



Missisquoi Matters

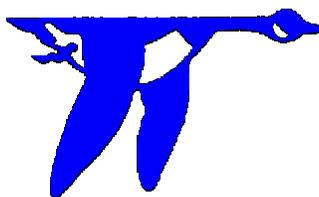
is the quarterly newsletter of the Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, dedicated to promoting a better awareness, appreciation, conservation, and responsible utilization of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

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Newsletter edited by Ken Copenhaver

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Lisa Swainbank
Office Administrative Assistant
Joe Bertrand
Maintenance Mechanic

MNWR Visitor Center hours
are Monday thru Friday
8:00am – 4:30pm
and weekends seasonally

Trail Cards Challenge

Have you been out on the refuge trails this fall and seen the trail card boxes? When you find the first box, take a trail card and use the punch in the box to punch out the trail's respective space on the card. Then take your trail card along on future hikes on the refuge's other trails. Once you've hiked all five trails and acquired all five unique punches on your card, return to the refuge Visitor Center during operating hours to claim your prize – a unique sew-on patch (right), created specifically for the Trail Card Challenge. Patches are only available to those intrepid individuals who have conquered all 5 trails!



To date, about 10 patches have been earned. Will you be next?

The trails are: Black/Maquam Creek Trail, Discovery Trail, Jeep Trail, Old Railroad Passage Trail, and Stephen J Young Marsh Trail. Trail cards are also available at the Refuge Visitor Center on Tabor Road. Good luck on your Trail Card quest!

Finch Forecast

Ron Pittaway, an ornithologist in Ontario, publishes an annual "Finch Forecast" in which he predicts which species of finches and other "irruptive" species will migrate south each winter. His predictions are based on an analysis of food crops in the boreal forests of Canada, including spruce, fir, and hemlock cones, birch seeds, mountain ash berries, and acorn crops. Many finches and several non-finches are considered "irruptive" species, meaning that they don't follow predictable migration patterns, instead moving (or irrupting) to areas where food is more abundant. If food in their breeding grounds is abundant, they will stay in that general area through the winter. But if food is scarce, they will move south.

This year, most of the food crops have had moderate to low production. Thus the forecast is for many species to move south. Since each species specializes in specific food types, the forecast is species by species. Although the forecast is geared toward southern Canada, many species could also spill over into northern New England and northern New York.

Pine Siskins, Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Grosbeaks, and Bohemian Waxwings have already been reported in Vermont. Others that we may see this year are Common Redpolls and more than the usual number of Purple Finches. In the Northeast Kingdom, we may have more than the usual number of Red Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills. So be on the lookout for these winter visitors, both at home at your feeders and at the refuge!

The entire forecast can be found here: <http://jeaniron.ca/2018/wff18.htm>

Refuge Manager's Update – November 2018

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR

It's starting to be "that time of year" again when the refuge staff wraps up the field season work and starts contemplating late fall and winter project planning and evaluating the 2018 work year. Biological data must be entered and summarized, and reports written and shared with our partners. Maintenance projects must be completed ahead of winter weather. Fall and winter can be a great time for reflection and planning – to look at what we have done and need to do, but also to evaluate what our staff can *actually* do.

I mention the above to highlight the fact that with the loss of a permanent full time staff member (Dave Frisque, Park Ranger) our team must now reflect on if and how we can continue programs that were supported by this position. There will be decisions on which programs we can continue and those which will have to be postponed or canceled until we regain staff capacity. These are difficult decisions, some of which will directly affect our public who have enjoyed programs or guided tours of our trails. This winter our staff will be evaluating all of our responsibilities and making decisions on how to manage with a reduced workforce.

Luckily for the short term we were able to hire a temporary-part time Park Ranger, Jennifer Thelen, for the summer and early fall who has been a tremendous asset to the refuge. She was able to staff our Visitor Center on weekends and provide some outreach and program support during the work week. You can see some of her handiwork if you visit the Stephen Young Marsh/Railroad Passage Trail kiosk. Jennifer completely redesigned our interpretive panels to highlight the biology and management of these two unique parts of the refuge – a tremendous job!

