

Implementation Framework

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

A *Healing Wings* Supplement



Pilot Program: Colorado National Monument and VA Hospital of Grand Valley



NPS / VICTORIA STAUFFENBERG

This pilot program is a 4-day program—spread over a season—to learn about birds, develop bird-watching skills, and participate in a bird-related service project. This shows how any national park site could partner with a veterans organization to implement the *Healing Wings* program.

Overview

After engaging in the basics of birding education, veterans are invited to field trips to meet volunteers and park staff on learn how the park provides habitat. Folks are engaged to help develop and participate in service projects such as bird counts in the area, habitat construction, and/or participation in the newly developing raptor monitoring program (FY22-23).

Programming is based on the availability recreational therapy staff, participants of the Grand Junction Veteran’s Affairs Medical Center, and Colorado National Monument staff and volunteers. This document provides staff and volunteers an understanding of the tools and resources necessary to implement the program.

Why Birds?

Accessibility. Birds are seen just about everywhere. Colorado National Monument supports 54 songbird species, 9 breeding raptors as well as migratory and winter populations.

Some of the more popular birds include the peregrine falcon, black-throated gray warbler,

gray flycatcher, juniper titmouse, gray vireo, Virginia warbler, many who find the pinyon juniper habitat another place to call home.

Outdoor recreational opportunities benefit us all. While outdoors observing birds and working to heal bird communities, we are receiving positive mental health benefits.



Day One

Learn about the world of birds

Goal Meet NPS rangers and learn about birds and the basics of birding in the local area. This includes explaining how participants can start experiencing birds and give them the *Healing Wings* program as a roadmap. This serves as an outreach program to meet veterans where they are.

Prerequisites

- Understanding participant needs (VA)

Existing Resources

- Park map and guide (NPS)
- Bird checklist and field guides (NPS)
- Access and Veteran passes (NPS)
- *Healing Wings* program (NPS)

New Resources

- Introduction to birds and birding (NPS ranger program)
- Local birds (NPS ranger program)
- Introduction of other available resources (NPS and partners)
 - Local Audubon society
 - Other federal land managers
 - State and local parks

Accomplishments

- Introduction to birds and birding program presented
- Date set for COLM field trip with park staff for guided birding experience



Day Two

Experience the world of birds

Goal Observe birds at a national park (Colorado National Monument).

Prerequisites

- Coordinate transportation (VA)
- Gather equipment (VA and NPS)
- Guided birding experience (NPS)
- Understanding participant needs (VA)

Existing Resources

- *Healing Wings* program (NPS)
- Binoculars (NPS and VA)
- Bird checklist and field guides (NPS)

New Resources

- Ideal bird-watching locations (NPS)
- Develop service project (NPS)

Service Project Considerations

- Feederwatch
- Annual park bird counts
- Raptor monitoring projects
- Habitat restoration projects
- Great Backyard Bird Count
- Local Audubon Society projects
- Poo-Poo Project

Accomplishments

- Remind participants to bring their Access or Veteran pass
- Exposure to the birding experience
- Exposure to other recreational opportunities at the park
- Development of the group project ideas based on the interests of the group and to be further developed by park staff
- Date set for service project



Day Three

Lend a helping hand

Goal Complete a service project as defined by group interests while encouraging participants to keep birding.

Prerequisites

- A basic understanding of the birding opportunities in the area
- Coordinate service project (NPS)
- Supplies and equipment needed for service project (NPS and VA)
- Coordinate transportation (VA)
- Understanding participant needs (VA)

Existing Resources

- *Healing Wings* program (NPS)
- Binoculars (NPS and VA)
- Bird checklist and field guides (NPS)

Accomplishments

- Completion of the group project
- Date set for sharing the experience
- Determine whether this sharing experience is an outreach or park event



Day Four

Share your experience

Goal Celebrate with others and share the experience of birding with veterans and other members of the military community.

Prerequisite

- Completion of the first three steps of *Healing Wings*

Existing Resources

- *Healing Wings* program (NPS)
- Journal, photographs, and stories from the first three step (Participants)

New Resources

- Location to gather and share experience (NPS and VA)
- Invitation to the sharing event (NPS and VA)
- Presentation system to display photographs or other digital presentations (NPS and VA)

Possible Events for Highlighting Projects
Suggested events in Colorado for the pilot program:

- The Bald Eagle Festival (February)
- Colorado Owl Festival (March)
- Yampa Valley Festival (September)

Accomplishments

- Share the *Healing Wings* experience with others
- Invite participants to continue birding and participating in service projects
- Ask participants to invite others to participate in a *Healing Wings* program
- Ask participants to help lead the next *Healing Wings* program
- Consider adding additional skills into the field experience:
 - Photography
 - Watercolors
 - Tracking
 - Nest box building

