

Birds in my Neighborhood®

2017 Status Report

Birds in my Neighborhood® acquaints elementary classrooms in Chicago with birds that inhabit their local community. Openlands believes school gardens and birds can be the entrée to connect youth with a long-term passion for the environment, and Birds in my Neighborhood seeks to provide instruction and resources that strengthen this connection. Since 2013, the program has reached 4,000 students from 27 schools. In the 2016-17 school year Birds in my Neighborhood was funded through the U.S. Forest Service International Programs, in partnership with Audubon-Great Lakes.

This report describes the results of Birds in my Neighborhood in the 2016-17 school year, including successes, lessons learned, opportunities for improvement, next steps, and stories.



Students from Suder Montessori discuss the birds that they saw during their field trip to Humboldt Park.

Birds in my Neighborhood® in 2017

1300

Students

41

Classrooms

110

Active and trained
volunteers

27

Schools

Birds in my Neighborhood 2016-2017 School Participants (community areas in parentheses)	
Beidler Elementary (East Garfield Park)	Lavizzo Elementary (Roseland)
Davis Magnet Academy (West Englewood)	McPherson Elementary (Lincoln Square)
Dawes Elementary (Ashburn)	Palmer Elementary (Albany Park)
Drummond Elementary (West Town)	Peck Elementary (Gage Park)
Edison Park Elementary (Norwood Park)	Ruiz Elementary (Lower West Side)
Fleming Elementary (Clearing)	Saucedo Elementary (Little Village)
Greene Elementary (McKinley Park)	Sheridan Academy (Bridgeport)
Hayt Elementary (Edgewater)	Shoesmith Elementary (Kenwood)
Hearst Elementary (Garfield Ridge)	Suder Montessori (Near West Side)
Jamieson Elementary (Budlong-Woods)	Tonti Elementary (Gage Park)
Kellogg Elementary (Beverly)	Yates Elementary (Logan Square)
LaSalle II Elementary (West Town)	Schmid Elementary (Pullman)
Dirksen Elementary (O'Hare)	Kozminski Elementary (Hyde Park)
Clissold Elementary (Morgan Park)	

Evaluation Methods

In June 2017, teachers and volunteers were asked to complete a survey about their experiences with Birds in my Neighborhood. 28 volunteers, and 14 teachers responded. Additionally, a feedback session with volunteers occurred on June 22, where discussion focused on expanding Birds in my Neighborhood.

Successes

100% of teachers were satisfied. (Teacher surveys; n=14)

- 100% of teachers were satisfied or very satisfied with Birds in my Neighborhood overall (\bar{x} =4.9/5*)
- 100% of teachers were satisfied or very satisfied with the classroom visit (\bar{x} =4.8/5), the schoolyard visit (\bar{x} =4.8/5), the field trip (\bar{x} =5.0/5).
- 93% of teachers were satisfied or very satisfied with Birds in my Neighborhood Journals (\bar{x} =4.6/5).
- 100% of teachers were satisfied or very satisfied with the additional resources (\bar{x} =4.7/5).

“The kids were much more into it than I thought they would be. They enjoyed all aspects of the program.”

- Clissold Elementary teacher

“Our volunteers established an excellent rapport with the students and were extremely knowledgeable about all things birds.” - Jamieson Elementary teacher

“It engages my students and motivates them to learn independently as well as to interact with nature.”

- Peck Elementary teacher

“Students [participate] in fun and educational activities. It serves as a bridge from common knowledge and terminology of birds to scholarly and scientific terms. The activities integrated in the program enhance and support the students’ interest in reading, writing, research and art.” - Hayt Elementary teacher

“The guides are fabulous. Additionally, the program helps students realize what diversity they have in their own backyard.” - Dawes Elementary teacher

* \bar{x} indicates the mean average score, with a high score being positive and a low score being negative.

Volunteers were very satisfied. (Volunteer surveys; n=28)

Overall, 93% of volunteers were very satisfied with Birds in my Neighborhood (\bar{x} =4.9/5), and 96% of volunteers indicated that they would like to participate again in the future.

“Good training and [I was] paired with an excellent mentor.” – Volunteer

“Only issue was that Openlands staff person had our bag with her and did not get to office on time that day. [My partner] went there and it was not ready or available. Seems like the bags are somewhat disorganized and not all the stuff is in them each time. Lack of consistency.” – Volunteer

“Once we got things organized it went well.” – Volunteer

“I was very sad to have left my assignment after only one visit due to my new job...but had sooo much fun on that visit. Excellent, well written program.” – Volunteer

Volunteers were prepared.

