



# News from the Thief River Falls Rotary Club

**For Immediate Release**

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Agassiz Audubon Society - Heidi Hughes 218-745-5663

## Photos Attached

### **Thief River Falls Rotary Helps Launch BirdWatch Program at Franklin Middle School**

Thanks to the fundraising efforts of the Thief River Falls Rotary Club and Agassiz Audubon Society, every 7th grader at Franklin Middle School in Thief River Falls will have binoculars and a bird identification book to use during the school year so they can learn about birds as part of their science education experience.

The "big idea" for the project came to the TRF Rotary from Heidi Hughes of Agassiz Audubon Society, who spoke at an October 2017 Rotary meeting. At the end of her program, Hughes mentioned the new BirdWatch project Agassiz Audubon started at the Warren-Alvarado-Oslo School District. She challenged the Rotary Club to help create a similar program for students in Thief River Falls.

The Rotary Board discussed the idea at a meeting the very next day and agreed to raise funds to buy 200 binoculars and bird identification books. They set a goal of \$20,000 - with the TRF Rotary committing \$5,000 to seed the project.

Rotarians connected with 7th grade science teachers Amber Murry and Cassie Kolhoff, and together they applied for grants from the Minnesota Ornithologists Union and the Thief River Falls Education Foundation.

Last month, the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union (MOU) awarded \$2,000 to the Project and the TRF Education Foundation provided another \$9,000.

In his award letter to Jessica Muller (TRF Rotary Treasurer and CPA with Brady, Martz), Steve Wilson, Chair of the MOU grant committee, said this project is "more likely to result in the critical mass of young birders necessary to sustain that initial spark of excitement around birdwatching, and lead to the creation of clubs, social-media groups, and the type of peer support that can result in birding becoming a community norm and lifelong activity."

This year's MOU grant was made possible by memorial donations to MOU's Savaloja Fund in honor of Steve Blanich, a Brainerd-area birder who was instrumental in advancing bird education and bird watching in Minnesota.

Agassiz Audubon Society approached Scheels of Grand Forks and Athlon Optics of Olathe, KS to enlist their support for the project. The two businesses made the arrangements for the school to receive a total of 200 Athlon NEOS 8x42 waterproof binoculars - for students, their teachers and volunteers.

Agassiz Audubon Society met with students to show them how to spot birds near the school. Agassiz Audubon will continue working with them again when school starts in the fall to find, identify and study birds - at school, at home and on field trips to Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge, Red Lake Watershed District flood control projects and other area birding hotspots.

If you'd like to support the Rotary BirdWatch project, help design and install a bird garden at Franklin Middle School, or to learn more about birds, please contact Agassiz Audubon (218-745-5663).

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The TRF Rotary Club is an organization of business professionals who believe in and commit to the motto "Service Above Self". They volunteer to improve the quality of our community. TRF Rotary Club's focus is on children and education, so most of their volunteer time is spent within the schools and supporting youth. Rotarians believe in developing the leaders of tomorrow with opportunities, creative thinking, and introduction into the world of business. Giving children a solid education with support is the foundation to lifelong learning. Rotary Club is proud to be a part of the Thief River Falls community.



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## Photo Captions



Franklin Middle School students head outdoors to try out their new 8x42 Athlon binoculars.



Where is the bird?  
Think of the tree as a clock. Look for movement on the branches to the right at 3 o'clock. Can you find it?



It's a Palm Warbler. See the rusty cap and bobbing tail?



Agassiz Audubon's Heidi Hughes shows students who wear glasses how to adjust binoculars for better "eye relief."

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