



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.

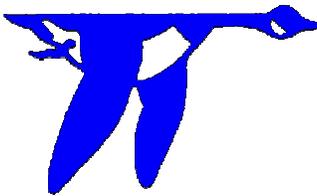
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Newsletter edited by Ken Copenhaver

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MNWR HQ hours are
Monday thru Friday
8:00am – 4:30pm
Saturdays May 19 to Oct 27
10:00 am – 2:00 pm

President's Message – February 2012

2012 will be a big year for Friends of the Refuge.

In January Friends board members held a Vision and Goals Workshop, and they will follow up with the completion of that effort at the March board meeting. The Workshop focused on ideas for projects that will enable the Refuge habitat and headquarters to become better connected with the people in the surrounding communities. It also includes plans for how Friends members can support the mission of the Refuge with volunteer projects. And finally, when the Workshop is complete we'll have a Vision that ties all of these elements together.

During 2012 and the following years we'll want you to know about the increased efforts that the Friends are making to connect the community to the Refuge. Read about it right here in upcoming newsletters.

On May 19 the Refuge and the Friends will host our annual Open House in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of IMBD International Migratory Bird Day. As we get closer to the day, please look for more information on our shiny new website [<http://friendsofmissisquoi.org/>] and our Facebook page [<http://www.facebook.com/friendsofmissisquoi/>]. While on our website or Facebook page, please post photos that you've taken on the Refuge.

It is still a great time to encourage others to become members of Friends of the Missisquoi Wildlife Refuge. It is a bargain at \$15. Membership information is on the website.

Our next newsletter will have more information about the projects that we'll be undertaking-- possibilities such as having the Refuge building open on Saturdays year round, monthly lectures or films, a fall Open House, having Art in the Refuge as a year-round effort, etc. This and more to be determined at our March 13th board meeting. Please show up at the board meeting and let us hear your thoughts.

Respectfully,

Paul Madden

President, FMNWR

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Bimonthly Board Meeting

Tuesday, March 13, 2012 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: May 8, 2012 at 6:30 pm

Refuge Work (Other Than Wildlife Management) Can Be Rocky

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR

For those of you who have taken the opportunity to visit the Mac's Bend parking area either to launch a boat this fall or take a hike on the Jeep Trail, you assuredly noticed the large pile of rock that appeared there in November. It's hard to hide 1,500 tons of riprap-sized rock, and it requires an explanation for those of you who sat scratching your heads at the appearance of such a pile.

This rock was purchased as a first step in working to protect a culturally sensitive archeological site that has been eroding for years. The erosion has not only washed away artifacts but also exposed them so that looters could have easy access to these rare and sensitive materials. The rock is only about one third of what we estimate will be necessary to fully protect this site due to its size and location on the refuge.

The site is a documented activity area for Native Americans in Vermont and is recognized by the Abenaki as highly sensitive. It was first studied in 1969 after Missisquoi NWR Refuge Manager Ed Chandler requested assistance after discovering various artifacts in the area. Since then, numerous investigations have documented the importance of this site and the entire Missisquoi River Delta to Native Americans as well as to more recent European contact era uses. Of course the Abenaki tribe has always maintained the area's significance and it is with full cooperation with the tribe that the refuge moves forward with its efforts to protect this eroding site.



By law, the USFWS must preserve any culturally significant sites under the control of the agency. This is spelled out in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which directs federal agencies not just to assume responsibility for but

also to “undertake... any preservation, as may be necessary to carry out this section.” Not only is it the law, but we believe it is also the right thing to do: protecting the heritage we have assumed responsibility for through the management of the refuge.

So you may be asking – “what comes next with that pile of rock?” The rock must be moved

across the river to the site. Again what you see at Mac's Bend Parking area is only estimated to be 1/3 of the total rock required to fully protect this site. The refuge has a small barge that we will use to move the rock across the river and we will likely be asking for regional help from other National Wildlife Refuges to borrow equipment necessary to complete the task.

We hope that this project can begin in the fall of 2012 at the latest. It will likely take two seasons to complete if funding is available and the necessary support is provided. In the end the refuge will have met the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act, made good on a problem long identified by staff and Abenaki tribal members alike, and protected a site that all archeologists agree is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.



Spring 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.