On an even brighter note, we have been supported by some outstanding volunteers this summer and fall. Longtime volunteer Steve Vittum has been invaluable in regularly mowing our Visitor Center grounds. Hal Bill has been working almost weekly alongside Joe Bertrand, our maintenance mechanic, on many different projects. And Hal along with Dave Filiberti took USFWS training this summer to operate our farm tractor and off-road vehicles. This training allows them to become extra helpful by being certified on new equipment. Dave used his training to mow 115 acres of grassland this fall, helping to maintain the fields for grassland bird nesting habitat. The many hours of support volunteers provide to the refuge allow the refuge staff to continue to forge ahead on new projects and sometimes just not fall behind! We can't thank all of our volunteers enough for the critical support they provide to the Missisquoi NWR!

Finally, it's a pleasure to announce that the Missisquoi NWR grew a little bit in October. The refuge purchased a 10.1 acre parcel on the Missisquoi River along Monument Road. This property along the river provides mature riparian forest habitat and some forested wetlands for a variety of wildlife. The property, which had been partly in agriculture, will be restored to forested habitat over time. It is not often that our refuge acquires new property but it is always a special moment when it happens - to know that this land will be protected forever and dedicated to wildlife management and conservation.



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 Bird Monitoring Walks

3rd Saturday of each month, 8:00 to 10:00 AM

Friends of MNWR members Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti 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 are 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 103 months of walks we have recorded 158 species of birds.** (Two new species were observed in the last 3 months—Merlin and Bufflehead.) Registration for the walks is not required. The schedule for the next three months is:

December 15: Jeep Trail. Meet at the Louie's Landing parking lot on Rte 78 approx. 3 ½ miles west of Swanton. We will meet at the gate and drive in to the trail head at Mac's Bend.

January 19: Maquam/Black Creek Trail. Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton village.

February 16: 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 soon as dates are known.

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, visit <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!



Note that Friends Store hours will be very limited through the winter until May when RV Volunteers will be available at the Visitor Center. Unfortunately for the Friends, U.S. Fish and Wildlife employees are not allowed to make sales at Friends' stores.

Results of 2nd Annual Big Sit!

On Saturday October 13, the Friends held their second annual Big Sit! A total of about 15 observers came and went throughout the day. A core group of about 5 to 7 people endured most of the cool, cloudy, and windy day. A special thanks goes to Jim Osborn, who helped greatly with some of the more difficult identifications.

At about 6:15 in the morning, when it was barely starting to get light, Julie Filiberti, Rich Kelly, and Ken Copenhaver arrived to set up shop at the Stephen Young Marsh observation platform. The count got started a few minutes later with a Barred Owl calling several times from the woods across from the marsh. We then heard an early Song Sparrow and Robin. When it got light enough to see the water, we found Mallards, Hooded Mergansers, Greater Yellowlegs, and a Great Blue Heron in the marsh. Flocks of Canada Geese flew over all day long, heading in all directions. By 7:00 AM we already had 10 species.

Some notable “morning” birds were a Peregrine Falcon, many hundreds of Red-winged Blackbirds with occasional Rusty Blackbirds mixed in, and several Bald Eagles. However, the “bird of the day” was a flyover Sandhill Crane—a very rare species for the refuge and only a few seen each year in the entire state. By noon we were already up to 36 species, which beat 2017’s Big Sit! total for the whole day by one species.

But the count continued to increase as some of the “best” birds of the day showed up in the afternoon, including several Northern Harriers, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, a Cooper’s Hawk, a Merlin, a flyover of 19 Black-bellied Plovers, and (relatively rare on the refuge) a Red-bellied Woodpecker. We finished up just before dark at about 6:00 PM. We were delighted to end up with 46 species, beating last year’s Big Sit! by eleven species!

