



Leaders in Training Handbook 2026-2027

Program Overview

We ask that both the parent/guardian and potential LIT read and review this document together.

Overview: Teenagers who enjoy working with younger children and would like more opportunities to be outside this summer will find a great fit in this camp program. Inspired by campers from previous summers who were eager to attend other camps and give back to their community, the Leaders in Training (LIT) program is designed to provide opportunities for older campers to increase their leadership skills by sharing their passion, knowledge, and enthusiasm for birds and the natural world with younger campers. LITs will assist camp staff in providing a caring and exciting experience for younger campers by acting as mentors, and will assist with on-site conservation projects providing exposure to various careers and approaches in the fields of biology, ecology, education, and natural resources.

Ages: 13-17

Location: Bird Conservancy of the Rockies Environmental Learning Center located at 14500 Lark Bunting Ln. Brighton, CO 80603.

Cost: Free, thanks to funding from our generous sponsors.

Application Process: This program's enrollment is dependent on an application process. If accepted, you may choose to send your child to one or more sessions. To apply, please fill out an online application. You will be contacted within two weeks regarding the status of your application and, if accepted, instructions on how to register. Applications can be found on our website under the Leaders in Training program page.

Applications must be received no later than **May 1st 2026** for full consideration.

Important Dates

The following dates are crucial for the development and growth of your child throughout the Leaders in Training program. These days are set aside solely for LIT instruction and will not include younger campers.

If you are unable to attend any of the following dates, please contact Payson Cronen Smith or Becky Heath at payson.smith@birdconservancy.org or becky.heath@birdconservancy.org

· LIT Camp Training: Saturday, May 30th

- 9 am – 4 pm

Contacts:

Payson Cronen Smith - Environmental Educator, **main LIT contact**

- Text: TBD
- Personal Cell Phone - For Emergencies: (970) 231-2189
- Email: payson.smith@birdconservancy.org

Becky Heath - Camp Manager

- Text: (303) 747-3649
- Personal Cell Phone - For Emergencies: (936) 994-0242
- Office: (303) 659-4348 x49
- Email: becky.heath@birdconservancy.org

Sherry Nikolaus - Education Director

- Office: (303) 659-4348 x11
- Email: sherry.nikolaus@birdconservancy.org

If you are ever sick, running behind, have a sudden change in plans, or any other reason that will mean you are either late to arrive or unable to attend camp that day, please make sure you get in contact with at least one of the people above.

Becky's text number will be the best way to reach any of us for non-emergencies during the camp season.

For emergencies, or even non-urgent but important situations, please contact either Payson or Becky's cell phone.

LIT Session Options

We highly encourage LITs to be present for the entire duration of a Bird Camp day (see below). This allows them to establish relationships with other LITs as well as campers creating a more enjoyable experience. Please indicate which camps your teenager is interested in and available for and Payson will be assigning each LIT to specific sessions by May 1st, 2024*. For all camps, LITs are expected to be present from 8:30am-4:15pm.

- The Big Camp LIT Session: **This camp includes field trips off site.**

Dates: June 8 - 12

Camper ages: Ages 12 to 13

Camp Duration: 9am-4pm

- Barr Adventure Camp LIT Session: This camp includes one evening campfire (**Thursday June 16th, pick up at 7pm**)

Dates: July 13-17

Camper ages: Ages 10 and 11

Camp Duration: 9am-4pm

- Raptor Camp LIT Session:

Dates: July 20 - 24

Camper ages: Ages 8 to 9

Camp Duration: 9am-4pm

- Budding Birders Camp LIT Session:

Dates: July 27 - 31

Camper ages: Ages 6 to 7

Camp Duration: 9am-4pm

- Wild Nestlings LIT Session:

Dates: August 3 - 7

Camper ages: Ages 4 to 5

Camp Duration: 9am-12pm

*Requesting specific camps does not solidify your teenager for the camp. Please wait for a confirmation email to be sent out prior to the start of camps. If your request comes in after May 1st, we will do our best to accommodate.

A day in the life of an LIT...

It is sometimes difficult to pinpoint exactly what a Leader in Training does because LITs do so much. At times being an LIT feels like being a coach, naturalist, doctor, entertainer, and a waiter.

When it comes to leading a group of kids in the outdoors anything is possible and although we try our best to stick to organized schedules we never know exactly where a day will take us! As a leader, you do not have to worry about creating a schedule. Staff will provide you with one. Staff takes care of the big picture and what happens by the hour, and you take care of what happens by the minute. That means that staff has scheduled activities for you, but it is your job to be attentive to the kids and to lead some of the activities staff present.

At the start of your camp session, you will be assigned a group of kids. Typically, you will not have over 5 campers in a group. This is your group to connect with, lead, and have fun with. You will have the opportunity to play name games with them, and teach your team basics of binocular and field guide use. You will need to get to know each camper in your team by name and on an individual basis.

Throughout the day, you will remain with your group unless otherwise instructed. It is your responsibility to make sure they are safe and are getting their basic needs met. You will learn to be attentive of their needs and learn to check for the little, but important things (check if they are carrying water on hikes, or if they are wearing sunscreen etc.) You will know where each member of your group is at all times. If conflict arises within your group, you can refer to staff whenever needed. Staff will often be checking in with you and providing you with feedback throughout the day. At the end of each day you will be nominating a camper (or all) to receive the "Golden Binoculars", which represents a camper that emulates behavior requirements that the campers come up with as a group at the beginning of the week.

