



Ø CLOSE WINDOW Ø

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## Students are able to link classroom to the real world with bird watching

By Caroline Gotler / The Bayonet

Armed with binoculars, checklists and a telescope, students from McBride Elementary School spent the morning bird watching at Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center March 18.



The outing was part of Kids Bird Watch, a program developed by Oxbow Meadows staff, aimed at getting children excited about watching birds.

"We want to make bird watching and citizen science one of the most memorable experiences they have in elementary school," said Heidi Hughes, Oxbow Meadows executive director. "What we're trying to do is create those 'aha' moments so that kids can have that 'Wow that was really cool!' experience watching a bird."

The program, which is being piloted in Key, South Columbus, McBride, Matthews and Clubview schools, targets fourth-grade science classes. Thanks to donations by the program's sponsors, each school will receive a bird feeder and enough birdseed to last through May. Teachers and students will receive hummingbird feeders to take home with them, as well as several birding books and checklists.

Students will send data about birds they observe at school to the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology's eBird project, an online resource for scientists tracking bird population and location

trends. Participating in eBird will provide an important link between the classroom and the real world, said Andrea Chambers, McBride science teacher.

"They'll be able to take what they've learned in the classroom and apply it to ... the world," she said. "And as 21st century teachers, we should be able to have our children adapt to real-life experiences."

In addition to getting kids excited about watching birds at school, the program also aims to inspire them to come to Oxbow to watch birds in their free time, and to bring the excitement of bird watching home to their families and friends, Hughes said.

After the field trip, Michaela Dow and Lynsey Painter said they hoped to return to Oxbow that weekend to bird watch.

"I think the coolest thing about bird watching is we were able to get a good wildlife experience," Dow said. "I thought we might just go inside and look at pictures of birds, but instead, they took us on a nature walk and showed us live birds that ... were

roaming free."

Marquel Fordham also plans to bird watch again in the future.

"Birds are very interesting," he said. "I think the most fun part was learning more about them and really getting to know them."

For Bonar Eliacin, bird watching opened new horizons.

"I never did bird watching before," he said. "Before I came here, I just thought they flew everywhere."

Some students, like Madison Poznanski, kept an eye out for their favorite bird species.

"My favorite bird was the Northern Cardinal, because they're really unique and pretty and they're good birds to watch," she said.

"We saw a couple of them fighting with each other."

Chambers said she hoped the program would help students develop a lifelong love of science and bird watching.

"We want the children to understand that this is something they can take with them into adult life," she said. "It's a connection. It's another tool we can use when it comes to connecting community and school and awareness of environment."

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