Owl Prowl

Saturday, March 17, 6:00 pm to approx 9:00 pm

Join refuge volunteer, Jeremy Brooks as he leads a walk in the refuge to seek out and listen to the vocalizations of resident owls. The Owl Prowl will be at the Black/Maquam Creek Trail located approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton on RT. 78. Look for the large Refuge sign at this parking area.

Bring along a low intensity flashlight. **Please call 802-868-4781 to register for this activity.**

Secrets Of Outdoor Photography

Saturday, March 31, 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Join refuge volunteer and photographer, David Schmoll for an educational look into some of the secrets of outdoor photography. Dave will explore some of the exposure settings and other options available on many compact digital cameras that can be used to get better outdoor photographs. This activity is designed for beginning and intermediate photography enthusiasts who use relatively inexpensive camera equipment. The activity will be conducted indoors at the refuge headquarters building located on Tabor Rd ¼ mile off of RT. 78.

Participants are asked to bring their own camera equipment. Participants may use the information and techniques from this activity to take photos around the headquarters building and on refuge trails after the photography activity is concluded. **Please call 802-868-4781 to register for this activity.**

Vernal Pool Walk

Friday, April 6, 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Join Park Ranger, David Frisque for a look at the life and activity in a vernal pool early in the spring. Vernal pools are important breeding areas for some of the more reclusive and seldom seen amphibians such as wood frogs and salamanders. Because these temporary wetlands often dry up completely by late summer or early fall, egg laying and early development of juvenile salamanders and frogs must begin early in the spring.

The walk will take place at the Stephen Young Marsh Trail area. Meet at the Parking Lot across from Stephen Young Marsh on Tabor Rd about one mile past the refuge HQ building. Bring along a small flashlight and waterproof footwear. **Please call 802-868-4781 to register for this activity.**

Woodcock Walk I

Friday, April 20, 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Join refuge volunteer, Greg Simard on a woodcock walk at the Stephen Young Marsh area. Woodcock have a unique courtship display that incorporates an aerial display and a ground level calling display that occurs just before and after sunset. Join Greg for an enjoyable early evening walk to witness this unique springtime activity.

Participants will meet at the Parking Lot across from Stephen Young Marsh on Tabor Rd about 1 mile past the refuge headquarters. **Please call 802-868-4781 to register for this activity.**

Woodcock Walk II**Friday, May 4, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm**

Join Park Ranger, David Frisque for another evening woodcock walk at the Stephen Young Marsh area. Participants will meet at the Parking Lot across from Stephen Young Marsh on Tabor Rd about 1 mile past the refuge headquarters. **Please call 802-868-4781 to register for this activity.**

Refuge Green Up Day**Saturday, May 5, 9:00 am to approx. noon**

The Missisquoi NWR will conduct Refuge Green Up Day on May 5, 2012 with the rest of Vermont. We will concentrate our efforts on river cleanup using refuge boats. The refuge will monitor river water levels and flows. Should water levels be excessively high or if flow rates in the river channel are too strong due to snow melt and spring rains, this event may be postponed or cancelled.

All participants should meet at the Louie's Landing Parking Lot on RT 78.

Please call 802-868-4781 to register for this activity.

International Migratory Bird Day & Open House Saturday, May 19, 7:30 am to 2:00 pm

Join us at the Refuge to celebrate the 20th anniversary of International Migratory Bird Day. The 2012 IMBD theme of "Connecting People to Bird Conservation" is intended to try to introduce new people to birds, birding, and bird conservation as an outdoor experience.

Activities will begin at 7:30 AM with an orientation at the refuge headquarters, after which groups will disperse via the refuge trails on foot, via waterways by boats, and, if there is a demand, by canoes and kayaks as well. We will record all species and as many individuals within those species as we can find.

All birding participants will return to the headquarters building by 11:30 AM to tally their results and have a light lunch. A speaker will follow the lunch at approximately 1:00 PM with a natural resource presentation on a topic related to the International Migratory Bird Day theme. Details concerning the speaker and the available morning activities will be posted on the Friends' website as they become available.

Please call 802-868-4781 to register for this activity.

