

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MIDDLE SCHOOLERS FLOCK TOGETHER TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE FOR BIRDS

ITHACA, NY and WASHINGTON, DC — A chance to learn scientific and technical skills while helping conserve birds was all the motivation middle-school students needed to participate in a Cornell University afterschool program this summer. The students are now flocking back to school full of new ideas to help birds and the habitats they depend on.

Through a series of free workshops and a curriculum focused on youth, family and community, the summer program included lessons in biology, ecology, habitat, mapping and data exploration. The program is supported in part by funding from the Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Inc. (SFI).

"One of our priorities is to connect youth to forests. We look for ways to instill a lifelong appreciation for the value forests represent for biodiversity, the wider environment and for people. This program is a perfect fit because it focuses on bird habitats, on conservation and on youth as future forest leaders," said Kathy Abusow, President and CEO of SFI Inc.

The curriculum is part of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's [NestWatch citizen-science project](#), adapted for afterschool and 4-H audiences. NestWatch is a nationwide monitoring program designed to track status and trends in the reproductive biology of birds, including when nesting occurs, number of eggs laid, how many eggs hatch, and how many hatchlings survive. Wood products certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard were used to build nest boxes.

"It has been fun seeing the kids' reactions to the nests and birds and how much they have learned in the process. I really hope some of them are able to channel their passion into lifelong support for conservation and perhaps for some even into a career in forestry or biology," said Robyn Bailey, NestWatch Project Leader.

The boxes have so far provided homes for black-capped chickadees, eastern bluebirds, house wrens and tree swallows. The last two species are in decline in the northeastern U.S. "About 80 eggs were laid in the boxes in this first year, and we're hoping to exceed that in 2017. Students are being exposed to all stages of the nesting cycle, from nest-building, to egg-laying, to young nestlings," Bailey said.

The students helped install nest boxes on the grounds of a school in Watertown, NY, and on a land trust property in Athens, NY. Students who participated in the building project were also able to take a nest box home. "I love the scalability of this project. Imagine if we could get bird nest boxes into the hands of just a fraction of the 60 million birdwatchers in America," Abusow said.

In addition to SFI and Cornell University, partners include the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#), [Cornell University Cooperative Extension of Columbia, Greene, and Jefferson Counties](#), and [New York State 4-H](#).

"The kids were so excited to take the boxes home. I heard one girl tell her mother: 'Look what we built today! This is a nest box and this hole makes it so only certain birds can get into the box. Can we put it in our backyard?'," said Mitch McCormick, afterschool program director for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County.

This project is also part of a larger effort to support bird-related conservation efforts. Since 2010, SFI has provided 10 grants for bird conservation totaling more than \$875,000. SFI is also partnering with The American Bird Conservancy, The National Wild Turkey Federation and Ducks Unlimited Canada on important conservation programs. Read an article about [six SFI-funded projects that are for the birds](#).



Middle school kids build nest boxes using wood certified to the SFI Standard. Photos by The Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

“Working with our bird conservation partners across the more than 280 million acres of forestland certified to SFI means we offer the scale to make a difference when it comes to research that will help birds and the habitat they depend on,” said Andrew de Vries, Vice President, Conservation and Indigenous Relations, SFI Inc.

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About the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a world leader in the study, appreciation, and conservation of birds. Its hallmarks are scientific excellence and technological innovation to advance the understanding of nature and to engage people of all ages in learning about birds and protecting the planet. The Cornell Lab is a membership institution dedicated to interpreting and conserving the earth’s biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds. Learn more at birds.cornell.edu.

About the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program

The SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program fosters partnerships between organizations interested in advancing understanding of the conservation-related benefits of well managed forests, and helping to create vital links between communities and the forests we all depend on. Conservation projects address topics of current importance such as developing understanding of biodiversity and wildlife habitat needs, the contributions of sustainably managed forests to water quality, and quantifying the value of these forests toward mitigating climate change. Community grants help link forests and people by assisting local communities through forest education programs, and supporting green building projects for low-income families, and other activities that underscore the links between people and their environment.

Since the program began in 2010, SFI has awarded 50 Conservation and 35 Community Partnership grants totaling more than \$3 million to foster conservation and community-building projects. When leveraged with project partner contributions, that total investment exceeds \$9.5 million. SFI is now accepting proposals for next year’s grants. Applications will be accepted through Monday, October 10, 2016. SFI grants are available to academic institutions, non-profit organizations and Indigenous groups. Download this year’s [RFP](#).

About the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Inc. (SFI)

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) stands for future forests. SFI® is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting forest sustainability and supporting the links between sustainable forests and communities through grant programs, carefully targeted research, direct leadership of critical initiatives, and partnerships that effectively contribute to multiple conservation objectives. Forests certified to the SFI Forest Management Standard cover more than 280 million acres/113 million hectares. Millions more acres/hectares benefit from the SFI Fiber Sourcing Standard. SFI’s Forest Management, Fiber Sourcing and Chain of Custody Standards work to ensure the health and future of forests. Through application of these certification standards, SFI’s on-product labels help consumers make responsible purchasing decisions. SFI Inc. is governed by an independent three-chamber [board of directors](#) representing environmental, social and economic sectors equally. Learn more at sfiprogram.org.

Media Contacts

Elizabeth Woodworth
Vice President, Communications and Community Engagement
Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc.
Tel: 202-596-3452
media@sfiprogram.org

Robyn Bailey
NestWatch Project Leader
Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Tel: 607-254-2426
nestwatch@cornell.edu