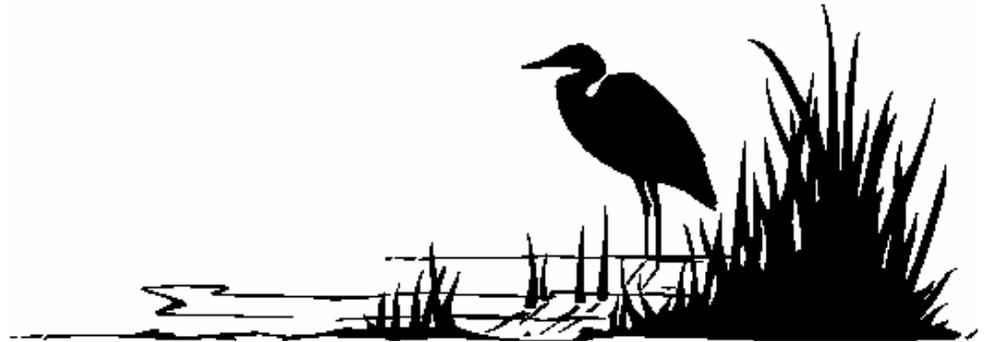


Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, Inc.
29 Tabor Road
Swanton, VT 05488



Missisquoi Matters

Summer 2019

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. 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.)



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

E-mail: info@friendsofmissisquoi.org

Newsletter edited by Al Crist

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MNWR Visitor Center hours
are Monday thru Friday
7:00am – 4:00pm
and summer weekends (June thru
August) 9:00am – 4:00pm

Your Mission...if you choose to accept it: A Search and Destroy Mission for the Invasive Yellow Iris needs your help at Missisquoi NWR



Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge contains the largest intact silver maple / sensitive fern floodplain forest in Vermont. Not only is it vital for some of the state's threatened and endangered species, but it's also important for other migrating and breeding wildlife as well.

In recent years, Missisquoi's floodplain forest has been under attack by a sinister saboteur, the Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*). Warning: Do not be fooled by this plant's beautiful yellow flowers! Unlike Vermont's native blue iris, this intrepid invasive silently spreads to outcompete native plants. If left to its own devices, Yellow Iris won't stop until it's the only plant around.

Being located at the lower end of the massive Missisquoi River Watershed isn't easy. The refuge's floodplain forest gets bombarded with floodwater from upstream sources. Flooding can bring threats, including the roots, stems, and seeds, of invasive plants! The floodwaters eventually recede, but the invasive plant parts usually succeed, and happily make the refuge their new home!

Missisquoi's floodplain forest is in imminent danger. A hostile takeover, by the invasive Yellow Iris, is happening right before our very eyes. Your help is needed to stop Yellow Iris in its tracks by marking flowering plants now, so a herbicide treatment can be done in the fall. The control and containment of Yellow Iris, and other invasive plants, is a **PRIORITY** in maintaining healthy and diverse habitats for wildlife at Missisquoi NWR.

Volunteers are needed to walk the refuge's floodplain forest, and mark all flowering Invasive Yellow Iris. Rubber boots and bug repellent will be necessary. When blooming begins in June we'll spring into action. Contact the refuge's Wildlife Biologist, Judy Sefchick (Judy_Sefchick@fws.gov) (802-868-4781), if you choose to accept this assignment. Once blooming begins, Judy will contact you with the dates and times that you can help.

Refuge Manager's Update - May, 2019

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR

In looking back to my last update for the newsletter, I find it interesting that I feel like repeating some of the same statements. For example “watch the trees break bud and for the grasslands and forest to green up as the summer approaches” still applies to the refuge now. Thanks to a very wet and colder than normal spring, we find that the development of refuge habitats are a bit behind. Indeed, the floodplain forest has been underwater for the entire spring, which is setting back plant development in the understory by weeks. While flooding on the refuge is normal and expected, prolonged flooding and flooding above 100' mean sea level is less common. In fact, since 1990, the lake gauge at Rouse's Point has recorded lake levels over 100' m.s.l. only 5 times during April and May.

If you have walked the trails on the refuge, you have certainly experienced this high water. The Black Creek/Maquam Creek trail has been 90% underwater since ice-out. The lower portion of the Railroad Passage trail has been completely submerged along with most of the Discovery Trail since the thaw. This not only makes accessing the refuge trails impossible (or at least difficult using some tall boots!) but also spells out likely maintenance work which will be required to bring our trails back up to snuff after the flood waters recede.

Regardless of temperature and precipitation, the birdlife of the refuge appears mostly unperturbed by the floodwater. In fact, waterfowl and other waterbirds appear to be just about everywhere right now exploiting the shallowly flooded fields and forest edges for foraging and roosting opportunities. Great blue herons have set up their rookery and are on nests along with osprey and eagles throughout the floodplain forest. Grassland birds

like bobolinks are crowding into drier fields on the east side of Tabor road to avoid the flooded fields to the west. Black terns are back and actively seeking areas where they can set up nests in this unusually high spring lake level.

