

## **Bird Study and Boy Scouts: A Win-Win In Combining Education and Conservation**

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In 2016, the Iowa Ornithologists' Union provided the Boy Scouts' Hawkeye Area Council a grant to support bird study. The project, *Bird Study at Howard H. Cherry Scout Reservation*, was aimed at conservation education through bird study, and the funds helped establish a bird study area and education program at the Scout Reservation.

The Howard H. Cherry Scout Reservation (HHCSR) is a local Scout and community destination in east-central Iowa located in northeast Linn County along the Wapsipinicon River. HHCSR has ample bird habitat, totaling approximately 500 acres, mostly deciduous forest. The reservation serves over 7000 Boy Scouts each year, their parents, and adult volunteers in the Hawkeye Area Council, which encompasses seven counties (Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington counties), making the Hawkeye Area Council one of the largest youth organizations in the area.

Conservation is a central theme to the Boy Scout program: Scout youth learn Leave No Trace principles and complete many badges and requirements focused on environmental and conservation issues, including bird study. HHCSR includes an Ecology Program area, which is used for conservation education. During the summer residential camping season, hundreds of Boy Scouts complete merit badges such as Environmental Science; younger Cub Scouts complete ecology and nature requirements. Birding is a significant part of the Scout conservation program, as many of the requirements involve the identification of birds and other wildlife.

Unfortunately, HHCSR has limited bird study resources. The Ecology Program area has a bird blind, but this area had become crowded with invasive honeysuckle. As part of a larger project to rehabilitate the Ecology area, the honeysuckle has been removed, and we have turned our efforts to rebuilding the bird study area. IOU funds helped establish a bird study area and education program, furthering the IOU mission to encourage youth interest in the identification and study of birds.

We used IOU funds to purchase materials and supplies to provide Scout youth with early success in birding. Scouts now have access to high quality identification guides, including the National Geographic Field Guide and Guide to Iowa Birds, both sources that facilitate identification for beginning birders by highlighting salient features and habitat. We now have new, high quality feeders and suet cages, which were lacking in previous summer camp seasons. Work on bird feeding area and elevated, shielded platforms is ongoing, slowed by winter weather, but the Ecology Program area will have a central area for bird feeding and watching for the Summer 2017 camping season.

These efforts have already started to benefit Scouts. In Summer 2016 Scout youth were able to register for *and complete* the Bird Study merit badge while at residential camp. Previously, the requirements went unfulfilled because not enough bird species were observed (the merit badge requires Scouts to identify at least 20 different bird species).

We will continue to develop and expand the bird study area. One priority item is a new bird blind that would have universal access and be usable to increase Scouts' overall birding experience. The Hawkeye Area Council looks forward to continued collaboration with the Iowa Ornithologists' Union!