



## Missisquoi Matters

is the quarterly newsletter of the Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, dedicated to promoting a better awareness, appreciation, conservation, and responsible utilization of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

29 Tabor Road, Swanton, VT 05488  
(802) 868-4781 ext 121

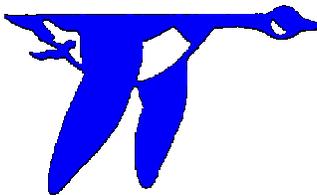
[www.friendsofmissisquoi.org](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org)

E-mail: [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org)

Newsletter edited by Ken Copenhaver

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Joe Bertrand  
*Maintenance Mechanic*

MNWR HQ hours are  
Monday thru Friday  
8:00am – 4:30pm  
Saturdays  
10:00 am – 2:00 pm

## How a Friends Membership Helps the Refuge

*by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR*

Becoming a member of the Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is a great way to help the refuge fulfill its mission. The annual membership dues are used directly to support refuge projects including habitat restoration, management, and environmental education. If you were a Friends Member in 2013 you can be proud that you helped with:

- Providing funds for area schools to pay for school bus trips to the refuge so that students can take advantage of meaningful integrated learning utilizing refuge trails and facilities.
- Partnerships with the refuge to successfully receive \$18,500.00 in grant funds to:
  - Begin riparian restoration along Route 78 (over 1,000 trees planted in 2013).
  - Help control water chestnut, a troublesome aquatic invasive plant.
  - Help fund our annual Kids Fishing Derby (over 100 kids and their parents participate annually).
- Providing a meaningful stipend internship to give an interested local area high school senior an opportunity to learn about refuge work.
- Hosting public events and open houses at the refuge, including our annual International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) event in May.
- Engaging speakers, such as Dr. Rosiland Renfrew from Vermont Center of Ecostudies, by providing a stipend to present her research on bobolinks at our IMBD event.

The Friends of Missisquoi NWR also runs an educational bookstore for the refuge's visiting public and provides guided birding, nature walks, and nature photography instruction. Being a member of the Friends is a great way to support environmental education and wildlife management as well as support community opportunities on the refuge. We are lucky to have you as a member of the Friends of Missisquoi NWR.

**For more information about the refuge, visit**

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/missisquoi/>

Also check out the Friends Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofmissisquoi> to learn more about the refuge and coming events. You can also look at, comment on, and share your own photos.

You do not need to have a Facebook account to view the page. Please stop by and let us know what you think!



**PRESIDENT'S OUTLOOK**

Writing here as the new ex-president of the board of Friends of the Refuge, I wish to provide a recap of 2013 and the past few years.

First off, the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is a wonderful place for watching wildlife, walking through the woods, exploring the river delta by canoe/kayak, painting, playing with photography, and much more. As always, we encourage the public to come out and enjoy this treasure--the Refuge is sitting right here in your front yard.

The Friends and the board of the Friends have become increasingly active over the past few years. We lead bird walks and nature walks, offer photography workshops, host art shows, provide informational lectures, run the Refuge store, and generally keep busy. Please see the information in this newsletter and on the website to get a bigger picture. Old newsletters for the past three years are on the website. Thanks very much to Ken Copenhaver for all of his work on creating and editing the newsletters.

In 2013 we received three grants to help the Friends and the Refuge in their separate-but-connected missions. Ben and Jerry's provided a grant as part of their on-going support for the Kids Fishing Derby, a very popular event put on by the staff of the Refuge with volunteer help by the Friends, many local businesses, and many supporters from around Vermont.

The other two grants were from the state of Vermont in order to improve riparian habitat on Refuge lands along the Missisquoi River and to remove invasive water chestnut from the Refuge. Ken Sturm, the manager of the refuge, wrote an excellent report on the water chestnut work in our Fall newsletter.

The Friends organization works well and closely with the refuge's professional staff, and we very much appreciate their full support of the Friends, as we know that they appreciate the support that the Friends provides to the Refuge. It is a nice relationship, we enjoy working together, and we look forward to many more years together.

Speaking of years, I've been president of the board of the Friends for four years. It is happily time for me to step down, but I'll continue to be active on the board and with the Friends. Rich Kelly, as vice president, will temporarily serve as acting president. We have a great group of people on the board, with two new members joining the board at our recent annual meeting (thank you Cathie Waltz and Sue Farrar). We very much encourage Friends members and the public to attend our board meetings, participate in our events, and come to the Visitor Center. But most of all, we encourage people to spend time enjoying all that there is to find and learn on the Refuge.