Monthly Nature Walks**1st Saturday of each month (see times below)**

Join Friends of Missisquoi NWR board member Joe Belanger for nature walks on various refuge trails, held the first Saturday of each month. Registration is not required. Locations are subject to change depending on trail conditions. The schedule for the next three months is:

March 3: Jeep Trail (9AM to 12PM) The Jeep Trail offers a riverside trek along the Missisquoi River with possible sightings of Pileated Woodpeckers, hawks, red fox, white tail deer and perhaps a glimpse of a few of the more hardy early migrants such as Great Blue Herons. Meet at the Louie's Landing fishing access parking lot on Rt 78.

April 7: Maquam/Black Creek Trail (9AM to 11AM) Some early migrants should be pushing into Vermont by the date of this walk with waterfowl, Great Blue Herons, and Red-winged Blackbirds present on the refuge at numerous locations. Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton.

May 5: Old Railroad Passage Trail (9AM to 11AM) Spring migration will be in full swing by this date so many forest and grassland song birds should be present. Time permitting, the walk should allow participants to see a small portion of the Maquam bog from the trail. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge headquarters and across from Stephen Young Marsh.

Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks**3rd Saturday of each month, 8:00 am to 10:00 am**

Friends board members Bridget Butler and Ken Copenhaver will lead bird monitoring walks 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 all levels of birders and provide a wonderful opportunity to learn about birds throughout the seasons. Registration is not required. Locations are subject to change depending on trail conditions. The schedule for the next three months is:

March 17: Old Railroad Passage Trail. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge headquarters and across from Stephen Young Marsh.

April 21: Maquam/Black Creek Trail. Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton.

May 19: Stephen Young Marsh Trail. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge headquarters and across from Stephen Young Marsh.

Annual Kids Fishing Derby**Saturday, July 28**

More information will be available as the date approaches.

People are asked to call 802-868-4781 to register for this popular annual event.

To check for any schedule changes or additions, visit the Friends website at www.friendsofmissisquoi.org and check the "What's Happening" section.

A Wing What?

*by Judy Sefchick Edwards,
Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR*

For one short week in January, there's a flurry of non-stop activity and a sense of urgency at Patuxent Wildlife Research Refuge. The scene may look somewhat bizarre to the casual observer: a room packed with people hunched over their work; endless stacks of leaning cardboard boxes; tables overburdened with books, paperwork, and measuring devices; heaps of stained envelopes spilling to the ground; and feathers of every size, shape, and color, piled ankle-deep on the floor. But to waterfowl conservation professionals, it's a little slice of heaven. (After all, no one ever claimed sanity in this profession!).

Welcome to the Atlantic Flyway Waterfowl Wingbee in Laurel, Maryland—a place where state and federal wildlife biologists, biological technicians, conservation officers, and other natural resource professionals converge once-a-year to study

and identify thousands upon thousands of hunter-harvested waterfowl wings. Despite the crowded conditions and a discernable stench when you first open the door, you'll find a group of 40 people from all over the Atlantic Flyway (Florida to Maine), who are more than excited to be here. After all, this event is steeped in tradition—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) biologists have been examining waterfowl parts (for the appropriately named "parts collection survey") since 1961!

Coordination among state wildlife agencies and the FWS, and voluntary participation by waterfowl hunters, is a must for the wingbee to be a success. Keeping track of who's hunting, how many, of what, where, and when, is key! The Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program (HIP) helps out—it requires licensed migratory game bird hunters to register in each state. The state then passes the hunters' names onto FWS, so a random sample of hunters can be asked to keep a diary of the birds they harvest. But that's only part of the process. The second part involves another sample of hunters who are given postage-paid envelopes and asked to mail

one wing from each duck, and the wing tips and tail feathers from each goose they shoot, to the Patuxent National Wildlife Refuge repository. A similar project occurs north of the border in Canada organized by the Canadian Wildlife Service. That's cooperation for you!

Once the survey envelopes arrive at Patuxent, they're logged into a database, rough-sorted into groups, placed in cardboard boxes, and stored in large freezers for safe-keeping. For waterfowl hunters, the fun ends when the last envelope is sent; but for bio-nerds like me, the real fun begins at the wingbee. Just as a spelling bee is an event where people gather to try to correctly spell words, a wingbee is an event where biologists gather to try to correctly identify the species, age, and sex of each duck wing or goose tail submitted by hunters.

