

## 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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(802) 868-4781 ext 121

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

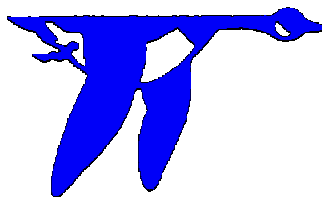
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Newsletter edited by Ken Copenhaver

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Joe Bertrand	<i>Maintenance Mechanic</i>

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

## Bird Tales 3

The Friends of Missisquoi NWR, in conjunction with the St. Albans Museum, recently hosted their third *Evening of Bird Tales*. This popular event, held in the Bliss Room of the St. Albans museum, is an annual February gathering of avian lovers young and old.

This year Mike Clough from the Southern Vermont Natural History Museum and a few of his feathered friends were welcomed to educate the audience about Vermont raptors.

Friends who attended were treated to very up close and personal views of a Red-tailed Hawk, a Red-shouldered Hawk, an Eastern Screech Owl, a Barred Owl, and an American Kestrel. Although the audience could not touch the birds, the viewing was from only feet away. Such close looks at these



particular birds could never be had in the wild. Many thanks to all those who braved the weather and came out to be captivated by these magnificent birds.

Be sure to watch for next year's Bird Tales event coming in February 2020.



## Bald Eagles on the Refuge

WOW, it's no wonder that so many eagles have been seen here!!!

### MISSISQUOI BALD EAGLE NEST SUMMARY

- 2011: first eagle nest on refuge; 1 chick fledged (1)
- 2012: 1 failed nest attempt; 2nd nest with 3 chicks fledged (3)
- 2013: 2 nests with 3 fledglings each (6)
- 2014: 2 nests with 1 and 3 fledglings (4)
- 2015: 2 nests with 2 fledglings each (4)
- 2016: 2 nests with 2 fledglings each (4)
- 2017: 2 nests with 3 and 2 fledglings (5)
- 2018: 2 nests with 2 and 3 fledglings (5)

TOTAL: 14 out of 15 successful nests

PRODUCTION: 32 fledglings in 8 years

## **Refuge Manager's Update – March 2019**

*by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR*

What a start to the New Year it was. It would be impossible not to mention the rocky 34 days of government shutdown, which rang in the New Year for federal employees. Missisquoi's staff was furloughed, along with everyone else—an unwelcome and frustrating disruption in our work at the refuge. I was required to visit the refuge each day of the furlough for safety checks and to provide any information to law enforcement, if necessary, during the shutdown. With the exception of two relatively minor illegal trespass problems, I am happy to report that Missisquoi's public users treated the trails and bathrooms with respect. For those who were visiting the refuge during that time, thank you for your patience, especially with trailhead parking lots that were not plowed during the furlough.

On top of the government shutdown, Missisquoi volunteers and staff also lost two board members from the Friends of Missisquoi NWR this winter. Long-time board member and nature walk leader, Joe Belanger, and board member and bookstore coordinator, Sue Farrar, both passed away in November 2018. We all will miss working with Joe and Sue at the refuge, and their valuable contributions and passion for the wildlife of Missisquoi NWR will be remembered.

Now at the beginning of Spring, Refuge Staff are finally back in the swing of normal refuge operations, and we have begun preparations for a busy field season. Thanks to the Friends of Missisquoi NWR we will have \$9,500.00 of grant funds to use for controlling invasive plants on the refuge. These funds will go a long way to accomplish the refuge's annual need for controlling knapweed, Japanese knotweed, Phragmites, and other invasives. In addition, Refuge Biologist Judy Sefchick will be coordinating two American Conservation Experience (ACE) interns this June to map and control invasive plants in our grasslands and possibly in our floodplain forests as well.

On the visitor services front, we are hoping to hire a seasonal Park Ranger position this summer who will help with environmental education and interpretation and other public use programming. We hope to have this position filled in time for school field trips in late May and June. With the retirement of permanent full-time Park Ranger Dave Frisque last year, the refuge has reduced outreach and educational events. We hope to restore some of these functions with our seasonal hire in 2019.