But what is a Big Sit! anyway? It’s an annual, international, noncompetitive birding event hosted by the Bird Watcher’s Digest magazine. It has been traditionally held on the second Sunday of October, but groups can also hold it on the Saturday before. It’s like a Big Day or a bird-a-thon in that the goal is to count as many bird species as possible within a 24-hour period—but with the major restriction that observations must be made from within a 17-foot diameter circle! The Friends chose the observation platform at Stephen J. Young Marsh, the size of which is well within the 17-foot limit.

The platform is an excellent location for a Big Sit! due to the variety of habitats within a short distance, including the marsh itself, woods to the west, shrubs to the east, and nearby grasslands. It also has great visibility in all directions for seeing flyovers. The Friends plan to do a Big Sit! again next year, and we hope you can join us!

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Bi-monthly Board Meeting

Wednesday, January 9, 2019 at 6:30 pm

At the Refuge Visitor Center

Members are always welcome to attend. Come and see what the board is planning and contribute your ideas.

Next meeting: Wednesday, March 13, 2019 at 6:30 pm

What Year Is It?

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR

Although 2018 was officially designated “*The Year of the Bird*,” for me, it was more “*The Year of the Bee*.” Don’t worry, I have a good excuse. For the first time ever this year, bumble bee surveys were conducted on Missisquoi NWR. While I wouldn’t use the word “*obsessed*,” I’ll admit that my mind and senses were focused on a very *different* group of globally-imperiled species this summer. Who knew that there’d come a day when I’d spend more time looking down rather than up; listening for buzzing rather than birdsong; and stalking fast-flying fuzz instead of feathers? Even the refuge staff just shook their heads!

How do you survey bumble bees? The answer may surprise you. With a small chance of finding the federally-endangered Rusty-patched Bumble Bee, the state-endangered Ashton Cuckoo Bumble Bee, and the state-threatened Yellow-banded Bumble Bee, no lethal methods could be used. For this survey at least, mad scientists with pins and formaldehyde, need not apply! These lucky bees would be placed in vials and put in coolers, so they could “chill out” before being identified, and then released on-site.

The first round of surveys started in May, as did my sense of disillusionment. Visiting ten bumblebee sites, for one-hour each, would take approximately three days, and would need to be repeated again in July and September. No big deal, right? Seconds after starting the survey, I had sweat on my brow and sunscreen in my eyes. Just like that, my idyllic notion (floating through flower-filled fields, net in hand and smile on face) of what it takes to collect bumble bees, was forever shattered!

Even though conditions were extreme, I thoroughly enjoyed working with, and learning about, bumblebees. In fact, the experience made me come to some interesting conclusions. Missisquoi’s “bee team” reinforced the idea that scientists in the twenty-first century are, in fact, much like the scientists who came before them. After all, who else but the *truly mad* would choose to spend days traversing fields of flowers, in a heat-induced stupor, while carrying nets and coolers...*yet still get excited to hear a buzz?*

To say that Missisquoi’s bumble bee surveys were worth every bit of time, effort, sweat, and toil, would be an understatement. Finding at least twelve of Vermont’s nineteen native species was even better than expected. Not only were many common bumble bees found, but there were some rarities as well, like: the Fernald Cuckoo Bumble Bee, a species found previously in Vermont only twice, with the last observation in 1963; the Yellow-Banded Bumble Bee, a state-threatened species that’s being evaluated for federal listing; and two uncommon Vermont species, the Northern Amber Bumble Bee and the Sanderson Bumble Bee.

With rapid declines in bee species world-wide, and one-third of all bird species threatened by extinction, shouldn’t we just call a truce? After all, who has time to argue about *what year it really is?* In this age of environmental pessimism, taking time to smell the flowers, while collecting bumblebees this summer, was in many ways, just what I needed. It not only put things in perspective, but also served as a reminder of how fortunate I am, to work at this place, called Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

Bird Spot Fever

by Bernie Paquette, reprinted with permission

Look,
Quiet now listen
Hear
Observe

Don't go
Yet
Stop, Look, Listen
for a little longer



Linger
Be the tree
that sways
but does not walk away

Stay rooted
like the grass, ferns, flowers

Let yourself be one of nature's elements
no longer an intruder
soon you will have visitors
otherwise missed.