It may sound easy, but it isn't—ask anyone who's ever been to one. With wings from about 30 different types of waterfowl, there's lots to learn and only a short time to learn it. Identifying the wing to species is usually the first task at hand. To do this, speculums, or distinct color patterns on duck wings, are inspected. For Example, compare the mallard and the American black duck, which both have purple speculums, or the American wigeon and green-winged teal, that both have speculums of iridescent green. Unfortunately, this method goes out the door for the waterfowl species (like goldeneye, scaup, bufflehead, scoters, and mergansers) that are mostly black-and-white, whose wings only come in various shades of gray!

It gets even more interesting when you have to determine sex. Does that wood duck wing have a straighter white pattern on its edge (male), or is it more teardrop-shaped (female)? The biggest challenge of all, though, may be to determine whether the wing represents an immature or adult duck. The wear on the feathers often tells the story. Juvenile feathers tend to look frayed or scraggly; adult feathers, on the other hand, have already been replaced with new ones, so they look wider, blunter, and have smoother edges. This sounds great in theory, but it's tricky—it only takes overlooking one

worn feather (out of the hundreds of feathers on a wing) to make a wrong call!

You can see how much of this—colors, patterns, narrow versus wide, frayed versus smooth—may be considered subjective. Measuring the wing sometimes helps, but often even the measurements overlap. It's a good thing that each table has 4 or 5 workers who can commiserate. Plus there's an expert checker (an experienced person who has received special training and whose accuracy has been carefully checked to verify the "call" of the workers) at the head of the table, who reviews each wing and has the final say. Routine variation in the wings, as well as hybrids, domestic crosses, and an assortment of other anomalies, make it necessary sometimes for even the experts to consult experts—that's Mother Nature for you!

You may be wondering if all the effort is really worth it. What good is a wingbee? Be assured that ducks everywhere benefit from this endeavor. Data collected at the wingbee helps paint a larger, more complete picture of the waterfowl harvest, from both a temporal and geographic perspective. Because the results end up describing the numbers of adults, juveniles, males, and females of each species harvested in a flyway, it also helps biologists make sound decisions regarding hunting seasons, bag limits, and population management. Remember that wingbees occur in each of the four flyways. It's estimated that around 90,000 duck wings and 20,000 goose tails are examined at wingbees in the United States each year.

During the four days at the Atlantic Flyway Waterfowl Wingbee, our group examined approximately 17,000 duck wings and 5,000 goose tails—whew! I left the wingbee with bleary eyes, a smile on my face, feathers covering my clothes, and duck dander in my nose. It was exhausting, yet exhilarating all at the same time. Although I've spent a lifetime looking at and loving ducks, the wingbee has given me a deeper appreciation for these fabulously -colored, unique, finely- feathered friends that occur throughout the Atlantic Flyway and (fortunately for us) migrate through Missisquoi.

For more information on duck wing identification, go to

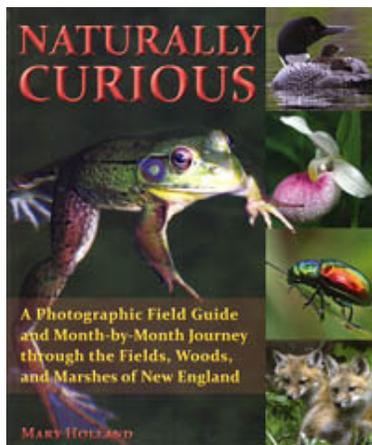
<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/birds/duckplum/index.htm>

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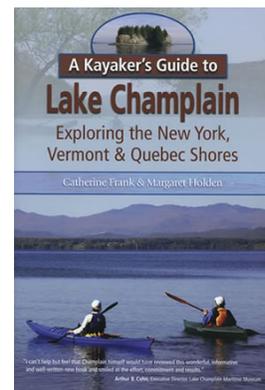
Mary Holland is a naturalist and nature photographer who lives in Hartland, VT.

A Kayaker's Guide to Lake Champlain: Exploring the New York, Vermont & Quebec Shores

by Catherine Frank and Margaret Holden

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Not just for kayakers, this is a wonderful guide for anyone interested in gaining a better understanding of Lake Champlain. Arthur Cohn, director of the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, noted, "I can't help but feel that Champlain himself would have reviewed this wonderful, informative and well-written new book and smiled at the effort, commitment and results."



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