Sincerely,

Paul Madden

## **Fiscal Year Woes**

*by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR*

For anyone working in the Federal Government, the transition between fiscal years is always a busy time. Closing out purchase orders and contracts, completing planned work on the refuge, and submitting reports takes up much of the month of September. However, we often can rely on the fiscal year change, knowing that we can at least continue our work at the refuge. As we all know, this was not the case in this October. With the impasse over the federal budget and the subsequent shutdown, the refuge was required to send home all its employees and stop all work and access immediately.

While disappointing and frustrating to the refuge's dedicated staff, it was particularly hard on the public who count on the public access to all the resources the refuge protects and manages. The shutdown coming in early October caused perhaps the biggest impact to our dedicated waterfowl hunters. The official opening day of waterfowl season, October 9, was right in the middle of the shutdown!

The shutdown closed the refuge to all activities, including hunting. This meant that coveted waterfowl blind sites, which are assigned through lottery draw each year, could not be used on opening day or for the next 8 days of waterfowl season. Over 65 people lost the opportunity to participate in the best part of the waterfowl season using the refuge's managed blind sites. This includes the junior waterfowl areas that are assigned to youth hunters who participated in the refuge's annual Junior Waterfowl Training Program. An untold number of waterfowl hunters who hunt our public areas along the lake were also shut out of the refuge.

Of course, many other people felt the impact of the refuge's closure during this time. All trails were

closed, and many people had to be informed on that first and second day of the shutdown that they could not walk on refuge trails.

Since all activities had to cease, we also had to stop the haying operation across the road from the refuge Visitor Center. This work, conducted through permits to local farmers, is done to manage habitat for grassland bird species. Without the cooperative work of these farmers it would be difficult to manage the refuge's grassland habitat. Having to stop this operation during early October, especially when the weather was warm and dry, certainly was frustrating for our cooperators. If the hay cannot be completely cut this year, the farmers will have lost a crop and the refuge will have lost an important management action that will have to be completed at another time by refuge staff or volunteers.

These are just a few of the local impacts of the refuge's closure in October. I have heard many stories from folks about how the government shutdown affected them personally. I also experienced the frustrations of hunters and hikers first-hand when I had to inform them that they could not use the refuge until the shutdown was over. If anything good can come from this, it may have possibly solidified in people's minds the importance of places like the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge and the part it plays in their lives. The refuge is here to protect and manage habitat for wildlife and also to provide access to the public for wildlife-oriented activities. We hope that this was the last time we have to close the doors of the refuge to the public and that everyone takes an opportunity to walk a trail, go hunting, or stop by the Visitor Center soon.

### **FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

#### **Bi-monthly Board Meeting**

**Wednesday, January 8, 2014 at 6:30 pm**

**At the Refuge Headquarters**

Members are always welcome to attend.

Come and see what the board is planning and contribute your ideas.

**Next meeting: Wednesday, March 12, 2014 at 6:30 pm**

## The Real Deal about Green-winged Teal

by Judy Sefchick Edwards, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR

Although it's November and we're starting to plan for next year, the events of this past year's field season are still fresh in my mind. Let's face it—working with wildlife is unpredictable to say the least, with each year presenting its own set of surprises, frustrations, and firsts. This year, the waterfowl banding season stands out in my mind, not because of the number of ducks banded, but because of *what* was banded. Besides the usual wood ducks and mallards (with the occasional black duck thrown in for good measure), two American green-winged teal were found in our net, making me wonder, “What's the real deal about green-winged teal?”

For those of you who aren't familiar with them, green-winged teal are North America's smallest dabbling duck, known for their short neck, small bill, and the iridescent emerald green patch on their wings and on the faces of males. Measuring only 14 inches from bill to tail, and weighing less than a pound, these delightful ducks are about one-third the weight, and two-thirds the length, of a mallard. If ever there was a real-life rubber ducky, this would be it!

Among other things, these diminutive ducks are agile and fast fliers. Besides being the only duck known to be able to scratch in mid-flight (who knew?), green-winged teal are able to attain speeds greater than 40 miles per hour. More than any other species of duck, green-wings can be found feeding on mudflats to probe for seeds, crustaceans, or aquatic insects. Although they don't dive for food, they will dive to escape predators like northern harriers or peregrine falcons.

In Vermont, green-winged teal are far more common in migration than during the breeding season. Being

one of the earliest spring migrants, they arrive here almost as soon as the snow melts in late March or early April. By early May, numbers of green-winged teal are at their peak, sometimes comprising as much as 29% of the refuge's spring duck population (refuge-wide waterfowl survey, April 30, 2012).

