



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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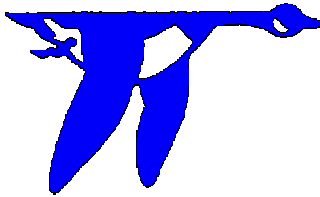
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Newsletter edited by Ken Copenhaver

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

Manager's Update – Spring 2014

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR

Is it really spring--finally? It has been a long cold winter and a particularly wet spring thanks to flood-stage lake levels for several weeks in April. I think by most accounts we saw things happening a few weeks later than normal on the refuge thanks to the cold and wet spring weather. For example, our vernal pools were still frozen when in most years we would have had our first spotted salamander eggs laid. Although this caused cancelations in our evening vernal pool walks, the salamanders just bided their time and waited. The nice thing about nature is that regardless of what we think of as a schedule, nature rolls with the changes and just does what it needs to do when it can do it.

Spring has definitely come roaring in over the last two weeks. Leaves have started coming on the trees and all of a sudden the forests and fields are filled with migratory birds singing and staking out territories. Even though many things were delayed this spring, our Bobolinks arrived right on schedule, as always, in the first week of May. It's a great time to see these grassland obligate birds right now as they defend their breeding territories right across from the refuge office or along the beginning of the Railroad Passage Trail.

The cold winter weather was helpful in one respect this year, allowing the refuge to complete an ice bridge over the Missisquoi River. This was the final push to move the remaining rock to protect the cultural site along the Missisquoi River. We are now waiting for the final archaeological clearance to finish off this project. We also have been working on engineering and permitting to replace and improve the Mac's Bend boat ramps, which have been degrading for years. We hope to have this project complete by the end of the year.

An exciting designation was received officially this April for the refuge. The Missisquoi Delta and Bay Wetlands were recently designated as a **Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**. The first in Vermont, the designation encompasses 7,665 acres, and includes the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge and the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's (VFWD) Maquam, Carmen's Marsh, and Rock River Wildlife Management Areas (WMA). The designation formally recognizes the importance of these wetlands as critical wildlife habitat and as key areas for recreational opportunities, such as bird watching and hunting, in Franklin County and all of Vermont.

The designation does not impose restrictions on the management of the sites and is not a United Nations Convention. Ramsar designation can provide the Service and VTFWD enhanced opportunities for grant funding to manage

and restore habitats on these lands.

The Ramsar Convention is a 42 year-old intergovernmental treaty, signed by over 160 countries, to promote voluntary international cooperation for wetland and waterfowl conservation. The treaty recognizes the importance of wetlands and offers to recognize sites considered a "Wetland of International Importance" based on a number of specific attributes, such as rare or unique wetlands, biologically diverse plant or animal communities, and large or diverse water bird and fish populations. This new designation raises international awareness of the importance of the wetland habitat protected by the Refuge and State WMAs and puts Missisquoi in the league with areas such as San Francisco Bay and the Everglades in regards to their ecological significance.

This spring also has seen the release of the new USFWS National Friends Policy. This policy was under development for several years and was completed after extensive public review and comment. The Friends policy will replace the 2005 Director's Order No 183: "Working with Friends Organizations and Cooperating/Interpretive Association Sales Outlets and Book Stores." While the 2005 Director's Order included guidance on the operation of Friends nature stores, it did not have any guidance for all the other ways in which we work with Friends organizations. We will be working with the Friends Board this summer to review the policy and determine what changes are necessary. To learn more about this new policy you

can go to the USFWS website:

<http://www.fws.gov/Refuges/friends/friendsPolicy.html> where you will find questions and answers, a video from the Director of the USFWS and a link to the policy itself.

The refuge staff is once again busy preparing for the field season. We have many interesting and challenging projects ahead of us in the next few months. We will be continuing acoustic bat surveys on the refuge again this year as part of a regional effort to document the species and relative abundance of bats on refuges in the northeast. We are also fortunate to work with the Friends to hire two contractors to pull water chestnut from the refuge wetlands again this year. Last year's work funded by state grants allowed for extensive surveying and treatment of refuge wetlands for this aquatic invasive species. Thanks to the Friends and the continuation of this grant opportunity, we will once again be able to work aggressively to control this invasive species in the refuge's aquatic habitats.