Get a sense of this place
you occupy now.

Take in what you see, hear, smell, touch
without judgment
Move from your inner self
to the outer world

Then observe actively
beyond an ID
what is unique about the bird you see,
its behavior and plumage.
Singling out individual differences

unusual features
can be more challenging and fun than
simply ID'g a species.

Ask why.
Why does this bird...
How is this Robin...different
than those your mind knows?

Record enough
that you can tell the story
of your experience.

The birth and burst of active observation
will make even a common seen bird
a new experience.

Bird Spot Fever
gets hotter
as you observe and concentrate
on the smallest details
in one spot
-for an extended period
allowing them to stimulate your senses.

When birds and other of nature's creatures
behave around you as if
you do not exist -
a *greater depth of birding*
will offer itself.

To see the original presentation of this poem with photos, visit:

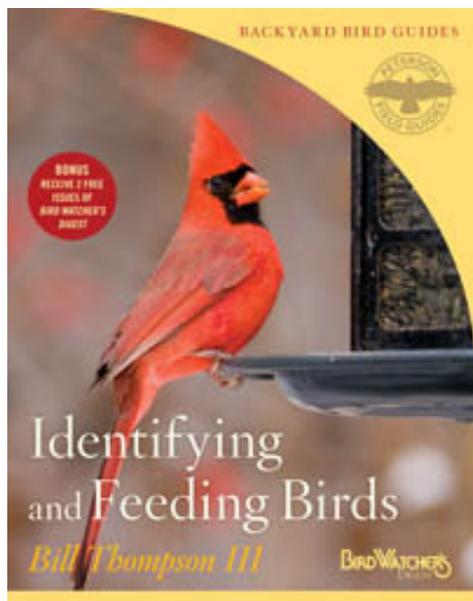
<https://vtbirdsandwords.blogspot.com/2018/02/bird-spot-fever-immovable-birding.html>

The Friends' Store

at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

BOOKS GAMES GIFTS TEE SHIRTS HATS

for people of all ages who love the outdoors



Peterson Field Guides: Identifying and Feeding Birds

Bill Thompson III

\$ 14.95, paper

246 pages, 7 x 9, full-color photographs, maps

This readable, friendly guide is intended for bird watchers and non-bird watchers alike—for anyone who wants to enjoy nature right in his or her own backyard.

The longtime editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest* and author of numerous books on birds, Bill Thompson III has been feeding and watching birds for forty years. He has tried everything, and here he shares what he's learned so that readers can avoid mistakes and skip right to successful bird feeding. He also debunks common myths about bird feeding: Does feeding birds stop them from migrating? Will birds starve if you leave your feeders empty after the birds have come to rely on them?

In an easygoing and lighthearted style, seven chapters cover all the elements needed to attract birds to a backyard (food, water, shelter) and address special cases and problems (keeping bees out of the hummingbird feeder, preventing birds from flying into windows, and much more). The final chapter profiles the 130 species that are most common at backyard feeders. No separate field guide is needed; it's all right here—everything a beginner needs to know to attract birds and then figure out what kind they are.

101 Ways to Help Birds

Laura Erickson

\$ 19.95, paper

284 pages, 6 x 9, b&w illustrations

- Specific, meaningful actions anyone can take
- Practical advice on feeding and attracting backyard birds
- How to create a bird-friendly household and community

This engaging book presents 101 things individuals can do to help both individual birds and bird populations as a whole. It also explains exactly how these actions can make a difference—what wrongs they help correct and what improvements they can bring about. Bird-friendly (and environment-friendly) practices are described in detail: things anyone can do around the home and garden, at work, at the store, in their community, in the outdoors, and on the road. Anyone who appreciates wild birds knows that the animals need our help. This timely guide shows bird-lovers what they can do.

