



MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Winter, 2019 - 2020

Volunteer Spotlight

With this newsletter we begin a new semi-regular column that will highlight a Missisquoi NWR volunteer. The refuge has over 75 volunteers that perform invaluable services to the refuge. This year the refuge benefitted from over 1,000 hours of volunteer support – support for habitat management, maintenance, and visitor services.

This issue we're shining the spotlight on Dave Filiberti of Fairfax, VT.

Missisquoi Matters: How did you discover the refuge?

Dave Filiberti: The short and sweet answer to this question is that I did not discover but was introduced to the refuge by my wife Julie.

MM: Why do you volunteer your time to the refuge?

DF: Long before I decided to volunteer, I had participated in some of the activities the refuge has to offer. I had walked the Black Creek and Maquam Creek Nature Trails in all four seasons. I had viewed wildlife while standing on the Stephen J. Young Observation Platform. I had walked on the raised wooden platforms located on the Discovery Trail and I had walked on the Jeep Trail to where it meets Lake Champlain. I had participated in several of the volunteer-led monthly bird walks and seasonal owl walks. I was in a position to volunteer. I am recently retired after 43 years at a corporate desk job. Our two daughters are grown and independent and quite frankly I needed some sort of break from my seemingly never improving golf game. Over the years other volunteers have helped me enjoy some of the wonders that the refuge has to offer so I guess part of me felt that it was my time to help out.

MM: What tasks do you do?

DF: Ha... What a great question. Need some code

written in C++ to monitor your inventory? Need some VBA logic coded into an EXCEL spreadsheet so your application has a friendly user interface? How about some help building a WEB page? Good tools for working in a corporate world, but what could I do in the great outdoors? My wife will tell you that given a compass and placed in the middle of the woods I may never be seen again. But I found out that the paid staff of the refuge very much appreciate all volunteer hours and are willing to work with you, and in some cases pay for your training. So, in 2018 I enrolled in government paid courses and I am now certified to drive big tractors and ATVs on government property. In my first volunteer year I used my tractor training to brush-hog 100 acres of grassland which runs along the East side of Tabor road. Also, during my first year I used my ATV training to transfer materials needed to support the refuge's autumn duck banding efforts. This year I enrolled in a motorboat certification course, again paid for with taxpayers' dollars. This was a great three-day course that, when passed, allows you to navigate a motorboat along the refuge waterways.

MM: How long have you been volunteering?

DF: 2019 was my second full season volunteering at the refuge.

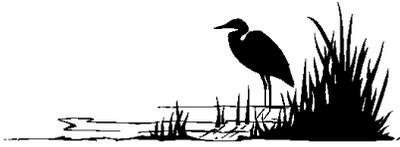
MM: How do you spend your time on the refuge when you aren't volunteering?

DF: My wife, Julie, is a big birder. I am not. I am a little birder. I am a fan of golf. However, over the years, especially in the non-golfing months (of which there are six here in northern Vermont) I have become more inclined to indulge in Julie's birding passion. One will find me walking all the trails bird watching throughout the winter months.

MM: What is your favorite place on the refuge?

DF: One of the best 'perks' of volunteering is that you have supervised access to

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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

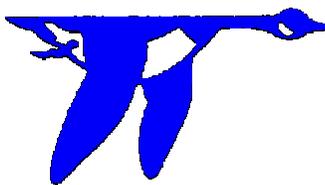
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Newsletter edited by Al Crist

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

Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

Volunteer Accomplishments

<p><u>Maintenance</u> 420 Total Hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Mowing Trails and Trail Work •Kiosk Repair and Maintenance •Building Repairs •Building Maintenance •Duck Blind Trail Maintenance •Waterfowl Banding Sites 	<p><u>Wildlife and Habitat</u> 260 Total Hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Invasive Species Control •Waterfowl Banding •Beaver and Muskrat Surveys •Bee Survey and Data Entry •Turtle Beach Monitoring and Maintenance
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Over 1,000 Hours Volunteered

76 Volunteers in 2018-2019

<u>Wildlife Dependent Recreation and Education/Outreach</u>	
300 Total Hours	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Monthly Bird Walks •Nature Walks •Junior Waterfowl Training Day •Art Show •Bookstore Staffing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Spring Trash Cleanup •Migratory Bird Day •Staffing the Visitor Center •Bird Tales •The Big Sit

areas on the refuge that are generally not accessible to the general public. I'll never forget the sense of awe I felt the first time I visited Cranberry Pool. During the fall of 2018 I was part of a group which consisted of members of the refuge staff and other volunteers. Our chore for the day was to establish and prepare two sites in Cranberry Pool to be used for duck banding. We started out at Mac's Bend where we boarded a small boat which we took down the Missisquoi river to the other side. From there we all crammed into an ATV which took us through a small patch of woods. When we emerged from the back side of the woods there sat Cranberry Pool in all its spectacular glory. Seeing this vast pool of water, wild rice, and other wetland vegetation nearly took my breath away. I honestly felt that I had somehow been transported back in time. Great Blue Herons took flight slowly floating across the sky. A dozen majestic eagles patrolled the waters below. The Osprey still in the area were fishing for their meals. The Great Egrets had arrived and created sort of a white canvas in the far end of the pool. As we moved along the dike which helps control the water level in the pool, hundreds upon hundreds of Red-winged Blackbirds lifted out of the wild rice which fills Cranberry Pool.

