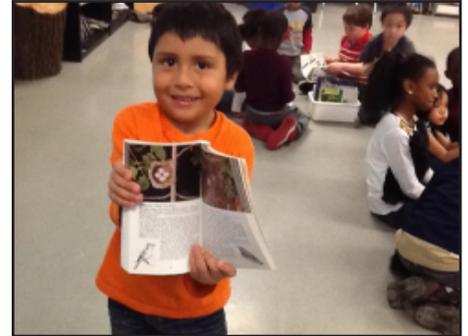
Harambee Elementary Continues to Benefit from Savaloja Grant

by Jenny Eckman, Environmental Science Teacher

Harambee received a 2014 MOU Savaloja Grant, which was a perfect match for Harambee. We shared the goals of benefiting birds, increasing understanding of birds, and diversification and expansion of the Minnesota birding community. Due to overwhelming interest by teachers and students, we applied for a second grant in 2015. This report is intended to share how the 2015 grant impacted our work. We are a unique magnet school with a diverse population and a desire to use the natural world as a context for learning. We wanted to increase and improve the ways we used birds as an integrating theme. We hoped to use the engaging and motivating topic of birds to connect standards in science, language arts, social studies and math as well as our magnet foci of community cultures and environmental science. The 2015 grant allowed us to improve our bird study in 3 valuable ways;

Resources

The students in the original grant received individual copies of Birds of the Northwoods Activity guide. This book is designed for students to complete activities and collect information about 50 different bird species. We also included time for the author of the book to visit classrooms, talk to the students about the book and birding as well as take them outside to look for good bird habitat in the Harambee backyard. The students kept these books as they moved into 3rd grade and the teachers continued to make bird study an integral part of their curriculum. The 2015 grant allowed us to purchase the same book for the next group of 2nd grade students and provide the same experience with the author. Now those students will be part of a 2 year cycle with the bird study. We also purchased WILD About Minnesota Birds by Adele Porter as a teacher resource guide for each of the incoming 2nd grade teachers. Having this quality



resource increased the chances that teachers would incorporate the bird study into their curriculum.

Training

David Grack, the author of the activity guide returned to work with both 2nd and 3rd grade students and teachers. David worked with Jenny to plan a session that was individualized for the team and connected to the other elements of each grade level's curriculum. David showed the teachers ideas for using the binoculars and field guides with students and took groups of kids out to bird with binoculars.

Meeting and Planning

Finally, the grant included time for the classroom teachers to meet with Jenny for planning and curriculum writing. At 2nd grade, we were able to use experiences of the previous year's teachers as a guide and make changes based on what worked (and didn't work) in the prior year. For 3rd grade, we worked to extend what began in year 1. This is critical to the success of the bird study. With pressure on teachers to meet standards and follow district mandated curriculum, we needed to insure that the bird study was an integrated component and not an add on.

With the grant, Harambee was able to purchase great bird resources which gave opportunities for all sorts of projects. The students were excited to participate!



Outcomes

The second year of the Harambee Beginning Birders project was another incredible success! Not only did the teachers moving from 2nd to 3rd grade want to continue, they took initiative to go further. One of the teachers wrote a Roseville Area Schools Foundation grant to secure additional bird related materials from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology as well as student materials and resources related to birds. They planned a field trip to a nature center for bird banding and continue to use the bird study as a context to connect multiple subject areas and engage kids with nature. They even involved families with a bird themed family event where students taught about Minnesota birds and families made bird houses and feeders to take home! The teachers moving into 2nd grade for the 2015-16 school year also embraced the bird study and were very appreciative of the work established in the first year. They incorporated iPad technology where students researched birds using Cornell and Journey North. Our hope that a vibrant birding community would develop at our school became a reality!



With our “looping” model, the current 2nd graders will stay with their classroom teachers for another year and move to 3rd grade together in 2016–17. The teachers currently working in 3rd grade will “loop” back to teach 2nd grade that year. Now that we have a solid foundation, the 2–3 loop can use birds as an integrating topic on a permanent basis and continue to make improvements. The Savaloja Grant was instrumental in making this possible. Thank you!

Savaloja Grant Recipient Report: Three Rivers Park District

by *Patty Maher, Outdoor Education Supervisor*

Project Summary: Our nature centers had very poor binoculars that were easily broken and frustrating to use. Through this grant we were able to purchase a classroom set of binoculars that are easy for everyone to use. The binoculars have helped our programs tremendously. With hundreds of kids and adults using them in their first year, we expect the new set to last for many more years and provide a high-quality bird watching experience for thousands of children and adults.

Thanks to the MOU Savaloja Grant, urban youth and adults enjoyed many successful birding trips with new binoculars at Kroening Interpretive Center and West Coon Rapids Dam. With Three Rivers Park District naturalists, participants that had never used binoculars before were able to explore the forest along the Mississippi River and learn about birds.

Location Information: Our team of Three Rivers Park District naturalists run nature-based programs at Kroening Interpretive Center in North

Mississippi Regional Park in North Minneapolis and West Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park in Brooklyn Park, as well as in the community.

Audience: The students, schools, and public groups that we serve come from a very diverse background. The majority of the kids that have used the new binoculars are in grades 4–8. The binoculars were a big hit at family and adult programs where we were able to hook more people on birding. They were also used during the Urban Birding Festival in June, the Brooklyn Center Community Schools field trip, with Jenny Lind Elementary School, with Champlin Brooklyn Park Academy, during summer camps and the 4th grade Minneapolis Summer School bird class.

There were many memories made this past year with the new binoculars. Notably, one junior high school student told us that it was her first time using binoculars, she saw a Bald Eagle, and she had a great experience. Thank you, Minnesota Ornithologists’ Union, for this great opportunity!





Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

University of Minnesota
Bell Museum of Natural History
10 Church Street SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Minnesota Ornithologists' Union
J. F. Bell Museum of Natural History
University of Minnesota
10 Church Street SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
Email: mou@moumn.org
Web: <http://moumn.org>
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The Mission of the M.O.U.

We foster the study and conservation of birds by amateurs and professionals. We promote the conservation of birds and their natural habitats. We support these aims primarily by publishing and sharing information, by serving as a repository for records, by conducting field trips, by awarding grants for research, and by supporting programs that educate members and the public about birds.

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Birding Hotline

Northwest: 800-433-1888

MOU Contacts

Minnesota Birding: newsletter@moumn.org
President: president@moumn.org
Vice President: vicepresident@moumn.org
Membership Secretary: membership@moumn.org
Treasurer: treasurer@moumn.org
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The Loon editor: editor@moumn.org
Web site: <http://moumn.org>
CBC compiler: cbc@moumn.org
Statewide RBA compiler: rba@moumn.org
MOU Records Committee: mourc@moumn.org
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The Savaloja Grants supports research and other projects selected by the MOU for special attention. Your contributions help fund a better future for birds in Minnesota. You can add a contribution to your membership check.

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