

2017 Projects Grant Report

Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Submitted by: Cerro Gordo County Conservation Board

Project: Nature's Window: Bringing the Outdoors In

The Nature's Window outdoor microphone was installed at the Lime Creek Nature Center in Mason City, located within the Lime Creek Conservation Area. The 450-acre wildlife area includes over 9 miles of hiking trails that span forest, wetland, and prairie habitats. Within the nature center, there is a row of chairs located in front of a wall of windows that overlooks a bird feeder setup and waterscape. The mostly forested view is only a few hundred meters from the Winnebago River, allowing visitors to see a variety of season migrant and year-round resident species. A table provides necessary bird-identification tools and a log for birders to write down their sightings. The speaker is setup in the corner and broadcasts the sounds of outside throughout the nature center building.

The speaker was fully installed in early August and has been used on almost a daily basis since then. Weekend volunteers at the nature center have commented on the addition and enjoy being able to listen to the sounds of nature while they watch over the center and converse with guests. Many days there are visitors that sit in the chairs and watch the birds for an hour or two and they have also enjoyed the addition of the speaker and being able to hear the birds while they watch.

The goal of the project was to allow those inside the nature center to stay connected to the outside world and give them to opportunity to learn the sounds of birds while viewing them from indoors. These goals have been met and, although it's not the most opportune time to listen to bird songs, we've enjoyed the occasion calls/songs from the chickadees, jays, and cardinals and look forward to the influx of songs in the spring. Even when birds are not in song, the speaker picks up the sounds of the waterscape and keeps the indoors connected to the outdoors.

Because the feeders are filled daily and attract a variety of species, the addition of speaker also allows the staff additional opportunities to hold bird watching events indoors while still being able to attribute the sounds to the different birds viewed. The first event to utilize the speaker system was a program called "Nature's Window" held September 25th 2017. Considered an "After School Special," the program was focused on a younger audience but allowed anyone interested to join us for the afternoon. We utilized the speaker system to listen to bird calls throughout the program. We discussed the basics of bird feeding, including types of feed, types of feeders, and feeder hygiene, then opened the floor to a general discussion on birds, answering a broad range of questions from how to attract certain species to what birds are considered the rarest in our area. Both youth and adults were engaged in the presentation and many were inspired to add additions to their own yard, such as a new feeder or water source!

As word continues to spread about the addition of the speaker to our nature center, we hope to see more bird watching interest from visitors and use the speaker at more programs in the future.

We are very grateful to the IOU for providing this grant to allow us to bring the sounds of bird songs into our center.

