

Field research survey program completed via raptor survey

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Ted Graber and Jody Hammre are two of 23 Anoka-Ramsey Community College (ARCC) biology students who recently completed a service learning field research project implemented in conjunction with the annual raptor survey conducted through Eastman Nature Center at Elm Creek Park Reserve of the Three Rivers Park District.

Field research is relatively rare in two-year college programs, but the project's co-organizer and supervisor Jennifer Braido, an Anoka-Ramsey biology faculty member, set out to change that.

"Anoka-Ramsey has a significant number of students who transfer to four-year colleges and pursue a major in the sciences," Braido said.

"Experience in authentic or research-based learning opportunities needs to be made available to these students."

Survey participants Graber and Hammre agree that the project was well worth their time.

"The project is great experience for those who will be doing field research," said Graber, who intends to transfer to the University of Minnesota to pursue a medical degree.

"This [the experience] gave us a taste

of real field research," said Hammre, who plans to transfer to St. Cloud State University to pursue either a degree in education or ecological restoration.

"And it will look good on my resume."

Graber, Hammre and the other students began the project by attending orientation sessions in January.

Coinciding with the raptor nesting season, the collection of data began Feb. 10 and continued into April with the help of co-coordinator Paul Schlick, Raptor Survey coordinator at Eastman Nature Center of Three Rivers Park District, who has been supervising this raptor survey for many years.

"What struck me was how welcoming Paul [Schlick] and the park staff were," Hammre said. "Funding for the survey is limited, so they rely on volunteers for this important work."

Anoka-Ramsey's participation in the project wrapped up in late April as each student prepared to present their findings on nesting and observed raptors and contribute to the established knowledge base of raptor species within the park.

"It is excellent experience in field work," Graber said.

"It's a taste of what it could be like with a \$200,000 grant from a research university."

Each student committed 10-15 hours of service (field work or literature research) and numerous additional hours to accomplish all the associated assignments.

The student groups (four to five students per group) were required to complete entrance and exit surveys as well as a project proposal, an outline, a paper and finally the presentation of their findings.

Here Graber was slightly disappointed that the project was no longer.

"We hypothesized that some raptors would actually increase with increased human population," Graber said.

"Raptors, like Cooper hawks would increase in population because they eat songbirds. The more humans use bird feeders, the more songbirds are in their yards and the more Cooper hawks. The project was not long enough to support our hypothesis."

While Graber and Hammre weren't able to prove their hypothesis, they did get to learn about raptor behavior, the use of natural resources and how environmental

changes affect behavior changes.

"Even if we didn't come to an indisputable conclusion, we still learned," Hammre said.

"No one can ever say 'Well, this is how it is.' There's always potential for new facts through more research."

While learning how to directly apply the scientific method within a relevant setting is vital to students, Braido said the community element was equally important.

"A central mission of a community college is to be an intricate leader and support institution for the community in which it serves," Braido said.

"Fostering relationships with and providing service to local organizations, such as the Three Rivers Park District, through its annual raptor survey, strengthens the role of Anoka-Ramsey Community College students within the community and strengthens the community as a whole."

For more information about the academic programs offered at Anoka-Ramsey and other community relevant programs, visit www.AnokaRamsey.edu or call 763-433-1100.

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