Keeping with visitor services, the refuge is fortunate to have been selected this year as one of 36 other National Wildlife Refuges across the country for a National Visitor Use Survey. Two ACE interns will spend two weeks in the summer and fall conducting interviews with refuge visitors. The project is coordinated nationally and produces a report on the numbers of visitors, activities, and other aspects of a refuge's visitation. The resulting document will provide a better understanding of visitors' recreational, educational, and informational experiences, and will measure satisfaction with current services, facilities, and opportunities. So if you see a pair of ACE interns on a trail or at the boat ramp this summer, please stop and take a moment to talk with them about Missisquoi!

Spring is always an exciting time at the refuge. Regardless of the weather, wildlife and plants continue to show us that spring is happening all around us. Take time to notice the new bird songs you hear each week while walking a trail, and look for the spring migrants sharing the refuge for a brief moment before heading further north. Watch the trees break bud and for the grasslands and forest to green up as the summer approaches. Taking time to observe and enjoy all of this helps me recover from a long, cold, snowy winter and appreciate the annual change to spring. And one of the best places to take this all in is, of course, the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge!



## 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.

### Archaeology of the Missisquoi Area

Wednesday, April 17, 6:00 to 8:00 PM

Come to a free presentation from Jess Robinson, Vermont State Archaeologist, who will be presenting a talk about the archaeology of the Missisquoi area.

Recent work by Northeast Archaeology Research Center and the University of Vermont Consulting Archaeology Program in and near to the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge (MNWR) has revealed new sites and exciting details related to the pre-contact Native American lifeways along the lower Missisquoi. Work by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation and the staff at the MNWR to synthesize new and old archaeological data in preparation for a National Register district nomination has also enabled us to see new patterns in Native Lifeways and environmental changes that may have had an effect on them. Jess will briefly discuss these topics and others during his presentation. A Q & A will follow.

Program starts at 6 pm at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge Visitor's Center.

### Woodcock Walk

Friday, April 19, 6:30 to 8:30 PM

Join refuge volunteer, Greg Simard on a woodcock walk on Friday April 19, 2019 from 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM. The walk will be at the Stephen Young Marsh area and participants will meet at the Tabor Road parking lot located one mile south of RT. 78 on Tabor Rd. The area is identified by a sign labeled "Refuge Trails Parking." American woodcock have a unique and intriguing courtship display that incorporates an aerial figure 8 display and ground level calling. The courtship display occurs near sunset and into the early evening hours.

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

### Refuge Green Up Day

Friday, May 4, 9:00 AM to approx 12:00 PM

The Missisquoi NWR will conduct "Green Up Day" on Friday May 3, 2019. Green Up day will begin at 9 AM and end at approx. noon. All participants should meet at Louie's Landing parking lot on RT. 78. The refuge will concentrate its efforts on river cleanup activities using refuge boats.

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

### 2019 "Art on the Refuge" Reception

Friday, May 17, 5:30 to 6:30 PM

The Friends of Missisquoi will again be hosting an annual art show, which kicks off during the 26th anniversary of World Migratory Bird Day on Saturday, May 18th, 2019. An artist reception will be held on Friday evening before the opening day. Stop by to meet and chat with the artists who are exhibiting their work in the refuge art show. Light refreshments will be served. Artwork will be displayed through July 19.

### Pre-World Migratory Bird Day Presentation by Maeve Kim Friday, May 17, 6:30 to 8:00 PM

As a prelude to World Migratory Bird Day (see next event), Maeve Kim will give a presentation the evening before titled "Birds, Beef and Brussels Sprouts: Vermont's Birds and Our Long Agricultural Heritage." Maeve is an avid birder and knowledgeable about many aspects of bird life and behavior. The presentation will be held at the refuge Visitor Center.

**World Migratory Bird Day****Saturday, May 18, 7:30 AM to approx 2:00 PM**

The Refuge will celebrate World Migratory Bird Day (formerly known as International Migratory Bird Day) on Saturday, May 18, 2019. The WMBD theme this year is **“Protect Birds: Be the Solution to Plastic Pollution.”**



We will start the day with an “Early Bird” bird walk at 5:30 AM at the Maquam/Black Creek Trail. Meet at the parking area on Rte 78, about 2.5 miles west of Swanton village.

