

## Birding for All Children Initiative: Final Report for Cape Cod Bird Club Grant

With a generous grant from all of you in the Cape Cod Bird Club, I was able to extend my Birding for All Children Initiative, in which I try to introduce the joys of birding to children whose families might not have the resources to help them get started.

With your grant I put together ten Birding Backpacks and distributed them to schools around the Cape from Brewster and Chatham to Sandwich and Falmouth.

Each backpack contained a laminated resource I created titled “Birding Basics.” This resource is designed to have a one-on-one conversation with each student who checks out the backpack from their school’s library. “Birding Basics” also explains how to use binoculars and where and how a student might look for birds.

It also encourages each student to be curious as they watch a bird, asking them what do they notice and wonder about, and asking them if anything about the bird or what it is doing reminds them of anything else.

Each Birding Backpack contains a set of laminated photos of birds commonly found on Cape Cod. Cape Cod Bird Club Board member Maria Curley put together these field guide sheets.

Each backpack contains a pair of quality, child-friendly binoculars, as well as an attached neck cord, case, and cleaning cloth.

In addition to the binoculars, I purchased for each backpack the following books, which I whole-heartedly recommend for the children and students in your life:

1. Cherie Winner’s Everything Bird: What Kids Really Want to Know About Birds. It answers 58 cool questions, from “Why do birds go extinct? Can’t they just fly away from their problems?” to “Why is bird poop so runny?”
2. Mel Boring’s Birds, Nests, and Eggs, which imparts some life histories in a kid-friendly way.
3. Latimer, Nolting, and Peterson’s Backyard Birds, a field guide for young naturalists.
4. Laubach, Smith, and Laubach’s Raptor!: A Kid’s Guide to Birds of Prey, a large book with great photos, a pullout pocket field guide, and exciting

information about behavior, hunting strategies, flight silhouettes, range maps, and more.

In addition, I included a laminated check-in card listing all the materials in the backpack to help students, families, and the librarians. Also, every backpack has a Cape Cod Bird Club decal affixed to the outside.

Finally, each backpack also contained a letter explaining the Initiative and a letter previewing the survey questions I used to gain feedback from the schools at the end of the year.

I reached out to principals and librarians at public schools across the Cape, and was able to place a Birding Backpack at the following schools:

1. Eddy Elementary School in Brewster
2. Stony Brook Elementary School in Brewster
3. The Oak Ridge School in Sandwich.
4. North Falmouth Elementary School
5. East Falmouth Elementary School
6. West Villages Elementary School in Marstons Mills.
7. Barnstable United Elementary School in Marstons Mills
8. Chatham Elementary School
9. Marguerite E. Small Elementary School in West Yarmouth
10. Barnstable Intermediate School in Hyannis

I was able to place all the Birding Backpacks in the fall and early winter, and followed up for feedback in the late spring. Many expressed excitement, love, and wonder on the part of the students and warm gratitude from the librarians and school administrators. Some expressed a wish for more backpacks, since many students had to put their name on a waiting list to be in line to borrow the backpack. One librarian wrote “the kids who were able to borrow it did enjoy the backpack tremendously. I heard about walks and hikes that they took with their families and the enjoyment of using the binoculars and reading the books.”

As birders, you all may smile but not be surprised that those who were birders themselves were especially delighted with this project. One principal responded “As a Bird Nird, I am all in!” A librarian wrote “I have been a Birder since I was a child, so I appreciated this opportunity that you are providing children!”

I am grateful for the funding Cape Cod Bird Club has provided. During the 2024-2025 school year, the 10 schools listed above had a combined enrollment of 3,059 students. Providing access to high-quality birding materials for over 3,000 students year after year opens the opportunity to fall in love with the life-long fun and adventure of birding to so many!

Thank you for collaborating with me on this worthwhile mission.

In gratitude,

Nancy Truitt-Blosser