



# MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF  
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Summer, 2020



## Summer Activities Schedule at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

*29 Tabor Rd.  
Swanton, VT 05488*

### **Create Your Own Fun at the Refuge**

**Monday thru Sunday, dawn to dusk, until further notice**

As I'm sure you are aware, Covid-19 has played havoc with the activity schedule at the refuge. The Visitor's Center is closed until further notice. The Woodcock Walk scheduled for mid-April was cancelled. The World Migratory Bird Day activities and the Art at the Refuge reception and show were cancelled for this year. Green Up Day at the Refuge was also cancelled but may be rescheduled at a later date. The yearly field trip to Eagle Point WMA near Newport was cancelled. The monthly Bird Monitoring Walks are on hiatus but hope to resume later this year.

In a normal year, spring at the refuge is a wonderful time of year, with an abundance of activities to choose from to get you outside after a long Vermont winter. Don't let the coronavirus stop you from enjoying our wonderful refuge. All trails, except for the Jeep Trail, are open and waiting for you to enjoy. There is birding, botanizing, and wildlife watching in abundance for you to experience. Just be sure to stay safe and to respect the habitat. It's breeding season for many species, so be sure to stay on the trails. Keep dogs on leash (and scoop their poops). Maintain at least a 6 ft. social distance from other trail users. Boat ramps are open and there is a lot to see at the refuge by kayak, canoe, or boat. There are also great fishing opportunities on the refuge.

**If and when events are scheduled, they will be posted  
on the Friends website as soon as dates are known.**

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

## Refuge Managers Update - June, 2020



Looking back at past newsletter articles for the beginning of the field season I can honestly say nothing could be as different today as I write this compared to all of the previous years.

Refuge staff and volunteers look forward to this time of year eagerly, especially after a long winter. Spring and summer are typically full while we conduct and coordinate the multitude of wildlife and habitat surveys, management projects and public events. As with all our lives, COVID-19 has disrupted all normal refuge operations.

Many of you will have noticed that while refuge trails have remained open, the Visitor's Center and public restrooms have been closed since the middle of March. Most of the refuge staff have been required to telework, and only "mission critical" work could be performed at the refuge. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been guided by a variety of policy decisions through the Department of Interior on what, where and how work on our National Wildlife Refuges can continue. Much of these decisions center on state policies and guidelines but ultimately center on staff and public safety.

The good news is that here in Vermont our state response to COVID-19 has been strong. If positive trends continue, I have hopes that refuge staff will be permitted to begin field operations and hopefully start working with volunteers and the public soon. It is likely that Visitor's Center operations and indoor public events will lag behind field operations and again depend on state and Department of Interior recommendations and guidelines.

Even with an optimistic view of getting back to work soon, the reality is that we have missed the window for many biological projects such as

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR

surveys for breeding woodcock, grassland birds, and early season native bees. Surveys for invasive species should be beginning soon which help document treatment success as well as plan future control operations. Other disruptions include the refuge cancelling two resident volunteers who were scheduled to work in our Visitor's Center this summer, and public outreach events like our popular Word Migratory Bird day celebration.

So as I write this update I find that I cannot provide specific dates on when the public can expect things to get back to "normal" at Missisquoi. All I can hope is that as things continue to improve, we will be able to have staff and volunteers doing the important work of the refuge soon. I also look forward to the time when we can welcome visitors into our Visitor's Center and host public outreach programs once again. Until that time, enjoy the refuge trails and stay safe.



**Rhodora (*Rhododendron canadense*), photographed in the Maquam Bog. The bog has one of the largest, if not the largest, concentrations of this species in the state. Can be seen in bloom from the Railroad Trail until mid-June.**

## Showtime !



If you fancy aerial acrobats and characters in brightly colored costumes, or enjoy a serenade of fine songs, then do I have a show for you! During the months of May and June, a well-rehearsed musical

production takes place in Vermont's great outdoors. There's no standing in line for tickets or calling ahead for reservations - this show is free for the taking, available for both young and old to enjoy, and may be as close as your own backyard!