The main activities of the day will begin at 7:30 AM with an orientation at the refuge Visitor Center. Participants will split up into several boat trips and bird walks, during which we will record all bird species and count as many individuals within those species as we can identify. All birding participants will return to the Visitor Center by 11:30 AM to tally results over a light lunch provided by the Friends.

At approximately 1:00 PM, Tom Rogers from the VT Dept of F&W, Education/Outreach Division, will give a presentation titled “The Birds of Vermont in a Changing Landscape and Climate.”

Throughout the day, an exhibit of artworks from local artists will be on display at the Visitor Center. The exhibit will run through mid-July. Further information on entering works in the exhibit will be available on the Friends website [www.friendsofmissisquoi.org](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org) in the near future.

**Please call 802-868-4781 to register for this activity.** Also please check back closer to the event date for any changes/additions to the schedule.

**2019 “Art On the Refuge” Exhibit****May 18 through July 19**

The Friends of MNWR is hosting an Art Exhibit again this year at the Refuge Visitor Center. Works will be focused on birds and nature found on the refuge. Media may include oil, acrylics, watercolor, pen and ink, pastels, photographs, and fabric-related works. Most works will be for sale. Artwork can be viewed and purchased on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from Memorial Day through Labor Day or at special events when a volunteer or Friends member is staffing the Visitor Center.

**Eagle Point WMA Bird Walk****Saturday, June 8, 8:00 to 10:00 AM**

The Friends, in partnership with the Memphremagog Watershed Association, will be holding our 4th annual Bird Walk at the Eagle Point Wildlife Management Area. The walk will be from 8:00 to 10:00 AM on June 8, 2018.

Located along the Canadian border just north of Newport City, Eagle Point WMA is owned by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is officially part of the Missisquoi NWR. It is managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department in partnership with the refuge. Eagle Point is a 420 acre parcel consisting of nearly a mile of lakeshore habitat, numerous wetlands, large meadows, hemlock, and mixed forest. It supports a great diversity of wildlife including aquatic mammals, waterfowl, grassland birds, and many other wetland and terrestrial species.

Please email Ken Copenhaver at [copenhvr@gmail.com](mailto:copenhvr@gmail.com) if you plan to attend the walk or need more information. Thank you. Hope to see you there!

Optionally, for anyone who wants to make a day of it, some of us are planning to bird a few more Northeast Kingdom spots after the walk, possibly Moose Bog or Silvio Conte NWR. All are welcome to join us!

## 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 108 months of walks we have recorded 158 species of birds.**

Registration for the walks is not required. The schedule for the next two months is:

**April 20: Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton village.

**May 18: Stephen Young Marsh Trail.** See World Migratory Bird Day info above.

Other Spring 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](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org) and click on "Calendar."

For more information about the refuge, visit [www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi/](http://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!



## FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

**Bi-monthly Board Meeting**

**Wednesday, May 8, 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, July 10, 2019 at 6:30 pm**

## **Fast Food on Mac's Bend Road**

*by Julie Filiberti*

As a nature lover, my mantra has always been, "You never know what you might find when you're out there. You just have to be out there to see it."

A cold, crisp, blue-skied Sunday in February was the picture perfect day to just be "out there." We spent a mid-afternoon walking Mac's Bend Road and part of the Jeep Trail. The hope was luck would be on our side and something eye-catching would present itself, but, it was quiet...very, very quiet. Eventually, signs of life did appear – a few chickadees and woodpeckers popped into view in the Mac's Bend parking lot and our ears picked up a distant Brown Creeper and far-off Pileated Woodpecker. We considered the find of the day a tap-tap-tapping Red-bellied Woodpecker...or so we thought.

The entire walk I had been scouting for owls. There was this indescribable "owly" kind of feeling to the day and I wanted to see one just to prove myself correct. I was secretly wishing a Great Horned Owl to come into view. I was scoping all of the suitable tree cavities for an Eastern Screech Owl. My dreaming aside, I knew a Barred Owl would likely be the most predictable owl for us to spot, and given the quietness of the day, I would welcome one.