We have a busy summer ahead of us and are lucky to have been able to bring back our Park Ranger, Jennifer Thelen for another season. Jennifer worked with us last year so she is able to pick back up and get involved with the refuge seamlessly. Her efforts this summer will focus on conducting education and outreach, both on and off the refuge, as much as possible. We hope to be able to continue quality environmental education through this season making up for the loss of our permanent Park Ranger position last summer.

Missisquoi is also fortunate to be able to host the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) for their annual board meeting this June. The NWRA is a non-profit exclusively focused on protecting and promoting the 850 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System. The NWRA supports friends organizations, promotes the refuge system on Capitol Hill and works to conserve the integrity of the refuge system through protecting buffering areas surrounding refuges. If you are interested in connecting with the NWRA while they are at Missisquoi, please contact me for more information.

This has been a trying spring – I think everyone is ready for warmer and drier weather. Nonetheless, I hope you take the time to get out now, even in-between rain showers (!) to visit the refuge. This is a great time to see the great variety of migratory birds nesting and passing through the refuge. Just plan to bring your boots!

A Note of Thanks

Do you enjoy the Missisquoi Matters newsletters? Please join us in sending thanks to our longtime editor, Ken Copenhaver! For the better part of the past decade, he has been the driving force behind our newsletters, diligently keeping us on schedule, suggesting article topics, compiling and editing each edition. In addition to the behind-the-scenes work in their production, Ken serves as the Friends' Vice-President, co-leads our

monthly bird walks and helps with our website maintenance.

This edition marks a transition for us, as Ken is retiring from his newsletter duties. Newly appointed Board Member Al Crist has agreed to step into the role as our new editor. Al has newsletter editing experience with other organizations, and has been working with Ken on this conversion for the past few months.

Thank You to both Ken and Al!



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.

Eagle Point WMA Bird Walk

Saturday, June 8, 8:00 AM

Join the Friends of Missisquoi NWR along with the Memphremagog Watershed Association for a morning of birding and exploration at Eagle Point Wildlife Management Area. This 420 acre tract of property on the shore of Lake Memphremagog near the town of Newport became part of the Missisquoi NWR in 2010 and is managed in partnership with the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

The property consists of a mix of upland and wetland habitats including northern hardwood forest, hemlock seepage forest, managed grassland, and a diverse wetland complex formed around Hall's Creek. The varied habitats should produce an impressive number of species to be seen. Note: there are no facilities on the property. This walk will be led by Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti.

Directions to Eagle Point:

- From East Main Street in Newport (VT5) turn left on Sias Avenue (heading north) – .6miles
- Sias Avenue turns into Darling Hill Road – 1.6mi
- Continue straight on North Derby Road – 2.1mi
- At the end, make a left onto Eagle Point Farm Road (T-17) and follow to Eagle Point WMA – 1.4 mi

“Art on the Refuge”

continues through July 19th

If you haven't already, stop by the Visitor Center to see the annual “Art on the Refuge” art show. The show kicked off with an artist's reception the night prior to the World Migratory Bird Day celebration that took place on May 18th, and will continue through July 19th. This year there are 31 artists represented and their work includes photos, paintings, watercolors, sculpture, and wall hangings. Most of the artworks are for sale.



May 17th Artists Reception at the Visitor's Center

Junior Waterfowl Hunter Training Program Saturday, August 17, 8:00am - 4:30pm

This long running program is being offered to young hunters, age 12 to 17, who want to learn more about the sport of waterfowl hunting and experience a high quality waterfowl hunt. Each young hunter must have an adult waterfowl hunter to serve as a mentor.

The program instructs beginning hunters in the knowledge and skills necessary to become responsible individuals who strive to learn all they can about waterfowl and to become knowledgeable in firearms safety, hunter ethics and wildlife conservation. Mentors and youths must pre-register with the Refuge by Monday, August 12. Participation in the program will be limited to 40 enrollees.

All mentors and young hunters must attend the one-day training session at the Franklin County Sportsman's Club on Route 36 (Maquam Shore Road) in St. Albans. Dress accordingly; the training session will be held rain or shine. All youth participants should bring the shotgun they intend to use for hunting to the training for a patterning session.

Junior Hunters and their mentors, once they complete the training, are awarded exclusive use of several premier hunting areas at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge for the first four weekends of the waterfowl hunting season. Juniors are only permitted to shoot for the first two weekends, mentors will be permitted to shoot alongside their juniors the last two weekends of the junior hunt. Blind sites and hunting dates for the Jr. Hunters are determined by a lottery conducted at the annual training session.