At least 80% of volunteers felt “very prepared” to lead each of the three visits and 100% felt at least “somewhat prepared.” (Volunteer surveys; n=25)

“Working with the same partner for the third year made things go smoothly!” – Volunteer

“I think I received all of the preparation possible from Openlands! Next year I'll be more prepared after just having experienced it before.” – Volunteer

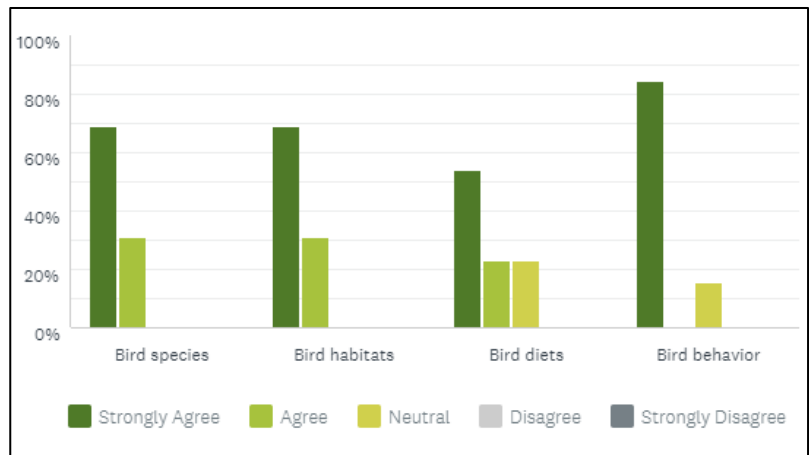
“I can always improve.” – Volunteer

“I went to one of the training classes as a refresher and reviewed the written material.” – Volunteer



At the spring field trip training for new volunteers, everyone enjoyed a great day birding at Montrose Point.

Students' knowledge about birds increased. (Teacher surveys; n=13)
 As a result of their classroom participating in Birds in my Neighborhood, teachers agreed that students were more knowledgeable about bird habitats, bird behavior, and bird diets.



Teachers were asked to agree or disagree with statements about student knowledge. i.e. “My students are more knowledgeable about bird behavior.”

- “Working with the journal, students became aware of birds of prey.” – Palmer Elementary Teacher
- “Their appreciation for nature and learning to LISTEN and observe.” – Greene Elementary Teacher
- “The students were just excited about all aspects of birds.” – Clissold Elementary teacher
- They became so aware and interested in birds... they were asking about doing additional research and projects.”
 – Suder Montessori teacher
- “Students became aware that even in such congested neighborhoods, one can spot and hear birds.”
 – Dirksen Elementary teacher
- “A school colleague’s son who is in my class said that her son had started to point out the various birds he could identify.” – Jamieson Elementary teacher
- “Students explained to other teachers how they knew the names of the birds. Students knew where to look to find birds.”
 – Peck Elementary teacher
- “As a result of the program, students were able to improve their knowledge and skills in research assignments, reading and writing. Students improved their discussion skills by implementing new acquired vocabulary about birds. Many students improved their artistic skills by sketching birds and their habitat.” – Hayt Elementary teacher
- “We were in the playground and they would say ‘look there is a.....’ or parents would say my child is identifying every bird they see.” – Suder Montessori teacher
- “Students begin coming to class in the morning and/or after outdoor recess talking about the different birds they noticed. They knew the type of bird and were able to describe various aspects about the birds’ species based on what they learned during the class visit, material shared via posters and their independent research about various birds.”
 – Miles Davis Elementary teacher
- “Students were able to write about our field trip in great detail.” – Clissold Elementary teacher
- “In class and on the field trip students demonstrated understanding of the bird calls by learning and practicing them.”
 – Dawes Elementary teacher
- “My students became very good at recognizing birds and were able to spot and name birds both on class trips and independently.” – Saucedo Elementary teacher

“Our first [bird walk] was good, but the last one, the students knew the names of birds, were more engaged in watching them and being more thoughtful and appreciative of the experiences.”

- Greene Elementary teacher

“Students are able to identify a bird by its size and color. They are also able to identify some bird calls.”

- Tonti Elementary teacher

Students are more observant of the natural environment. (Teacher surveys; n=13)

100% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that students are more observant of the natural environment in urban settings because of the classroom participating in Birds in my Neighborhood. ($\bar{x}=4.8/5$)



Students from Shoesmith Elementary School watch birds at Bobolink Meadow in Jackson Park.