Spring is always a great time of year on the refuge. This spring was long coming but is now in full swing. I hope you will find the time to visit the refuge in the coming weeks to see the thousands of nesting and migrating song birds, waterfowl, and other wildlife using the refuge at this time of year. Though many trails are still a bit soggy (and in some cases under water!) there are still great opportunities to spend time at the refuge enjoying this incredible wildlife resource on Lake Champlain.

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Bi-monthly Board Meeting

Wednesday, July 9, 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, September 10, 2014 at 6:30 pm



Summer 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.

Art on the Refuge

Saturday May 17 through Friday July 18

Our "Art on the Refuge" show is an opportunity to see nature as another person views it--through the eyes, vision, and hands of an artist. Hosted at the Refuge Visitor Center, we have wonderful paintings, photographs, and other art as Vermont artists interpret plants, wildlife, and the wild landscape.

The Show opened on May 17 and will run through July 18. The Visitor Center is open Monday to Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, and on Saturdays from 10:00 to 2:00. Come have a look.

We thank the many artists who have placed their works in the Show, and we thank Sarah Rosedahl, a North Hero artist who helped us put this all together.

Kids Fishing Clinic (Derby)

Saturday June 7, 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM

The annual Kids Fishing Clinic will take place along the Macs Bend Road from Louies Landing Parking lot down to the Macs Bend boat launch site, a distance of about 1 mile. Fishing will occur along the banks of the Missisquoi river. Numerous educational and informational venues will be operating near the Macs Bend Building while the fishing is on-going. Topics include fly casting, fly tying, spincasting, watershed models, and demonstrations, a fish ID aquarium, lure making, and an aquatic invasive species display. Children are encouraged to participate in these activities at some time while they are fishing. A light lunch will be served and a limited number of random drawing prizes will be given away at the end of the event.

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

Ditch Pickle Classic

Saturday & Sunday June 28 & 29

The Ditch Pickle Classic is Lake Champlain's exclusive "catch-photo-release" bass tournament specifically for fly anglers. Fish caught by DPC anglers are measured, photographed, and promptly returned to the same waters where they were caught, drastically reducing any chances of immediate or delayed mortality.

This is a not-for-profit event intended to shed positive light on the tremendous resource that is Lake Champlain. Check-in from 9:00 to 12:00 on Saturday and a post-event BBQ/Awards Ceremony on Sunday from about 12:00 to 4:00 will be held at the Missisquoi NWR Visitor Center on Tabor Rd. in Swanton. Details about the 2014 Ditch Pickle Classic can be found at <http://www.dpcvt.com/p/2014.html>

Junior Waterfowl Hunter Training Program

Saturday August 23, 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM

The Junior Waterfowl Hunter Training Program is offered to youngsters 12 to 15 years of age who have an adult waterfowl hunter to serve as a mentor. The program is a joint educational effort of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, the Vermont Chapter of Ducks Unlimited, the Sportsman's Club of Franklin County, and volunteers. The program instructs beginning hunters in the knowledge and skills to become responsible, respected individuals who strive to learn about the species being hunted and to become knowledgeable in firearms safety, hunter ethics, and wildlife conservation. Those who complete the training will be eligible for blind sites on the refuge during waterfowl season.

Instruction will begin at 8:00 AM at the Franklin County Sportsman's Club on Route 36 (Maquam Shore Road) in St. Albans. The training session will be held rain or shine, so please dress appropriately.

To register for this year's program, please call the refuge headquarters at 802-868-4781.

Monthly Nature/Photography Walks 1st 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:

- June 7: Stephen Young Marsh Trail.** Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge headquarters and across the road from the marsh.
- July 5: Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton.
- August 2: Old Railroad Passage Trail.** Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center and across the road from the Stephen Young Marsh.

Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks 3rd 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 50 months of walks we have recorded 133 species of birds.** Registration is not required. The schedule for the next three months is:

- June 21: Old Railroad Passage Trail.** Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center and across the road from the Stephen Young Marsh.
- July 19: Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton.
- August 16: Jeep Trail.** Meet at the Louies Landing boat access area. We will drive in to the trail head at Macs Bend.

To check for any schedule changes or additions, visit the Friends website at www.friendsofmissisquoi.org and click on "Calendar."

For more information about the refuge, visit www.fws.gov/refuge/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 don't need to have a Facebook account to view the page.

Please stop by and let us know what you think!