MM: What do you feel is the most important aspect of the refuge?

DF: I believe the refuge as it exists today serves many purposes. Birds depend on areas such as the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge as both a place to rest and refuel during their annual spring and fall migrations, and for some to call home for the summer

and raise their young. Hunters and fishermen have access to a truly wild area where they can practice their skills and pass the passion of their sport on to the next generation of outdoor enthusiast. The five main walking trails located on the refuge and the Headquarters located on Tabor Road are great places where parents can bring their young children. The refuge has programs throughout the year that places special emphasis on teaching children the value of what the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge has to offer. Who knows, maybe some of today's young visitors will retire from their working career, remember visiting the refuge in their youth, and come back and volunteer.



Dave Filiberti

If Dave's story has inspired you and you would like to volunteer at the refuge, contact Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager. Ken can be reached at 802-868-4781 or by email to Ken_Sturm@fws.gov

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, January 8, 2020 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 11, 2020 at 6:30 pm

Refuge Managers Update - November 2019



Looking out the window as I write this, I could be mistaken into believing it is mid-January. With the intense cold and early snowfall it sure seems

like the middle of winter at Missisquoi all of the sudden. The rapid change in temperatures quickly froze all of the refuge wetlands, and just yesterday, the lion's share of the Missisquoi River froze up. This early freeze has a dramatic effect on the wildlife using the refuge. When just last week I could see hundreds of waterfowl loafing and feeding in refuge wetlands, most have now left the refuge seeking open water. Only a few hardy great blue herons can be found skulking along the riverbanks looking for any shred of open water in hopes of a hard-earned meal.

While this sudden change in weather is a bit of a surprise, it completely fits into what seems to be the norm here at Missisquoi. Just when you think you can make a plan, the weather changes dramatically and all plans go out the window. We experienced a similar weather problem last spring with exceptionally high water that flooded all of the refuge's trails and infrastructure as well as all its emergent marsh habitat which effected refuge management priorities and shifted wildlife use patterns of refuge habitat. I have been heard to say that there is either too much water, not enough water, too much ice or not enough ice for the refuge to carry out its plans. Such is the life working on a large, dynamic, and complex river delta! The refuge staff have been busy catching their breath after an exceptionally busy field season and are starting to do the necessary maintenance and data management put aside during the summer.

We said goodbye to Jennifer Thelen, our

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR

seasonal Park Ranger this month. For those of you who met Jenn, or attended one of her programs, you will certainly understand that we were sorry to see her finish her term at Missisquoi. Jenn brought renewed enthusiasm for outreach and education to the refuge for the second season in a row. This year she increased outreach to our "gateway" communities of Swanton and Alburgh through collaborations with local libraries and community events. She completed revisions of the Missisquoi Educator's Guide, a resource for teachers and educators to enrich their experience at the refuge. If you are interested, you can download a copy of the new educator's guide here:

<http://www.fws.gov/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147618990>

Late fall and winter are the times when the refuge staff can evaluate the previous year's work and start planning for the next year. We will be evaluating this year's work and setting goals for next season. Many of these goals include the help of the Friends of Missisquoi and other volunteers. If anyone reading this newsletter is curious about what the Friends Group is involved with I encourage you to come to the next board meeting and find out! There are plenty of opportunities to get involved and the refuge appreciates all of the support we get from our great volunteers.

Lastly, I hope that everyone remembers that our trails remain open during the winter and that it is a great place to walk, snowshoe, or cross-country ski. Wildlife observation takes on a new challenge during the winter months, more like detective work looking for clues – so I encourage everyone to be their inner wildlife detective and get out and enjoy the wildlife and habitats that the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge protects and manages!



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 116 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:

- December 21:** **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.
- January 18:** **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.
- February 15:** **Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton village.

Save the Date for 'Bird Tales' Thursday evening, February 6, 2020

Save the date! Thursday evening, February 6, 2020, will be our 4th annual Evening of Bird Tales. This popular event will feature a variety of speakers sharing entertaining stories and information about "everything and anything birds." If you are interested in participating as a speaker, please email us at info@friendsofmissisquoi.org.

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!



The Audubon Christmas Bird Count - Give It a Try!

Are you looking for a fun winter event? If so, why not try a nearby Christmas Bird Count? It sounds cold and slightly intimidating but it's actually a whole lot of fun. Here are some FAQ's.

What is the Christmas Bird Count?

Sponsored by the National Audubon Society, it's the world's largest "citizen science" project. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is a census of birds in the Western Hemisphere, performed annually during the Christmas season by volunteer birders. The purpose is to provide population data for use in science, especially in conservation biology, though most people participate for recreation as well.

Does it take place on Christmas day?

Usually not. National Audubon requires that counts take place any day from December 14th to January 5th inclusive.

When and why did it first begin?