“They never really pointed out birds before. After, they were doing it all the time.” - Suder Montessori teacher

“They pointed out different birds whenever we were outside.” - Clissold Elementary teacher

“After the program when I walk through the hall students will excitedly run up to me stating that they saw a specific type bird.” - Dawes Elementary teacher

“Students looked for birds at recess and while walking to other classes. They commented on student-behaviors that led to the birds flying away.” - Peck Elementary teacher

“Although they live in the neighborhood, many students have never been hiking into LaBagh and were not aware of all the nature around them.” - Palmer Elementary teacher

“Spotting birds while outside during recess, or when waiting to be picked up at the end of the day.”

- Dirksen Elementary teacher

“On our annual walk-a-thon students were pointing out the birds they could see.” - Jamieson Elementary teacher

“My students would report to me about spying birds in their yards or when they were away from school. They told of seeing birds nests and baby birds.” - Saucedo Elementary teacher

“After BimN students would stop and get quiet to notice and point out birds and other animals to each other.”

- Tonti Elementary teacher

Students benefited from Birds in my Neighborhood in other ways as well. It elevated their interest in learning and research, increased awareness of and respect toward nature, provided real-life connections to subject matter, improved class dynamics, and improved students' writing. (n=8)

- Elevated interest in learning and research (n=3)
 - "It encouraged some to want to do research and write further reports...the books on birds didn't stay on the shelf."* – Suder Montessori teacher
 - "They were inspired to do more research on their own to learn more information about various birds mentioned during the 1st class."* – Miles Davis Elementary teacher
 - "They were pleased with what they learned. They have become bird experts. They are proud and so am I!"* – Greene Elementary teacher
- Increased awareness of nature (n=1)
 - "I think the students are becoming more aware of their environment and all the nature that surrounds them."* – Palmer Elementary teacher
- Respect for nature (n=2)
 - "Yes, the students became more respectful of nature."* – Dirksen Elementary teacher
 - "Yes. They developed a greater appreciation for birds in our neighborhood."* – Miles Davis teacher
- Real life connections to class (n=1)
 - "Students need more 'real life' connections and the program provided this opportunity."* – Jamieson Elementary teacher
- Improved class dynamics (n=1)
 - "Yes, I feel that the students and myself benefit because we get to share time with each other outside of school."* – Dawes Elementary teacher
- Improved writing (n=1)
 - "They were descriptive writers about our bird trip."*
 - Clissold Elementary teacher



Edison Park Elementary Students record the birds they saw at North Park Village Nature Center, with help from their teacher.

Parent Involvement

75% of teachers sent home the parent letter. (n=12)

75% of field trips had at least 4 parent chaperones, according to teacher respondents. (n=12)

“I had a lot of chaperones for this program. I did not set a limit, I felt if parents were interested they should come and experience this field trip with their child. Because of this, there were two parents and their group with a volunteer. I went with two parents and a volunteer as well.” – Palmer Elementary teacher

“Every parent thanked me for allowing them to go on the trip. They had fun.” – Dawes Elementary teacher

“There were some parents who told me that their children were very excited about learning about birds and the field trip to Douglas Park.” – Saucedo Elementary teacher

“The parents that came all mentioned how much they like the program. One commented on the parent liaison that spoke with them before we left for the walk in the woods and said how knowledgeable she was.”
– Palmer Elementary teacher

“It was really helpful to have a staff person discuss the program with the parents on the field trip. I think it made a big difference.” – Volunteer

“All schools involved the parents on the field trips. They helped to keep an eye on the kids and out of trouble (away from ponds). Many parents were caught up in looking and identifying birds.” – Volunteer



Birds in my Neighborhood volunteers point out birds at the field trip training at Montrose Point.

Volunteer engagement

93% of volunteers participated in three or more Birds in my Neighborhood engagements. 17% participated in eight or more engagements (n=28).

When asked “To what extent has Birds in my Neighborhood been an avenue for you to become more engaged with Openlands, Audubon Great Lakes, and/or our partners, volunteers gave the following responses (n=28).

