Birding, the act of observing, listening to, and interacting with birds in their natural habitat, is a commonly practiced hobby in the United States. With colorful plumage, intricate flying patterns, and alluring calls, it comes as no surprise that individuals old and young enjoy this nature rich passtime. However, not everyone can experience birding to their desired level due to mobility challenges. Dr. Alex Field, a recent graduate of the OTD program and now a board certified occupational therapist sought to improve the birding experience for non-ambulatory individuals.

Wrote Dr. Field, “Birding by use of binoculars and spotting scopes requires a level of fine motor dexterity and agility that could potentially be impacted for individuals with certain debilitating conditions. Holding the binoculars to your eyes, turning the focus wheel, and moving and responding accurately to the quickness that birds have can be troublesome to this population, and may cause them to stop participating in birding altogether.”
Currently, there are adaptive birding products on the market but they tend to lack in durability, overall functionality, and are reviewed as cumbersome, clunky and perform inadequately along the changing terrains of trails and landscapes. Dr. Field’s capstone project centered around recruiting non-ambulatory birders to trial these adaptive birding products and compiling an extensive list of the supporting and limiting features of each item. He intended to use that information to design a more universally acceptable piece of equipment that non-ambulatory birders can utilize to enhance their birding experiences and quality of life.

Using the Sammons Center for Innovation and Research in Occupation-Based Technology Grant, Field was able to purchase an assortment of mounting systems, binoculars, spotting scopes, and pieces of equipment that assisted with the attachment of optics to the mounting systems. He trialed these pieces of equipment with four power wheelchair users with diagnoses of spinal cord injury, muscular dystrophy and dwarfism. Then, he conducted a focus group with these participants. “Participants were very honest about their product reviews and provided information that was helpful in determining the new adaptive birding equipment design concept” wrote Field. Dr. Field now has optics manufacturers interested in continuing a professional partnership with him and his capstone mentor in the future to create a mounting design users feel would be more beneficial. He additionally plans to implement future trialing sessions and focus groups to continue refining the idea and ensuring the best device possible is produced. Says Dr. Field “The impact this research has, and will continue to create in the future, is truly amazing. I appreciate your [Sammon’s Grant] support with every step of this process.”

Want to learn more about Dr. Field’s Project?
- [Here](#) is his capstone dissemination video
- [Here](#) is an interview with Alex on his research