To register for this year's program, call refuge headquarters at 802-868-4781. Please include the mentor's name and youth's name and age, address and telephone number. If you have any questions about the program, please contact Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, at 802-868-4781.

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

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 110 months of walks we have recorded 158 species of birds. Registration for the walks is not required. The schedule for the next three months is:

June 15: Railroad Trail. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center and across the road from the marsh.

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

August 17: Jeep Trail. Meet at the Louie's Landing parking lot located on Rte 78, approx 3 ½ miles west of Swanton village. From there we will drive to the trail head at Mac's Landing.

All 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".

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.



Peeping, Toms, and other Signs of Spring

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR

It's May . . . at least, *I think it is*. The clocks and calendars say so, but the still-chilly air, nighttime frost, and cold gray days, say otherwise. More of a winter-extension than an actual spring, it's been a season that only a mother (Mother Nature that is) could love. It's probably safe to say that most Vermonters—both people *and wildlife*—are looking forward to something different. With no end to the 'big chill' in sight, thank goodness there's peeping, Toms, and other signs of spring, that offer a ray of hope.

To some, this year was reminiscent of a good old-fashioned Vermont winter. To others, it felt like a never-ending nightmare. Fearing that spring wouldn't come, my cabin-fever took a fanatical turn for the worse. Then, in the cool, dark, depths of March madness, a clear, high-pitched whistle put all my fears to rest. After all, who dares question the motive of a spring peeper? As its name implies, spring had arrived!

Though only one inch in length, and weighing the same as a sheet of paper, spring peepers shouldn't be underestimated. Having the ability to shut down their metabolism, to spend the winter literally freezing under leaf litter, is only one part of their story. Spring peepers also take a leap-of-faith in the fall, by getting their bodies 'almost-ready' to breed. With that being accomplished, it's easy to see why peepers are so willing and able to start the spring season, even before the ice melts!

Singing spring songs to attract a female is way more difficult than it sounds! Night after night, for weeks at a

time, male peepers congregate for a compelling competition: who can call the fastest and lowest? Peeping at < 1 second intervals means they can produce 3,000 – 4,000 peeps per hour! What's more, their peeping can be heard a half-mile away. The energy expended by their peeping is said to be about the same as a human running. Who knew that spring peepers could sing-their-hearts-out and get a workout at the same time?



As you may suspect, after the peeping came Tom, strutting his stuff and gobbling, trying his best to attract a mate. Seeing him display in all his glory, was definitive--spring had definitely sprung! After all, who in their right mind would argue with a turkey? Large, but surprisingly mobile, turkeys can run at speeds of 25 mph, fly at speeds of 35 mph, and bust through tree limbs (in Incredible Hulk fashion) to roost! With Toms and jakes gathering together to form gangs, err flocks, questioning these birds is definitely out of the question!

Many signs of spring give me comfort. A peenting woodcock, silver maples bursting with blossoms, and the first queen bumble bee, give me reassurance that all is well. How lucky I am to experience springtime with them, at this place called Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge!

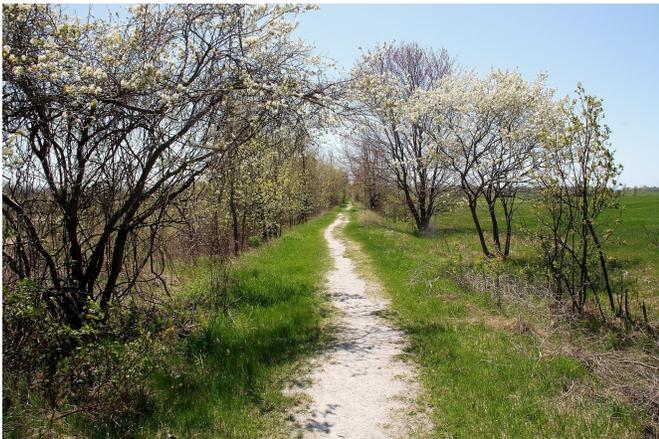


Refuge Staff and Volunteers enjoyed a rainy morning cleaning up along Route 78, the Missisquoi River, and Cabot Marsh as part of Vermont's annual Green-Up Day efforts.

The Old Railroad Passage Trail: The short history of the Lamoille Valley Extension Railroad

by Greg Simard, Friends of MNWR member

If you've ever walked the Old Railroad Passage Trail on the Missisquoi NWR, you may have wondered why an old railroad bed exists in this particular location, so close to the currently-active railroad. Well, here is the unlikely story.



By the late 1850's the Central Vermont Railroad (CV) and its predecessors had completed lines extending out to Alburgh and then to Rouses Point, NY. The railroad included trestle crossings from West Swanton to East Alburgh and another crossing from West Alburgh to Rouses Point. At the same time, the Ogdensburg and Lake Champlain Railroad operated a line from Rouses Point to Ogdensburg, NY on the St Lawrence River.