- Became more involved with Openlands and/or Audubon Great Lakes (n=4)
“Very effective! I have since become a Treekeeper and volunteered with Audubon-GL at the flower & garden show. I plan to continue all programs next year.” – Volunteer
“It has been a "gateway" experience; I'm also a Treekeeper and an Openlands member now.” – Volunteer
“I have had very little involvement before, so glad I could do more.” – Volunteer
- Learned more about Openlands and/or Audubon Great Lakes (n=4)
“It has been interesting to learn more about the work Openlands does.” – Volunteer
“The volunteer events have helped me learn more about both organizations.” – Volunteer
“I read their info more closely.” – Volunteer
“It's been great learning about all the volunteer opportunities.” – Volunteer
- Became more engaged (n=4)
“Quite a bit.” – Volunteer
- Became more involved with a partner organization (n=2)
“Through Birds in my Neighborhood, I made connections that led me to become involved in the CPD Natural Areas Volunteer Steward program.” – Volunteer
- To be determined (n=2)
- Miscellaneous (n=5)
“The BimN experience further deepens my commitment to the extraordinary mission of Openlands.”
– Volunteer
“I plan on helping out anyway we can. We are so glad Dean Fischer made us aware of the program.”
– Volunteer
“I am able to refer other individuals to Audubon Great Lakes.” – Volunteer
“Except for email requests for monetary support, I did not detect further connection.” – Volunteer
“BimN is one of those programs which brings together a lot of disparate green threads helping to create an overall appreciation of nature.” – Volunteer

Stories from the Field: Birds, Bison, and Bunkers

“This is the most exposure to nature that these kids have had in their entire lives,” Ms. Capinigro told me as we hiked with her students along a path at Midewin National Tall Grass Prairie on a beautiful Saturday in mid-May.

Midewin is the former Joliet Arsenal in Will County, and is now a 19,000 acre property that Openlands helped to protect. Midewin means “Healing Society” in the Potawatomi language, which is fitting since it is now the largest prairie restoration project east of the Mississippi River. You can still see the 400 bunkers constructed with cement and earth that were previously used to store weapons, but now these aging structures are surrounded by native tall grass prairie and roamed by wild bison that were reintroduced in 2016.

In May, 100 teachers, students and family members from Peck Elementary and Hearst Elementary joined Openlands and Birds in my Neighborhood volunteers on two separate all-expenses-paid weekend excursions to Midewin: “Birds, Bison, and Bunkers.” Volunteers led bird walks in the western section of Midewin, pointing out birds like warblers, eastern bluebirds, bobolinks, dickcissels, and even a bald eagle! Students thoroughly enjoyed the bunkers, exploring them on the inside and climbing up to the top of them for a beautiful view of Midewin. The Hearst Elementary group was at Midewin the day of the U.S. Forest Service’s Midewin Bison Expedition. Numerous partner organizations were on hand to share artifacts and information related to the natural history of Midewin and the bison had been coaxed into a nearby pasture to graze in plain sight.

The four teachers that helped recruit participants for these trips indicated that they were both smashing successes. We now have a foundation in place for more family field trips to Midewin with other schools. – John Cawood



For teachers, students, and family members from Hearst Elementary, seeing the wild bison herd at Midewin was the grand finale of a birding adventure that included touring arsenal bunkers, observing grassland birds, and visiting the Midewin Bison Expedition.

Lessons Learned

Teachers are satisfied with the journal, though one teacher suggested refining it so that you can see both sides of the checklist in one spread.

“Journals would be easier for students to use if the tally pages for the school yard trip and field trip were on facing pages, so that students wouldn't have to flip back and forth.” – Saucedo Elementary teacher

When asked, several teachers indicated that there are other teachers in their grade level would participate if invited (n=9).



Testing binoculars with Peck Elementary students.

“Yes. One.” – Dirksen Elementary teacher

“My administration is interested in having all five second grades participate (mine plus four more) if that would be possible. It correlates with one of our NGSS standards.” – Peck Elementary teacher

“We already participate in this program as a grade level.” – Palmer Elementary teacher

“Yes...we would love an additional four classes (five total) for the same age group 1-3....if can't do all five would like to if still can be expanded and may combine classes for only 2nd graders to participate.” – Suder Montessori teacher

“I'm not certain.” – Miles Davis Elementary teacher

“Probably, but we will have two new teachers at my grade level, so I can't speak for them.”
– Clissold Elementary teacher

“Thus far I have been working with the 4th grade teachers and I'm confident that they would all like to participate.”
– Dawes Elementary teacher

“I know they would be!” – Greene Elementary teacher

“Two other teachers in my grade would like to do it.” – Tonti Elementary teacher

Allow for more volunteer visits and customized interactions with students/class.