The spectacular show is spring migration, when warblers come in incomprehensible numbers from their winter homes in Central or South America, to their breeding grounds in North America. For warblers, routine, instinctive survival brings them to and through the United States. For humans, if we look and listen closely, it can be an entertainment extravaganza!

Warblers are some of the smallest songbirds, with most measuring around five inches in height (a little taller than your coffee mug), and weighing around one-third of an ounce (about the same as one teaspoon of sugar). Do not look for them at your feeders! Warblers are bug-eating machines that flit about in trees and thickets, searching for, and devouring huge amounts of insects and larvae. Their migration often coincides with tree leaf-out, since leaves provide food for the insects they eat.

Best known for long migrations, bright coloration, and complex vocalizations, warblers begin to arrive here in April. By mid-May, the warbler migration is in full swing. With a long and varied cast of characters, the show in northwestern Vermont contains about 25 different

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR

performers. To see some of the state's stars, just grab your binoculars and head out to one of Missisquoi's wooded trails.

The first to arrive on stage is the yellow-rumped warbler. Easily recognizable by the yellow spot on its rear, this hardy little bird is prepared to fly north, regardless of conditions.

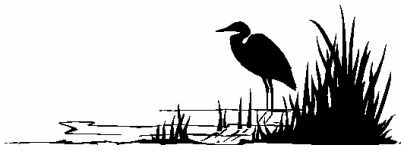


Having a longer intestine than other warblers has its advantages. When insects are scarce, Yellow-rumps can eat waxy berries, sap, and even poison ivy!

For glitter and romance this springtime, look no further than the yellow warbler. Known for its



*continued >> p. 4*



## 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)

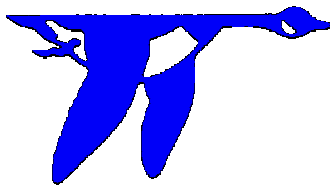
E-mail: [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org)

Newsletter edited by Al Crist

Printed copies courtesy of  
Med Associates, Inc.

### Board of Directors

Rich Kelley	<i>President</i>
Ken Copenhaver	<i>Vice Pres.</i>
Linda LeBlanc	<i>Treasurer</i>
Carol Yarnell	<i>Secretary</i>
Paul Madden	
Julie Filiberti	
Cathie Waltz	
Jason Crooks	
Al Crist	
Wil Roberts	



### Refuge Staff

Ken Sturm	<i>Refuge Manager</i>
Judy Sefchick	<i>Wildlife Biologist</i>
Lisa Swainbank	<i>Office Administrative Assistant</i>
Joe Bertrand	<i>Maintenance Mechanic</i>

**The MNWR Visitor Center is closed until further notice**

brilliant all-yellow body and rusty-streaked chest, the male yellow warbler goes to great lengths to attract and court a female. It sometimes sings more than 3,000 songs in a *single* day, just to entice someone special!

By now, you may have guessed the show's villain. Who else, but the cunning brown-headed cowbird? Not a fan of hard work or parental responsibilities, the cowbird sneaks about, and takes the easy-way-out, by laying its egg in an unsuspecting warbler's nest. Tricking a warbler into raising its young works unless the warbler senses something is amiss. After all, the yellow warbler is no one's fool. She may decide to build another nest, leaving all eggs behind. Scientists have observed female yellow warblers building as many as six different nests, one on top of another, in order to defeat this brown-headed foe!

For scandal in the show, look no further than the American redstart. With boldly patterned plumage of black and orange, the male redstart is a restless creature in constant motion. This 'playboy' of the bird world may have two mates at the same time, merely 1,600 feet apart!



Like

all good things, this spectacular springtime show ends all too soon. In Vermont, warblers literally seem to be 'here today and gone tomorrow' as they migrate, nest, and then begin their southward journey home. As the final curtain call draws near, I think, 'Bravo, bravo little birds, for another magical springtime show!' Although sad to see them go, I know these migratory marathoners will return at the same time next year, for another delightful show.

## **Bog Walk !**

One of the brightest jewels in the crown of Missisquoi NWR is surely Maquam Bog. This is a huge bog in a nearly pristine condition, totaling over 1600 acres and averaging about two miles in diameter. It's the largest bog in either New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, or Massachusetts. Several plant community types make up the bog: alder swamp, dwarf shrub bog, mixed shrub sedge bog, and the rarest and most significant of all is the pitch pine woodland bog.