Green-winged teal are northern nesters, breeding mostly (80%) in the boreal forests of Canada from

Alaska to Labrador. They may be small, but they're hardy (and well-insulated -- we hope)! The fact that we had a successful green-winged teal nest at the Stephen J. Young Marsh this summer is definitely a cause for celebration! Although nesting has never been common in Vermont, it's gotten even less so in

recent years, making green-winged teal a “Species of Special Concern” in the state.

By now, most green-winged teal have left Vermont for greener pastures and warmer water. Who can blame them? With the fall waterfowl migration peaking here during September and October, sometimes as many as 16,808 ducks have been seen using the refuge, with 3,882 of them being green-winged teal (refuge-wide waterfowl survey, October 9, 2012). That's a bunch of ducks! A few ‘Superteal’ may be seen in December, but even the hardiest of ducks have to get real and get moving once the water freezes.

For years, I've repeated the mantra, “You can't make rules for ducks” (or any wildlife for that matter) and the green-winged teal at Missisquoi seem to be no exception. All I can say is that after 7 years of working here, and 3,269 ducks banded, I'm more than happy to be a part of another magnificent Missisquoi first!



CREDIT: ROB WHITNEY



## Winter Activities Schedule at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

29 Tabor Rd.  
Swanton, VT 05488

All programs and tours are free, but registration is required where noted.

### Monthly Nature/Photography Walks 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of each month, 9:00 am to 11:00 am

Join Friends of Missisquoi NWR members Joe Belanger, Mark Batchelder, and Bob Chaperon for nature/photography walks on various refuge trails, held the first Saturday of each month. Registration is not required. The schedule for the next three months is:

**December 7: Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton.

**January 4: Jeep Trail.** Meet at the Louie's Landing boat access area. We will drive in to the trail head at Mac's Bend.

**February 1: Stephen Young Marsh Trail.** Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center and across the road from the marsh.

### Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month, 8:00 am to 10:00 am

Friends of MNWR members Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti will lead bird monitoring walks year-round on various refuge trails on the third Saturday of each month. The purpose of the walks is to gather long-term data on the presence of birds, their abundance, and changes in populations. Observations will be entered into the Vermont eBird database where data is stored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. These walks are appropriate for birders of all skill levels and provide a wonderful opportunity to learn about birds throughout the seasons. **After 45 months of walks we have recorded 131 species of birds.** Registration is not required. The schedule for the next three months is:

**December 21: Jeep Trail.** Meet at the Louie's Landing boat access area. We will drive in to the trail head at Mac's Bend.

**January 18: Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton.

**February 15: Stephen Young Marsh Trail.** Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center and across the road from the marsh.

Other winter events will be posted on the Friends website as they are scheduled.

To check for any schedule changes or additions, visit the Friends website at [www.friendsofmissisquoi.org](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org) and click on "Calendar."

Read past issues of Missisquoi Matters at [www.friendsofmissisquoi.org](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org) and click on "About Us" and "Newsletter."

## Bird Feeder Society

*Used with permission and adapted from an article by Casey Rucker, Friends of the 500th, Canaan Valley NWR*

One of the pleasures of feeding birds is the opportunity to watch different species interact at the feeders. Over the years, I've observed a rough hierarchy that rules birds' social interactions. The easiest observation is that the larger and more aggressive the bird, the more it dominates the others. In finer detail, however, this broad rule becomes subject to nuance and variations.

At the top of the feeder hierarchy are the raptors: in the case of my feeders, these are primarily Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks. These birds feed directly on the seed-eaters at the feeders, and their arrivals are loudly announced by Blue Jays and Black-capped Chickadees. The raptors rely on a sudden attack, because their presence quickly clears out the whole vicinity.

Next most dominant are the American Crows, followed by Blue Jays. Crows and jays will often store many seeds or nuts in their gullets, then fly off to gorge and eat them in private. The crows are interested only in feeding, and their mere presence sends the other birds away. Jays enjoy more disruptive behavior. Often a Blue Jay will seem to make a flyby of the feeders only to disturb the feeding birds. Jays are also usually aggressive defenders of their space when feeding. Common Grackles are slightly less aggressive than the jays.

Other large-billed birds, such as Hairy Woodpeckers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, stand their ground at the feeder against jays and grackles but not crows. As long as they aren't disturbed at their own feeding, this group of birds will tolerate the other birds around them. This winter I've noticed that the Evening Grosbeaks at my feeders have slowly grown more assertive against Blue Jays as time has passed.

Next up in the hierarchy are the take-out diners, the Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches. Because they do not linger at the feeders, they can dart in to grab seeds and nuts amid the company of larger and more aggressive birds. They are also usually the first to come back when the feeders are deserted.

Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins are the most aggressive of the smaller dine-in feeders. In large enough flocks they can dominate a feeder area in the presence of much larger and more aggressive birds. Generally, however, it's the smaller birds that prefer to eat in who get driven away the most.