The feedback session included discussion about how Birds in my Neighborhood could allow for volunteers to tailor the experience for their school. For example, someone may decide to visit the class a fourth time. Or a volunteer could suggest other resources for teachers to share with 1-2 students that were especially interested. Customizations would require minimal to no supervision from Openlands or Audubon Great Lakes.

“One boy did not want to stop for lunch; his mother said he's obsessed with birds. He's the kind of student we need to serve better.” – Volunteer

Fall version should be piloted.

During the Birds in my Neighborhood feedback session, volunteers indicated support in testing a fall version of the program, with 3-5 schools. There was agreement that birding would not be as productive, and that the timeline might be shorter, but that trying such a pilot could be worth in considering how it would expand capacity.

Additional suggestions for improving Birds in my Neighborhood

Teacher suggestions

- More/longer visits (n=3)

"I would love for the in class visit and the school yard visit to be longer." – Saucedo Elementary teacher

"More classroom visits." – Dirksen Elementary teacher

"The time spent in the classroom could be lengthened. It seemed like a lot of information to put into one classroom visit before our walk. Perhaps two days, or longer than one hour in the classroom. I was the first class in the afternoon and because we spent longer than an hour with the volunteers, the second class started late.

I'm not sure if they had to cut short any of the activities with the volunteers." – Palmer Elementary teacher

- Improved communication

"I was a little confused by the emails from different people at the beginning, but it got better as we went along."

– Clissold Elementary teacher

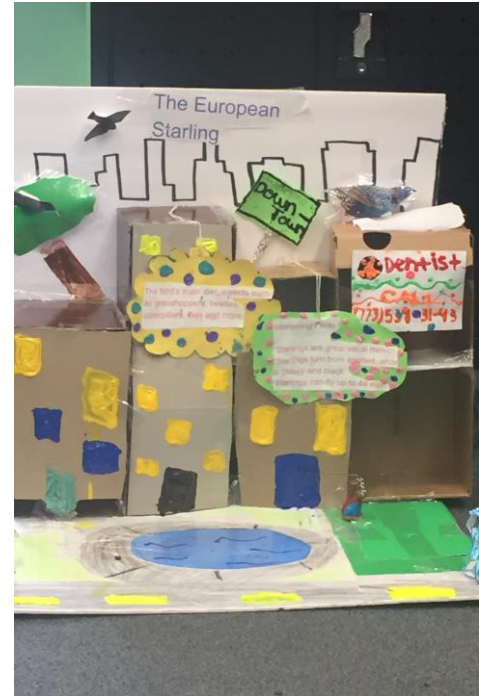
"Maybe more info to send home as we're going through the program because I don't send the journals home until we're done so they don't lose them." – Greene Elementary teacher

- Add a class (n=1)

"The program itself is fabulous, but it would be great if we could bring more than one class, perhaps one grade level." – Dawes Elementary teacher

- No improvements needed (n=1)

"The program is excellent and needs no improvement." – Jamieson Elementary teacher



Starling diorama, by a student at Dirksen Montessori.

Volunteer suggestions

- None/stay the same (n=5)

“Keep doing what you’re doing.” – Volunteer

- Change coordination structure (n=2)

“Consider asking if some volunteer(s) would like to help with field trip coordination and other logistical tasks.”

– Volunteer

“A field trip that has more than two classes requires

one of the “educators” to take an explicit lead and coordinating all of the players (other educators, volunteers, teachers). Logistics, scheduling, and distributing subgroups around the site suddenly becomes important and a little formal organization helps.” – Volunteer

- Expand (n=2)

“I’ve talked to people who would love to get this program in [other schools] so I think there is great potential for expansion. Finding volunteers who are available during school hours is problematic, though.” – Volunteer

“Just upscaling, because it’s a great program” – Volunteer

- Improve communications with teachers (n=1)

“The biggest challenge is getting the teacher to schedule the sessions and respond to email in a timely manner.” – Volunteer

- More/longer visits (n=1)

“A little more time in the classrooms and everywhere else. The time flies by.” – Volunteer

- Help with managing tough students (n=1)

“I would like to know more techniques for dealing with student behavior.” – Volunteer



Peck Elementary students, parents and teachers on a field trip to Midwin Tall Grass Prairie

Next Steps

Pilot Fall replication in Chicago, possibly in Lake County as well.

Openlands and Audubon-Great Lakes will explore changing the model of coordination in order to increase capacity to expand.