The pitch pine bog is the only one of its kind in Vermont and is the largest of the very few found throughout New England. This community features pitch pine, rare Virginia chain fern, blueberries, a variety of sphagnum moss species, and is dominated by rhodora (*Rhododendron canadense*). Peat depths range from 2.5 ft to 8 ft deep. Periodic fires and flooding have shaped and maintained the vegetative communities in the bog. The bog is home to a variety of wildlife including short eared owls, shrikes, and moose. It is a significant wintering area for whitetail deer.



Due to its sensitive nature, Maquam Bog is closed to the public except for deer hunting. The margins of the bog are nearly impenetrable due to the very uneven terrain and thick brush. Fortunately, for visitors wishing to see a bit of the bog, a railroad bed was laid along the south-western edge of the bog in the 1880's. This abandoned railroad bed is now the Railroad Trail. Except for viewing a

bit of the bog from the Railroad Trail, there is really no way for visitors to access this amazing and unique habitat, except.....

For some years the Friends of Missisquoi have sponsored occasional winter visits into the heart of the bog. These "bog walks" don't take place every year. Weather conditions have to be just right and a walk leader who is familiar with the bog must accompany the group. The walk can only be done when the ground is frozen and there is adequate snow cover to protect the vegetation from trampling. Snowshoes are the mode of transportation. Bog walks have been cancelled when conditions were not adequate. The idea of these walks is for the group to see and experience the uniqueness of the bog, to learn what a bog is about, how it provides unique growing conditions, and to learn specifically about Maquam Bog.

Last fall, Friends board member Jason Crooks suggested we should consider arranging a Bog Walk for the coming winter. Who could we ask to lead the walk? The most knowledgeable walk leader that we could hope for would be Vermont's own world renowned bog expert Ian Worley, retired Professor of Environmental Studies and Plant Biology at UVM. Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, reached out to Ian to see if he might agree to lead the walk and we were elated when he did agree.

Ian emailed us a bit of his background with bogs: "By way of background, I've been in over 3,000 peatlands, from ones no larger than a kitchen table to those well over 1000 acres. They were in locations as far apart as the subtropics, to the Arctic, southern New Zealand, northern Scotland, Newfoundland, northern Alaska, Bennington County, the Northeast Kingdom, on a remote oceanic island, the center of a continent, below sea level, to above tree-line, from my hands and knees to the height of my soaring airplane, and ages of bogs varying from the first days of a bog's beginning to over 43,000 years old. I've visited many forms of peat extraction and seen over 100 types of utilization of peatlands and peat. I've evaluated the values of individual peatlands for many NGOs and

*continued >> p. 6*

government agencies from towns to the federal and international levels and given professional testimony to local, state, and federal courts. I have also been engaged as an environmental ethicist at mining and preservation sites, as well as within the world of scholarship.” WOW! What a resumé! We might actually learn something on our bog walk.

The date was set for Saturday, February 29th with a back-up date a week later in case the weather conditions forced postponement. Due to the bog’s sensitive nature the maximum number of walkers would be 15 and participants would be limited to refuge volunteers and Friends members.

The day opened with partly cloudy skies, temperatures in the teens, and adequate snow cover on the ground- perfect! The group met Ian in the Rail-



road Trail parking lot where an introduction to bogs in general and Maquam Bog in particular was given. Then it was on with the snowshoes and off to the bog.



Here follow descriptions of the day from two of the bog Walkers:

“We called this a walk, but it was more standing around discussing all things bog. Many of us actually got quite chilly because we were stopped so often. Thinking we covered less than 2 miles, but it took us four hours to do it. We bushwhacked once leaving the RR Trail. This included following along on top of a Beaver dam which was fun, but challenging at times. We ascended a slight rise (lunch on top) before descending to and crossing the lagg (moat) and getting into the bog. Time in the bog was spent searching for bog specific plants. We took core samples (3?) along the way (before bog and in



bog) in an attempt to sense the soil change to peat. A memory was finally getting to the rise above the bog and seeing it: a cold, desolate (as compared to surroundings) flat expanse, pitch pine pockets here and there. Beautiful in an austere way, reminiscent of a high desert experience.” Jason Crooks.

