

Bird Blind Improvement Project

The Macbride Raptor Center, located at the Macbride Nature Recreation Area north of Solon, Iowa, is open to visitors every day throughout the year. A large wildlife viewing bird blind that can seat nearly 25 individuals is tucked away just inside our woodlands and in front an array of bird feeders are attached to cables to allow visitors to winch them at heights that make them inaccessible to deer.

The goal of this project was to improve the structure of this feeding array by replacing four wooden posts, as well as a couple of winches and steel cable to attach feeders that allows for height adjustments and lowering to refill with seed as needed. Former Project Center leadership led by Jodeane Cancilla (Retired Director), Max Warnecke, Luke Hart, Michele Nigg, Phil Cronin, and Lisa Dreesman provided the effort and completed the project sometime during the spring after the ground was thawed enough to allow the posts to be replaced. These people have since moved on to other projects and are no longer with us, and unfortunately it is unknown to me what the itemized cost of each item came out to be.

It is estimated that the Raptor Center receives an estimated 5,000 walk-in visitors annually, and through the University of Iowa's School of the Wild field trips and week long Wildlife Camps, our educators teach young children early how to identify Iowa's common birds and other wildlife by spending time in the bird blind both with and without binoculars to help develop these skills and an early appreciation for Iowa's wildlife and the outdoors. Banding has also occurred at this site to study physiological fat storage differences across species and habitats, as well as to aid with hands-on, experiential educational opportunities.

This configuration has also been a tremendous benefit to the longevity of feeders, as well as a savings in seed as it disallows deer to gain access, while still providing corn and millet on top of ground platforms for deer, squirrels, ground foraging birds, and raccoon.

We would like to thank the Iowa Ornithologists' Union for their contribution to help facilitate our maintenance and construction needs with this project, and we'll continue to look for creative ways to further educate and enhance the experience visitors receive, as well as conduct basic and habitat related research.