Additional Quotes and Stories

Volunteers were asked: Are there any stories or memorable moments you would like to share from your classroom visits or field trip?

“Students were very well prepared and knowledgeable about birds due to [the established curriculum] the previous year (not BimN).” – McPherson Elementary volunteer

“In addition to the students, it was fun to engage with the chaperone parents, many of whom were equally eager to learn about the birds. We met a fellow on our field trip (neighbor) who, upon seeing the kids identify the birds, joined our field trip. He said he had lived there his whole life and never noticed all the birds the kids were getting excited about, so the little ones could share their knowledge with other grown-ups.” – Greene Elementary volunteer

“I love that the students are thrilled with robins and crows.” – Dawes Elementary volunteer

“During our first visit to Mark Sheridan, Teria noticed a Peregrine falcon nest in the masonry high up on their school building. The students were SO excited (even though they never actually saw the bird) and named him ‘Perry.’”
– Mark Sheridan Academy volunteer

“We had a new teacher this year and she was really wonderful. You could tell the kids were stressed though, by all the uncertainty in CPS. One kiddo, Milo, asked regarding the journals, “Um, is this essential? We don't have a lot of time left in the school year.” After the teacher reassured him that there would be time, little Milo was pretty pumped to embark on his bird research.” – Drummond Elementary volunteer

“Well, the falcon that lives at the school is truly amazing!” – Mark Sheridan Academy volunteer

“The students were very engaged until we got to the end and they saw a soccer field and playground. However, everybody stopped what they were doing when a Great blue heron flew low over the soccer field as if trying to make sure they got a good look at one more cool bird.” – Ruiz Elementary volunteer

“Palmer teachers independently had kids do bird posters which were really impressive.” – Palmer Elementary volunteer

“Students loved when they noticed a bird on the field trip and identified by name. Many of the students said they never realized all the birds were around them...now they will be looking all the time.” – Clissold Elementary volunteer

“The students become very excited seeing ANY bird. We were lucky to see some good ones, like an American kestrel.”
– Hearst Elementary volunteer

Teachers were asked: Overall, do you think that students are more interested in birds than they were before Birds in my Neighborhood started?

“Definitely. The students when not knowing or remembering a name of a bird, asked for it or looked it up.”
– Dirksen Elementary teacher

“My students have made more life science connections, observing what is around them when we have been outside for other school activities.” – Jamieson Elementary teacher

“Yes! They looked for birds, discussed what types of birds they see by their houses, and taught other teachers how to identify birds.” – Peck Elementary teacher

“As a result of participating in the program, students were able to improve their knowledge and skills in research assignments, reading and writing. Students improved their discussion skills by implementing new acquired vocabulary about birds. Students improved their artistic skills by sketching birds and their habitat.” – Hayt Elementary teacher

“Yes, they are. After the program, they mentioned birds they've seen in the neighborhood. We still heard the woodpecker, although we haven't seen it as of yet!” – Palmer Elementary teacher

“Yes, because they talked about birds and wanted to research more about them.” – Clissold Elementary teacher

“Absolutely! I know because they make comments like, ‘I never realized how many birds are in my neighborhood’, or ‘I never knew there was a bird named a chimney swift.’” – Dawes Elementary teacher

“I think that this program has helped plant a seed in my students' minds and that they will continue watching for birds. One of my students told me that she asked her father to get her a pair of binoculars so that she could go bird watching.”
– Saucedo Elementary teacher

“Most definitely and the families have even expressed how pleased they were, as chaperones and by what the children told them.” – Greene Elementary teacher

“I think so, because many went back home to teach their siblings and parents what they have learned. They also named the BimN trip as one of their favorite trips. It beat the Museum of Science and Industry.” – Tonti Elementary teacher



Birds in my Neighborhood® is a partnership
between Openlands and Audubon-Great
Lakes, funded through the US Forest Service
International Programs.



This past July, we were saddened to learn of Gail Gammel's passing, after a multi-year battle with breast cancer. As a volunteer for Birds in my Neighborhood over three years, Gail and her teaching partner Julie Sacco introduced first and second graders from Edison Park Elementary School to birds through classroom visits that culminated in a field trip to the near by North Park Village Nature Center. Gail's dedication was inspirational. On numerous occasions she fought through the difficult symptoms of her medical treatment in order to be with the Edison Park students because she found the visits to be energizing and therapeutic. She will be dearly missed.

