

Iowa Ornithologist's Final Grant Report 2022

1. Title of project

Milton R. Owen Bird Observation Station

2. Project Description

With the help of the Iowa Ornithologists Union, Mitchell County Environmental Education Foundation was able to purchase exterior grade building materials and quality, Audubon Society approved bird feeders for a bird observation station to enhance the learning environment of the Milton R. Owen Nature Center.

Although feeders and building materials were purchased, due to some staffing and equipment issues, the feeding station has not been installed yet. It is scheduled to be installed as soon as holes can be dug in the spring.

3. Project Goals

The goal of this project was to revitalize and upgrade the bird feeding and observation area at the Milton R. Owen Nature Center. An interpretive plan for the nature center was completed in late 2020 and includes a "wildlife observation" area, focused around native Iowa bird identification and observation. This area is designated in a different part of the nature center from where the current feeders are located. This new area has full length windows, which improves visibility and has better access to water and electrical supplies. The current station, while functional, is unattractive and the feeders are well past their prime, with many of them damaged and/or missing parts. The selection of current feeders has also dwindled, due to damage loss, and may not be providing the most species diversity possible at the feeders.

The awarded project provided funding for building materials for a new observation station – one that is more appealing to the public, easier for staff to maintain, and will better utilize the observation tools (cameras and mics) previously provided by the IOU.

The overarching goal of this project is to enhance the learning capacity of the Milton R. Owen Nature Center and make steps toward completing the redesign plan and increase the educational impact of both the interior and exterior learning spaces. With this new station, Mitchell County Conservation Board Naturalist, Chelsea Rowcliffe, can continue to reach the following education goals for the Milton R. Owen Nature Center:

- Increase appreciation for local avian diversity
- Encourage interest in birds and bird watching
- Foster awareness and participation in bird conservation efforts
- Inspire youth involvement with bird-related educational activities

4. Project Impact

Several of the feeders have been utilized in the current station and there has been a marked increase in bird visitors, especially Northern Cardinals and a variety of Woodpeckers. The Mitchell County Environmental Education Foundation was able to purchase some of the feeders from a local greenhouse and garden center that was going out of business for 50% off the grant projected price, which allowed for a greater number of feeders and types to be purchased. The \$87.37 difference in receipts vs. granted money went towards the purchase of 4 feeders (one ground feeder, one hanging flat feeder, one double-high suet feeder, and one hopper feeder) from the greenhouse going out of business. A receipt was not included for this due to it not being itemized, only coded, and several other non-IOU grant purchases were made at the same time. The 50% off feeders are shown in the attached photo, being utilized in the current station until the new station can be built in the spring. The lumber and duct-work are awaiting warmer weather in the Mitchell County Conservation Board shop. The lumber, purchased locally, came in under the quoted price from the original grant.

This year, Mitchell County Environmental Education Foundation and Mitchell County Conservation will be taking part in the “Building Better Birders” Program, and the feeders (and soon-to-be-installed station) will have a major impact on the participants and public that come to the Milton R. Owen Nature Center to learn from this great education series. The first session is taking place on May 27th, 2023.

