chicago audubon society

5801-C North Pulaski Road • Chicago, Illinois 60646 • 539-6793

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FINAL REPORT: Small Project #99-049

CONTRACTOR: Chicago Audubon Society
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INTRODUCTION:

The Chicago Audubon Society (CAS) distributes a set of educational materials annually. The materials, called Audubon Adventures, are developed by the National Audubon Society for use by elementary and middle-school classes. In 1998 CAS applied for and received a grant from the Wildlife Preservation Fund, to be used for purchasing material kits. CAS requested $1,000, to be matched by $1,000 of its own funds.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The Audubon Adventures kit contains newspapers on four different topics, a videotape produced by Disney on a related topic, a teacher's manual that provides additional information and age-appropriate projects, and sources for additional information, including direct telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for the Education staff at the National Audubon Society and different web sites. The kits contain enough newspapers so that each student could receive one to keep for each of the four topics. In addition, CAS sent a letter to each teacher providing the name, telephone number, and e-mail address of a local contact to assist with any questions they might have.

The 1998-99 newspapers were titled "Mississippi River System"; "Colonial Nesting Water Birds"; "A Hole Is A Home"; and "Nature Goes To School". The first two topics discussed the basic science and the challenges in those areas. The third looked at the various kinds of animals that live in holes, and where holes can be found. The fourth helped students think about how they could observe nature on the grounds of their own school. These are all explicitly concerned with wildlife and habitat, in keeping with the goals of the National Audubon Society and CAS. The videotape showed the nesting habits of the Atlantic Puffin, and explained how Audubon researchers have helped puffins return to historic nesting islands and the kind of study and monitoring that continues to be done as populations gradually increase.

Classrooms were solicited for the program in a variety of ways. Last year's teachers provided an initial base of support. Members of the CAS Board of Directors made contacts with schools in their home area and generated some requests for the program. An article in the CAS newsletter invited parents and grandparents to nominate their own child's class, and quite a number of teachers signed up based on these contacts. In several cases, the parent also agreed to serve as a teacher's aide and help present the Adventures material to their child's class.

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RESULTS:

The additional money provided by the Wildlife Preservation Fund allowed us to be more aggressive in promoting the program. As a result, we were able to increase the number of kits provided from 18 in the 1997-98 school year to 37 this year. These kits supported 40 classes, since in several cases the classes had more newspapers than students, allowing teachers in the same school to split up the materials in a more efficient manner. The total expenditure for education materials came to $1,374. This was almost entirely for the purchase of Audubon Adventures kits. Approximately $10 was spent on various posters for classrooms that had expressed interest in specific topics. These posters, available for $2 each, were used for previous Adventures kits and remain available from the National Audubon Society.

Classes that received materials were located throughout the Chicago metropolitan area, consistent with the wide area served by CAS. The cities, along with the number of classes sponsored in each city and the number of schools with sponsored classes, are as follow:

City	Number of Classes	Number of Schools
Burr Ridge	5	1
Chicago	10	4
Des Plaines	13	2
Elmwood Park	4	1
Lake Villa	1	1
Midlothian	2	1
Oak Lawn	1	1
Oak Park	1	1
Park Ridge	2	1
Skokie	1	1

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY:

While we were not able to sponsor as many classrooms as we had hoped, we are quite pleased to have more than doubled the size of the program so quickly. It is surprisingly difficult to persuade administrators in some schools to accept free science materials; parents are much more likely to get the teachers interested than is a blind contact by CAS. However, once a teacher has used the materials, she or he is generally very interested in continuing in the program the following year, and often has several colleagues in the same school who are also excited to begin once they see how the program works. We are therefore very optimistic that many of the schools we sponsored this year will have more classes enrolled next year. I have also provided a set of materials to the Education Department of a local college, and as these students begin their student teaching they may be interested in acquiring a set of Adventures materials for their own use.

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I sent out a survey to the teachers who received Audubon Adventures this year, asking them what they liked about the program and what they would like to see changed. I also asked them if they would like to receive the curriculum next year. Of the surveys returned so far, all have enjoyed the program, none offered any suggestions for improvement, and all have asked to be involved again next year. One teacher said

> "All of the program was intriguing and informative. Thank you for including us. Audubon Adventures was fun. If you can include us in your program again we would appreciate it. My class really enjoyed the activities and the video. We also identified birds all year long when we went on our various outdoor adventures."

Another reported "Of course, they loved the puffin video. We had lots of discussions about this and birdwatching."

All in all, the additional money from the Wildlife Preservation Fund has allowed us to expand the program considerably and created what we are certain will be a broader base of support for programs in future years. The program itself is, we feel, a very valuable step in helping instill our children with an appreciation for the importance of wildlife and habitat, and the problems faced by the same.