Mourning Doves, Downy Woodpeckers, European Starlings, Northern Cardinals, Red-winged Blackbirds, and House and Purple Finches generally only approach the feeders after the larger birds have had their fill. Cardinals only seem to come to the feeders when they have to, and their presence usually means a poor mast year or unusually bad weather. Blackbirds will occasionally dominate the feeders in a flock, but usually not for long.

Finally, Dark-eyed Juncos specialize in getting to the feeders first as well as gleaning what all the other birds have left behind.

In spite of all the jockeying for position, all the birds eventually get their turn. And what I love the most are the really brutal weather days, when it's blizzarding or the bottom has dropped out of the thermometer. When it's truly a matter of survival, all the birds eat peacefully together in mute admission of mutual need.

Sometimes, the law of the jungle is tolerance and cooperation!

### Store Order Form

To order by phone, call 802-868-4781. To order by mail, fill out this order form and send to:  
 The Friends' Store MNWR, 29 Tabor Rd, Swanton, VT 05488  
 Please add \$6.00 shipping and handling.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me:  **Mammal Tracks and Sign of the Northeast (\$17.95)**  
 **Identifying Animal Tracks (\$9.95)**  
 **Mammal Tracks and Scat (19.95)**

Payment: Enclose check or money order, or fill in Credit Card information.

Type of card:  MasterCard  Visa  
 Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature \_\_\_\_\_

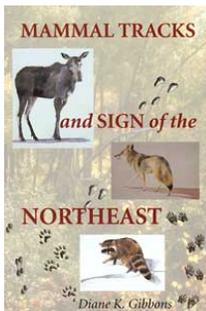
# The Friends' Store

at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

BOOKS    GAMES    GIFTS    TEE SHIRTS    HATS

for people of all ages who love the outdoors

Check out these books to hone your winter tracking skills!



## Mammal Tracks and Sign of the Northeast

by Diane K. Gibbons

**\$ 17.95** - paper, 137 pages, 6 x 9, b&w illustrations

*Mammal Tracks and Sign of the Northeast* is a field guide for identifying the tracks of mammal species native to the region which extends from New England, New York, and Pennsylvania to eastern Canada. Simple to use and light and easy to carry in the field, the book contains the most important information that a tracker will need— including life-size illustrations of tracks and scat, gait patterns, trail width, species habitat, food sources, scat and urine information, breeding seasons, range maps, and special tracking tips for all thirty-seven species. A unique dichotomous key devised by the author allows trackers to identify even the most confusing track through a process of elimination. The charming, highly detailed, and to-scale pencil illustrations are indispensable aids to accurate identification. *Mammal Tracks and Sign of the Northeast* is an artistic and accurately rendered guide suitable for professional trackers, naturalists and wildlife professionals, outdoor educators, hunters, and amateurs alike.

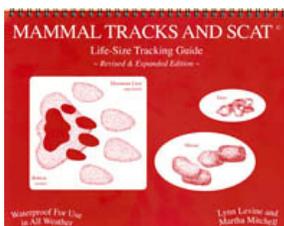
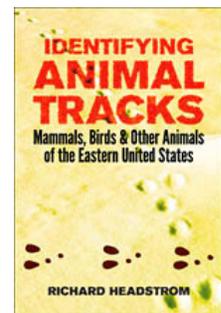
## Identifying Animal Tracks

### Mammals, Birds & Other Animals of the Eastern United States

by Richard Headstrom

**\$ 9.95** - paper, 142 pages, 5 3/8 x 8, b&w illustrations

Hunters, naturalists, scouts, and nature lovers will appreciate this comprehensive guide to wildlife prints and tracks. It features the tracks of more than 100 species of mammals, birds, frogs, toads, salamanders, snakes, lizards, turtles, insects, and other invertebrates, all common to the eastern United States.



## Mammal Tracks and Scat

### Life-Size Tracking Guide, Revised & Expanded Edition

by Lynn Levine & Martha Mitchell

**\$ 19.95** – spiralbound, 24 pages, 11 x 8 1/2, two-color illustrations

By moving alongside a set of animal tracks, or finding scat, you can discover whether the creature climbed a tree, found a mate, or marked its territory.

*Mammal Tracks and Scat* is a life-size, waterproof tracking guide that will help turn your tracking adventure into a magical experience. The illustrations are actual size, making it much easier to compare drawings in this guide with tracks and scat in the field. This field guide is designed to be carried through brush, bramble, and snow, and still emerge unscathed. In a handy spiralbound format, *Mammal Tracks and Scat* can be laid on the ground for simple comparison with the actual track or scat.