Rusty or Not, Here They Come!

by Judy Sefchick Edwards, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR

The spring migration is on and blackbirds are some of the first to arrive...rusty or not, here they come! And Rusty Blackbirds are not, rusty that is; at least not this time of year when they're in full breeding plumage. Instead, Rusty Blackbirds seen during springtime are charcoal black beauties with bright, light-yellow eyes. The only "rusty" thing about them right now may be their song, which is fondly described as, "resembling rusty hinges, or a tape being played backwards!"

Known as "Nanook of the North" in the blackbird world, the Rusty Blackbird breeds further north than any other North American blackbird. From Alaska to Newfoundland, and extending south into the northern United States in Minnesota, Michigan, New York, and northern New England, these birds breed in boreal forest bogs and marshes. Apparently some breeding Rusty Blackbirds (that aren't really rusty) don't mind being green—they're found in colder, northern regions of Vermont, like the Green Mountains or Northeast Kingdom, where boreal wetland habitat exists.

Spring comes early if you're a blackbird—during February, when most of us are resetting the snooze button on our alarm clocks, blackbirds are already making their way north to nest. Though Rusty Blackbirds lag behind Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles, they're still one of the earliest spring migrants. Leaving their wintering grounds in the lower Mississippi Valley and southeastern coastal plain, Rustys arrive in Vermont sometime during mid-March or April.

In the Champlain Valley, Rusty Blackbirds are literally here today and gone tomorrow, stopping just long enough to fuel up for the next leg of their journey north. With such a short timeframe to see them, my best advice for birdwatchers is: Don't eat, sleep, or blink, or you'll miss them! Another piece of advice is to look closely at all birds that are black (especially noting their eye color). With their elusive nature, Rustys have no trouble passing

themselves off as "just another blackbird"—something that they're definitely *not*!

Unlike other blackbirds that have raucous calls and flamboyant feathering (like the bright red shoulder pads on Red-winged Blackbirds or the striking iridescence of grackles), Rusty Blackbirds are quieter, less gregarious, and far from flashy (sporting plumage that only shows rust-colored edgings in the fall and winter). While the "bad boys" of the blackbird world (they know who they are) wreak havoc on grain fields, Rustys prefer to keep their feet wet, foraging on insects, more like shorebirds than blackbirds. Since Rusty Blackbirds are habitat specialists that depend on wooded wetlands, they're usually seen at edges of flooded forests or riverine habitats, instead of dry fields.

Why do we care about Rustys? With an estimated population decline of at least 88% in the past 40 years, and a continuing yearly decrease of at least 5%, Rusty Blackbirds are currently one of the fastest declining bird species in North America as well as one of North America's greatest conservation mysteries. Unfortunately for Rusty Blackbirds, their elusive nature, low profile, and use of inaccessible, remote habitats have made them easy to overlook; only recently has the scientific community become aware of their plight.

To help understand the quandary of Rusty Blackbirds, the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group was formed in 2005 to direct research efforts in both the United States and Canada, in order to figure out the causes of Rusty Blackbird declines. In addition, this year, the Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz called on the observational powers of citizen scientists to help document locations where Rusty Blackbirds were found, and where they were not, during their northward migration.

For a couple of weeks at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge this past April, we were fortunate to have Rusty Blackbirds grace us with their quiet,

unassuming presence. At Mac's Bend Road, Rustys could be seen walking the entire stretch of flooded field, while probing and leaf-flipping to get some tasty treats. Along the Stephen J. Young Marsh Trail, smaller flocks were seen near seasonal wet areas, feeding in the mud and resting in trees. As usual, the Rustys tried their best to blend in with flocks of their louder, crazy cousins—Red-winged

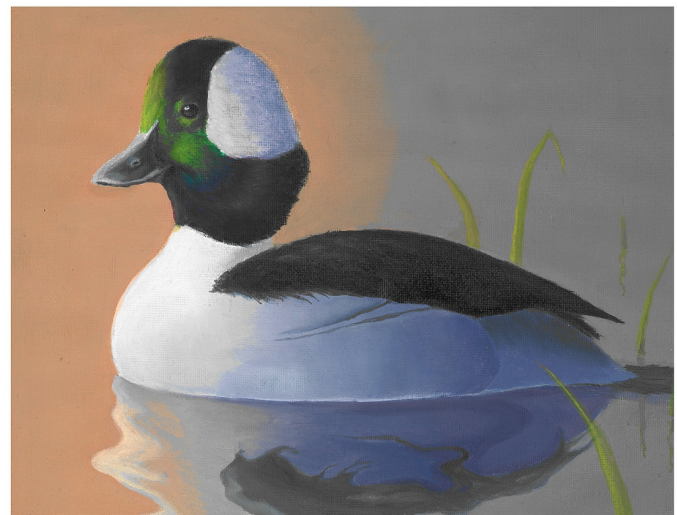
Blackbirds, Common Grackles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, (and even Robins, on occasion!)—but their eyes gave them away!