Just before the Mac's Bend parking area on our way back to the car, we spotted a Barred Owl, just roosting on a branch, sleepy eyes barely open. It looked directly at us. It didn't move. It just closed its eyes again and allowed us to marvel at its serene beauty. As we stood motionless, admiring through our binoculars, we observed it quickly turn its head to the left and immediately open its eyes. They grew dark and wide. They were intensely watching something unbeknownst to us. In no more than a couple of seconds, it left its perch, snatched something from an adjacent branch, and landed a few trees ahead. As we watched it glide ahead, we could see something in its talons, and that something appeared bird-like.

Once it landed and situated its prey, we could discern a Downy Woodpecker in its grip.

Unfortunately, we were now looking directly upon its back, so we slowly and carefully walked a bit farther on to earn us a front view, hoping it wouldn't spook as we moved ahead of it. It stayed put and worked at its meal. Some of the Downy's larger flight feathers got plucked and discarded. Black and white feathers slowly twirled down to the snow beneath. Tufts of down drifted in the air.

The owl was particular, frequently turning the woodpecker to get better access to whatever part of the bird it was seeking to consume. Feathers continued to spiral away. As it ate, it frequently paused, looked around a bit, and then narrowed its eyes as if it was pleasantly full and was contemplating dozing off, only to then perk back to life and rip off another bite.

With its beak lifting the remains from its talons at least twice, it heightened its body and tried to swallow whole what remained, only to find it was still too large and returned the mass to its talons' grip. The third time was the charm. Enough of the bird had been eaten in pieces to allow the remains to slide down its throat in a couple of seismic gulps.

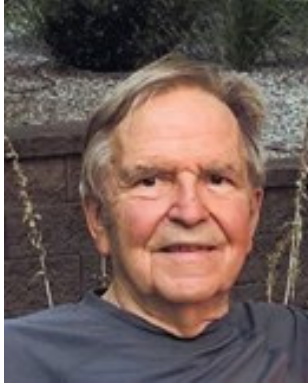
The woodpecker, only minutes before alive and well and oblivious to its doom, was completely gone. The meal was done. As a final ritual, the owl cleaned its face by repeatedly wiping its beak from side to side on the branch at its feet. It then gave its feathers a little ruffle. I imagined a burp. Its entire meal was about 20 minutes from start to finish. Was this a mere fast food snack for a sleepy owl? I'm not entirely sure, but I will admit to being thrilled to witness such a spectacle.

Encounters such as these are continually reinforcing my mantra, proving that if you just go outside with curiosity and patience, and have a little bit of good fortune, you just never know what you might happen upon.



## Friends News

The Friends have recently lost two valued members, Joe Belanger and Sue Farrar.



Joe Belanger, longtime Friends and Refuge volunteer and past-president of the Friends of Missisquoi passed away in November. Joe devoted a lot of his time to the refuge and led monthly nature and photography walks for many years in addition to his service on the Friends Board of Directors. Joe was born in Bethel but spent most of his childhood growing up in Waterbury, before moving to the Swanton area. He served his country in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam Era. He was employed by IBM as an Engineer and worked there for over 30 years. In his free time, Joe was an avid outdoorsman finding enjoyment in Kayaking, hiking the Long Trail with his daughter, cycling, and of course, hiking on the refuge. Joe's final request was that you get outside and take a bike ride, or a hike in the woods to honor his memory.



This past fall the Board of Directors of the Friends group lost a special member, Sue Farrar, who passed away in November. A lover of nature and quiet walks on the Refuge, Sue joined the board in 2013. She took over the management of the Friends store, keeping it well stocked and current. She also helped staff the visitor center on weekends during the winter season. A licensed social worker, Sue brought her people skills to her endeavors here at the Refuge. Her cheery disposition and welcoming smile will be missed. Sue's family chose to honor her legacy with donations in her memory which will be used to purchase benches for the trails. Her husband, Bob Farrar, a St. Albans attorney, has volunteered to serve on the Friends Board and we welcome him to the group.

## The Friends' Store

at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

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

Note that Friends Store hours will be very limited 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. The Store will be open on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from Memorial Day through Labor Day and at special events when a volunteer or Friends member is staffing the Visitor Center. Special events include World Migratory Bird Day on May 18. We regret that the store cannot be open more frequently. If any members would like to volunteer to "mind the store," please contact any board member.