In the 1870's a rail line from Portland, Maine to Rouses Point was planned to allow connection to Ogdensburg. Construction was completed to Swanton Junction in 1880 where it connected to the CV. This connection was at the current location of the Swanton Historical Society. Later in 1880, a 2.3 mile extension was constructed from Swanton Junction to Maquam on the shores of Lake Champlain, approximately 1 mile

south of the Swanton Town beach.

At this point, the Portland to Ogdensburg line was missing the link from Swanton to Rouses Point. The logical connection would be over the existing CV line. However, CV would have nothing to do with this connection. The Lamoille Valley Extension Railroad (LVE) was therefore created as the link connecting Swanton to Rouses Point, providing rail service all the way from Portland, Maine to Ogdensburg, NY.

Construction was started in 1883 on these remaining 11.9 miles. The line started near the Swanton Town beach, passing through the Maquam bog, across Hog Island to a trestle crossing ¼ mile south of the existing CV tracks. On the Alburgh side, the trestle landed adjacent to the existing CV trestle. From there the LVE essentially ran parallel to the CV line, including a trestle from West Alburgh to Rouses Point. The LVE was completed on January 1, 1884 and began operation at that time.

Unfortunately, the new line was competition for the existing CV railroad. To eliminate the competition, the owners of CV quietly gained controlling interest of the LVE railroad in early 1884 and shut it down.

July 1, 1884 was the last day of operations. The result was that the LVE was out of business a mere 6 months after starting operations, and by 1887 the tracks were removed.

So, what of the LVE line remains visible today? A portion of the Maquam extension is still visible in the Maquam Wildlife Management area on the south side of Rt 36, and the crossing through the Refuge is one of the refuge's trails, known now as the Old Railroad Passage Trail.

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, July 10, 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, September 11, 2019 at 6:30 pm

The Friends' Store at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge



FRIENDS STORE REOPENING!

After many months of inactivity, the Friends store has reopened! To celebrate we offered a 25% off sale during the weekend of the World Migratory Bird Day. Sales were brisk and we'll soon be replenishing the stock with new books, hats, shirts, and nature related items. We also have a great selection of local artwork nature cards, so stock up! Our summer volunteer Visitor Center hosts arrive after Memorial Day and, along with help from our member volunteers, we look forward to keeping the store open 7 days a week during the busy season. Please stop by and check out our store the next time you visit Missisquoi NWR. Please remember that all purchases require cash or checks. All profits support programs and special projects at the Refuge.

World Migratory Bird Day 2019

by Ken Copenhaver

On Saturday, May 18, the Friends and the Refuge celebrated the 26th annual World Migratory Bird Day. WMBD is traditionally held on the second Saturday of May, but at Missisquoi NWR, we hold it a week later to give the migrating birds an extra week to make it "up north." The 2019 theme was **Protect Birds: Be the Solution to Plastic Pollution.**

The day started off at 5:30 AM with a group of "early bird" birders doing a walk on the Black/Maquam Creek Trail led by Jim Osborn. Due to high water, they weren't able to go very far on the trail, so they walked slowly and let the birds come to them, tallying 56 species in just under two hours - a very good start to the day!

All participants then gathered at the Visitor Center where Ken Sturm gave a quick rundown of the day's activities and sent everyone off to look for birds. A few lucky people, chosen by lottery, got to go on the two boat trips led by Jim Osborn and Charlotte Bill - one to the Missisquoi delta and the other to Dead Creek. Everyone else divided up into two walking groups. Julie Filiberti and Ken Copenhaver took a group to Stephen Young Marsh (part of their monthly bird monitoring walks), and Ken Sturm took a group on the Old Railroad Passage Trail. All groups had excellent species counts:

Missisquoi Delta boat trip had 50 species, Dead Creek boat trip - 52 species, Stephen Young Marsh walk - 53 species, and Old Railroad Passage Trail - 52 species.

We ended up with a total of 105 bird species for the day. This beat the 2018 count of 94 species, but didn't quite match our high count of 113 species in 2016. Numbers were boosted by some early morning and late evening counts done by volunteers for the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, who were surveying for nocturnal and crepuscular species. The "bird of the day" was the Trumpeter Swan, with two spotted by the Missisquoi delta boating group - a great addition to our WMBD species list, which now totals 166 species tallied since 1999.

Following the morning walks and boat trips, everyone returned to the Visitor Center for a lunch of pizza, supplied by the Friends, followed by an informative presentation by Tom Rogers from Vermont Fish and Wildlife titled "The Birds of Vermont in a Changing Landscape and Climate." Throughout the day, visitors enjoyed the artwork on display at the Visitor Center. The Friends annual "Art on the Refuge" art show will continue through July 19. Hope you can join us for next year's WMBD!