Rusty blackbirds could use your help. If you'd like to learn more about them, or join in the fun of the 2015 Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz, go to: <http://rustyblackbird.org>.

Vermont Junior Duck Stamp Contest

by Dave Frisque, Park Ranger, Missisquoi NWR

The Vermont Junior Duck Stamp Best of Show winner for 2014 was Teddy Ninh. Teddy is a student at Essex High School and has been submitting entries for the Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest for a number of years. His entries have consistently ranked very high during the judging of these art work entries, but this year he achieved Best of Show ranking from the 5 judges in late March. Teddy's entry was one of 151 submitted in 2014.



In early April Teddy's entry went on to compete in the National Jr. Duck Stamp Art Contest as the Vermont representative. The Best of Show entry from each state was submitted for this national competition. While the entry did not place in the top 20 at the national competition, we are hopeful that Teddy and other students will continue to participate in the Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest.

The Junior Duck Stamp Art Program is a cross-curriculum science and art endeavor that invites students interested in science and art to select a species of North American waterfowl, review the natural history and habitat needs of that species, and then create an art entry featuring the species. The program is available to all students K-12 as well as groups outside the classroom such as scouts, 4-H, and others. Each state has a coordinator who is responsible for conducting the Junior Duck Stamp program annually. David Frisque at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is the coordinator and contact person for the Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest in Vermont. The Jr. Duck Stamp Program was established in 1994 and is now in its 20th year.

More information about this program is available on line at www.fws.gov/juniorduck.

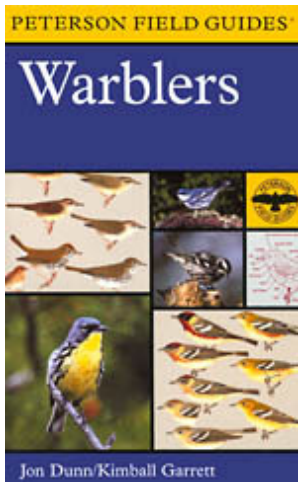
Read past issues of Missisquoi Matters at www.friendsofmissisquoi.org
and click on "About Us" and "Newsletter."

The Friends' Store

at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

BOOKS GAMES GIFTS TEE SHIRTS HATS
for people of all ages who love the outdoors

The Friends store stocks an assortment of Field Guides. Here are just a few!



Peterson Field Guide to Warblers of North America

Jon Dunn & Kimball Garrett

Illustrated by Cynthia House & Thomas Schultz

\$ 21.00 paper

400 pages, 4 1/2 x 7 1/4

full-color photographs & illustrations, b&w illustrations, maps

Each of the 60 species is described in detail, from field marks to mating habits. Every plumage is beautifully illustrated in color.

The Sibley Guide to Trees

David Allen Sibley

\$ 39.95 flexibound with flaps, 428 pages, 6 1/8 x 9 3/4, full-color illustrations

The all-new, beautifully illustrated guide book to trees—from America's #1 best-selling nature author.

David Allen Sibley, the preeminent bird-guide author and illustrator, now applies his formidable skills of identification and illustration to the trees of North America. *The Sibley Guide to Trees* is an astonishingly elegant guide to a complex subject. It condenses a huge amount of information about tree identification—more than has ever been collected in a single book—into a logical, accessible, easy-to-use format.

With more than 4,100 meticulous, exquisitely detailed paintings, the guide highlights the often subtle similarities and distinctions between more than 600 tree species—native trees as well as many introduced species. No other guide has ever made field identification so clear.

More than 500 maps show the complete range, both natural and cultivated, for nearly all species. Trees are arranged taxonomically, with all related species grouped together. By focusing on the fundamental characteristics of, for example, oaks or chestnuts or hickories, the guide helps the user recognize these basic species groups the same way birders recognize thrushes, warblers, or sparrows.

An important new contribution to our understanding of the natural world, *The Sibley Guide to Trees* will be a necessity for every tree lover, traveler, and naturalist. It is sure to become the new benchmark in field guides to trees.