“I’ve been on 3 previous bog walks over the years, all led by Joe Bertrand. This is the first walk I know of that Ian has led, though he was obviously familiar with the bog from previous work he has



*continued >> p. 7*

been involved with as a professor. The walk itself included an introduction to the bog in the parking lot and frequent stops with more explanations about the area around the bog and in the bog itself. He discussed the geology and hydrology of the bog, previous research done in the bog, historical uses of the bog, as well as plant life in the bog and its variation from area to area. He also compared Maquam Bog to other bogs in the northeast and emphasized

its uniqueness. Ian used a 10-foot piece of rebar as a probe to examine the amount of decay and depth of plant material, comparing probes around the bog with probes in the bog itself.” Ken Copenhaver.

Keep an eye out for a Bog Walk announcement, hopefully within the next few years. If you do go, it'll be an opportunity to experience an incredibly unique, pristine natural area rarely visited by man.



**The Rhodora, On Being Asked,  
Whence is the Flower**

*by Ralph Waldo Emerson*

In May, when sea-winds pierced our solitudes,  
I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods,  
Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook,  
To please the desert and the sluggish brook.  
The purple petals fallen in the pool  
Made the black water with their beauty gay;  
Here might the red-bird come his plumes to cool,  
And court the flower that cheapens his array.  
Rhodora! if the sages ask thee why

This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,  
Tell them, dear, that, if eyes were made for  
seeing,  
Then beauty is its own excuse for Being;  
Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose!  
I never thought to ask; I never knew;  
But in my simple  
ignorance suppose  
The self-same power that  
brought me there, brought  
you.



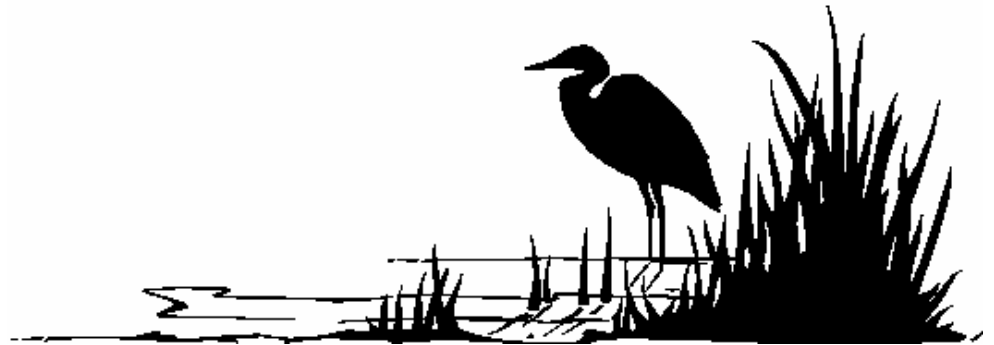
**FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

**BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING**

**Wednesday, July 8th, 2020 at 6:30 pm by Zoom**

**email [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org) if you'd like to attend**

Members are always welcome & encouraged to attend. Next board meeting is September 9th at 6:30 pm



Please tell us how to serve you better - The Friends of Missisquoi NWR Board is eager to know more about the kind of programs, outings, or activities you would like to have offered on or about the refuge. Please email your suggestions and comments to [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org). Thanks!

**Yes!** I want to support the Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge and its programs with my membership. My dues include a subscription to Missisquoi Matters and a 10% discount on items at the Friends Gift Shop. Enclosed is my contribution of:

**Membership Level**

- \$10 Student
- \$15 Individual
- \$20 Family / Classroom
- \$50 Supporting
- \$100 Steward
- \$250 Life / Business
- \$1000 Patron

Would you like to receive your newsletter by postal mail or by email? Please circle one:

**Postal Mail      Email**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ (membership begins the month you join)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

(Your email address will not be shared with any other organization. We would like to be able to contact members regarding last minute changes to Friends activities and events.)