We understand that this is a big challenge, and we will be there to assist you along the way. We know that being a Leader in Training means that you will be doing a lot of activities for the first time. We are not looking for perfection, we are only looking for a positive attitude, a willingness to try, and motivation to grow!

Expectations

You are about to begin a challenging and rewarding experience as a Leader in Training (LIT) for Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' Bird Camps. In the LIT role, you're somewhere in the middle between a camper, and a staff member. Your main jobs are to support Bird Conservancy staff throughout the day, practice your leadership and role model skills and facilitate a positive outdoor camp experience for the campers. Below are some important expectations about the LIT program.

- Attend the Leaders in Training Camp training on June 1st
- Follow instructions from Bird Conservancy staff.
- Respond in a timely manner to communication (emails, phone calls) from Payson, Becky, and other Bird Conservancy Staff. We will contact you only regarding matters related to Bird Conservancy.
- Arrive on time with a positive attitude ready to receive instructions for the day. Please arrive by 8:30am on your scheduled camp days so we can review the schedule for that day. (If you are unable to attend on a day you are scheduled, please let Payson or Becky know as soon as possible.)
- Come prepared for the day's activities in your LIT uniform and bring personal care items with you (lunch, hat, sunscreen, water bottle, jacket, etc.)
- Complete journal pages independently throughout the summer and check in if you have questions
- Act as a "group leader" for a group of 2-5 younger campers during LIT lead activities.
- Provide clear and enthusiastic instruction to individuals and small groups during LIT lead activities and when assisting Bird Conservancy staff.
- Keep your group in sight and count them regularly.
- Listen to campers and their needs.
- Communicate with the Bird Conservancy staff when issues/challenges come up.
- Bring all issues regarding disciplinary policies to staff and refrain from taking them on yourself.
- Help keep campers safe and treat all campers and the natural world with respect and kindness. Failure to do this can result in removal from the program.
- Self-reflect, grow and adapt as needed.
- Be willing to receive feedback and understand that feedback is essential to learning.
- Have Fun!

Project

In addition to daily activities, LIT's will be given a project to complete using both camp time and time outside of camp. This project will be done individually and can be finished either by the end of camp or throughout the year. This is a very open ended project, the intent is to use it to pursue something you are interested in that's related to either Bird Camps or conservation as a whole. Some project examples are:

- Creating an "Ecosystem Jar," the main project option, which will be further clarified at the LIT Training Day
- Creating a lesson plan you want to see at camp and running it with campers
- Creating a report on something going on in the conservation world that you're interested in. The report will be given to Becky, Payson, and a few other Education Team members
- Finding a service project related to conservation you are passionate about, working with that project, and delivering a report on that project to Becky and Payson
- Creating an art piece related to conservation or Bird Camps in some way. You can choose to keep the piece when finished, or install it somewhere at the Old Stone House
- Any other idea you might have! (Must be approved by Becky or Payson)

If materials for your project idea are needed, please discuss with Becky and Payson to figure out a plan prior to starting.

The project will be introduced at the Leaders in Training Camp Training on May 31st and is to be completed before the end of camp season. Although there will be no "grade" associated with this project, it will be treated as an essential part of the Leaders in Training program and completion of the project is required.

School Year Events

During the school year (August 2025 - April 2026), Bird Conservancy hosts occasional events that LIT's will have roles at. **You will be expected to attend at least one event in the Fall (August-December) and one event in the Spring (January-April).** Here are a few options to attend that are already planned:

- Fall Birding Festival at Barr Lake State Park's Nature Center
 - Saturday, Sept. 12th from 8am-2pm
- Barr Lake State Park Halloween Trail
 - Date unconfirmed, but most likely Oct. 24th or 31st

More events will be released as we plan them! We understand that life is busy, but if you cannot make it to any events, please talk to Payson or Becky.

Payson and Becky will also try to plan occasional LIT get-togethers to show appreciation for you all. In 2023 we went to the Denver Zoo and got a private presentation with one of their animal ambassadors, and in 2024 we went to the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. If you have an idea you'd like to see happen, share it with Payson or Becky to see if it's feasible.

Tips for Success

- Show desire to be a leader.
- Treat the LIT program as an opportunity for you to develop skills and grow.
- Read your binder! Every LIT will receive a binder at training with useful information, tips, games, and more.
- Work to develop rapport with campers – the best way to do this is through games.
- Use questioning when teaching, to review and reinforce information – What do you notice? What does this remind you of? What does it make you wonder about?
- Ask questions if you don't know. This is a learning experience and we don't expect you to know all the answers.
- Let Payson, Becky or camp staff know if you are struggling with your project or just need to bounce ideas off of someone. We are here to help you!
- Communicate with Bird Conservancy staff regularly with both struggles and achievements. Our ultimate goal is to see you succeed in this program.

Please contact Payson Cronen Smith or Becky Heath with any questions or concerns at payson.smith@birdconservancy.org or becky.heath@birdconservancy.org