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Okay, I think I can run through this fairly fast and mine is going to be somewhat similar to Trystan’s because we are working in similar cultures. In North America people generally have warm, fuzzy feelings about owls, this picture kind of sums it up. Some of you might know Stuart Houston from Canada. In this picture you can see his grandkids that were at our International Festival of Owls one year, I mean, owl clothes, owl book, owl puppets, stuffed owl, giant owl, so generally people in North America like owls. There are some Native American cultures where that’s not true but in the whole the public likes owls a lot.

The purpose of our programs at the International Owl Center, we are very clear and we have it on the back of our shirts, is to make the world a better place for owls. We do that by making people aware of how we impact owls, because it does not matter where you are on the planet, it’s generally us humans that are the biggest problem for owls but that also means we are their greatest hope. In North America it’s not that people are intentionally harming owls like is happening in other places that people up here [in our educator panel] are dealing with. People in North America tend to unintentionally harm owls and they are not aware of how they affect them. So we have these pledge sheets and pledge stickers to make people aware of what they can do to help owls. Simple things like leaving dead trees standing to provide nest cavities, mowing less lawn to provide more habitat, keeping cats indoors so they are not killing the small owls and the owls aren’t killing the cats, but it is realistic things that people can do. One of the big things is using traps instead of poison to control rodents. We do this with children and adults and this is the conclusion of almost every program we do: this is what you can do to help owls. It is not fluffy things like give us money so we can do things, but it is: this is what YOU can do in your daily life, and that is the take home message of our programs.

We talk to varied audiences, anything from school groups both on-site and off-site, general public audiences, senior citizens, we go into nursing homes, so we kind of cover everybody with our programming. We have programs geared towards different types of audiences. One that we do with very young children, second grade and under (these are 8 years old and less) is called our “Build an Owl” program where we try to be as hands on as possible. We have things laid out on the table. What you are seeing in this picture is two stuffed Audubon birds that when squeezed make sounds and the child has to squeeze them and decide which one sounds like an owl and we talk about owl sounds. Another thing, another student will come up and we’ll have two heads, they are actually real heads (preserved) from a heron and from and owl, and say, “If you were an owl, which one of these would you want to have as a head?” or the same with feet, and they put the correct things in the magic owl box . At the end we put the magic owl blanket over the top and a child comes up and says magic words and out comes a stuffed owl. Then we bring out a live owl and talk about it later on. The program talks about the adaptations that owls have in a fun way. We also have a game show that we do and it is literally a game show. We divide the audience down the middle and this works great for upper elementary aged students (up to about 12 years of age), mixed audiences or if you have adults that are really fun-loving you can have a blast doing this one too. They literally come up front, ring in on a buzzer and the questions pertain to how we are interacting with owls. “If you find a baby owl on the ground, should you bring it home and raise it?” or “Do owls make good pets?” Those are the types of questions that are involved in the game show.

One of the most common programs we do is our “Owl Detectives” program. This teaches how you can identify owls the way you actually experience them, which isn’t normally sitting in full sunlight in a field guide pose, it’s identifying them by size, shape, sound and silhouette. During the program they are actually learning the owl calls, we ask them to imitate the calls because they are going to remember them better if they actually do them. Sometimes we will also do special programs where we do owl prowls in the evening where we take the people out in the wild and call in wild owls. We are very careful to tell them this is not something that you do repeatedly in the same area. We only do it once per month, we go to different areas and we go over some of the etiquette of that also.

We also have a cultural program. That’s one of the nice parts of being a center that focuses just on owl education: we can get into other aspects also. We talk about how owls have been viewed in different cultures around the world throughout history. And we also sensitize them because very often North Americans are like: “Oh, people have these cultural views, oh my gosh” and they just look down their nose, but we start out the program with a picture of a bat and a rattlesnake and say, “What do you think about these?” People in North America have very irrational views about rattlesnakes and bats because of what they have been taught and I say, “Now guess what? That’s what you’ve been taught, and this is what these people have been taught. They believe these things just as strongly as you believe this.” So some cultural sensitization goes along with that also.

Another fun program that I do is our Great Horned Owl Soap Opera. It’s based on the research that I’ve been doing on Great Horned Owl vocalizations over the past 13 years, but it’s not the dry boring version. It’s literally the soap opera that is happened between the wild owls and the captive owls interacting. It is a really engaging way for the people to learn about breeding biology, the vocalizations, and really connect with the birds and realize that there is so much more to these birds, they are not just these objects that are out there, they are real individuals.

We also have an advanced program that we do for very small groups of adults that we call Owlology 401 where they are actually dissecting owls, looking at the eyeball structure and looking at all the anatomy in depth. We go out and do some telemetry work, we go out and do owl prowls with them also. So this is literally a ten hour class one day; it is really intensive and people really enjoy it.

We are also branching out into doing online programs because we are in a fairly rural area so reaching a lot of people is difficult and there are a whole lot of schools or other organizations that would like to have our programming but they will simply never be physically able to come because we are too far away. We are adapting our programs so that we can do them live online in an interactive way. We also have our webcams from our breeding project, part of the vocalization study, that we stream live online. We have trained volunteers that work as moderators who are educating about the vocalizations and behaviors and everything that is going on as part of that. So we do online work also which reaches a lot more people.

And then we have our International Festival of Owls (actually our Owl Center is an outgrowth out of the Festival of Owls and that’s where we met Raju [Acharya]), but we do everything. We just started it as a hatch-day party for the live owl that we had and it kind of got out of hand from there. But we do children’s crafts, we do a kids’ owl calling contest, pellet dissections, we have owl-themed food, an international owl art contest which now has hundreds of entries every year, an international owl photography contest, face painting. Live owl programs are kind of the backbone, that’s really what gets people to come, and that’s really how we can do the rest of the education. Also nest box building and our World Owl Hall of Fame awards. We present awards to people who have done fantastic things to make the world a better place for owls.

Our basic program format is different from what many places do. We do a program that doesn’t include a bird, then we bring a live owl out on the fist and if we are at our center the birds will fly back to their perch just literally out of habit (because they know that’s what they do) so people can experience how quiet, or not, owl flight is. We always conclude with the things that the audience can do to make the world a better place for owls.

A challenge for us is that we are in a very rural location: the whole entire city of Houston, Minnesota has a population of 979. We are in a beautiful rural area but it is really hard to get a whole lot of people there because we are kind of out in the middle of nowhere. That’s a challenge for us, our closest population centers are 25 miles away, a city of 30,000 and another 25 miles away in a different directon we have a city of 50,000. You have to drive an hour to get to a city of a 100,000 and 2.5 hours to get a city of a million people or more. Being rural is somewhat difficult for us especially maintaining a facility. If we were just a program where we went out off-site, that’s much easier to do financially than maintaining a facility that people can come to visit. So the financial aspects of that weighs in as well as being in a rural area and being able to attract visitors.

 I am just kind of doing this in a nutshell here. Jim [Duncan], do you want to speak about yours a littlebit or do you want me to talk about it? [Jim indicates that Karla should talk about his work.]

Jim Duncan does work up in Canada with owl education and he has kind of a similar context to what we are doing. He focuses on schools primarily and requires the students to study owls before they have a program. The students have a much better experience if they do some work studying owls before the programs. Then he requires that the students raise money for the program which then is used to fund owl research. It has funded many graduate students and all kinds of things over the years. Anything else you want to add? No?

Okay, that’s mine in a nutshell.