The first count took place in 1900. At that time a "Side Hunt" was a popular Christmas diversion. Participants would choose sides and go a-field with their guns. Whichever side brought home the largest number of furred and feathered quarry won the hunt. In response, a new tradition was proposed, a "Christmas Bird Census" to count birds rather than to hunt them.

What were the results of the 1900 count?

There were just 27 participants for the 1900 count. These dedicated birders did 25 separate counts that day. The counts were mostly in the northeastern U.S. but ranged south to Louisiana, north into Canada, and west to Colorado. They tallied about 18,500 birds comprised of 90 total species

How about last year's results?

Wow, how this thing has grown! 2,585 separate counts were completed during the 2017-2018 CBC (last year's results have not yet been released). The 76,987 birders who participated counted over 59 million individual birds. 2,673 different species were sighted.

What geographic area is covered by the CBC?

Counts are conducted in every state in the U.S. and every province and territory in Canada. Counts also occur in Latin America, as well as the islands of the Caribbean and of the Pacific. Most of the participants are in the U. S. (58,719) and Canada (14,264). 4,004 counters represented Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands.

What are the methods used for each count?

Each individual count is performed in a "count circle" with a diameter of 15 miles. The volunteers break up

into small parties and count in assigned areas, counting every bird they see or hear. In most count circles, some people also count at home feeders.

How is the data used?

The data collected over the past 119 years allows researchers and conservation biologists to study the long-term health and status of bird populations. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred plus years. The long term perspective made possible by the CBC is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat - and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.

Do I need to be a good birder to participate?

No. In fact the CBC is great for beginners. The number of species present is much smaller than in other seasons and birds are easily seen in winter.

Sounds way too cold for me. Won't I be miserable?

Definitely not. You'll probably spend most of your time birding from a car, with occasional walks thrown in.

Does a count circle include Missisquoi NWR?

No, but two counts are fairly close by (see below).

Any chance food is involved?

Yes. There's usually good food and lots of fun at the compilation dinner.

OK, convince me. Why should I do this?

Mostly because it's so much fun. How often do you get the chance to spend a whole day birding? Throw in the camaraderie of your count group, the fun when all the counters get together at the compilation dinner, and the fact that for one day you will completely forget the worries and hum-drum of your daily life, it becomes obvious this is a really great event. Try it once and I bet you'll be hooked.

The Champlain Islands CBC takes place on Sunday, December 15th. It covers portions of Alburgh, Isle LaMotte, North Hero, Grand Isle, Point Au Roche, NY, and St. Albans. Email Terry Marron at tgmarron@comcast.net

The East Franklin County CBC takes place on Saturday, January 4th. It covers stretches of the Missisquoi and Trout Rivers, the eastern half of Lake Carmi, large chunks of our Cold Hollow to Canada forests, and the villages of Montgomery, Richford, Enosburg and Berkshire. Email Charlotte Bill at east.franklin.vt.cbc@gmail.com

Big Sit Results

Team “Missisquoi Marsh Mellows” took the field on a beautiful Saturday, October 12th, led by team captain Rich Kelly and star birder & food caterer Julie Filiberti. The team took control of the observation platform at Stephen J. Young Marsh at Missisquoi NWR before dawn and would not yield control until the Big Sit ended at 6 pm. The sitting was long and hard, and combined with strenuous bouts of raising binoculars to eyes, chatting, laughing, and eating, quite favorable results were produced. A great time was had by all and 33 species were sighted during the sit.



A core group of four (Rich Kelly, Julie Filiberti, Carol Yarnelle, and Jim Osborn) were joined by another 10 to 12 sitters at various times throughout the day. It was a beautiful fall day: mostly clear, unseasonably warm, and fairly calm. Bird activity was a bit slow but fairly constant with the expected afternoon lull. The highlight of the day were several large flights of Cormorants that flew directly over the marsh. Over 1,000 birds passed in 10 minutes and the sound was impressive. 7 new species were added to our Big Sit list.

Julie was the sole beginning-to-end sitter and also was responsible for an impressive hospitality table of food and snacks that sustained the strenuous activity of the sitters throughout the day. Here are the species seen during the sit:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Canada Goose | 12. Pileated Woodpecker | 23. European Starling |
| 2. Wood Duck | 13. Merlin | 24. American Pipit |
| 3. Blue-winged Teal | 14. Eastern Phoebe | 25. Pine Siskin |
| 4. American Woodcock | 15. Blue Jay | 26. American Goldfinch |
| 5. Ring-billed Gull | 16. Common Raven | 27. Palm Warbler |
| 6. Double-crested Cormorant | 17. American Crow | 28. Yellow-rumped Warbler |
| 7. Great Blue Heron | 18. Black-capped Chickadee | 29. Swamp Sparrow |
| 8. Turkey Vulture | 19. White-breasted Nuthatch | 30. Song Sparrow |
| 9. Bald Eagle | 20. Hermit Thrush | 31. Red-winged Blackbird |
| 10. Great Horned Owl | 21. American Robin | 32. Rusty Blackbird |
| 11. Downy Woodpecker | 22. Gray Catbird | 33. Common Grackle |

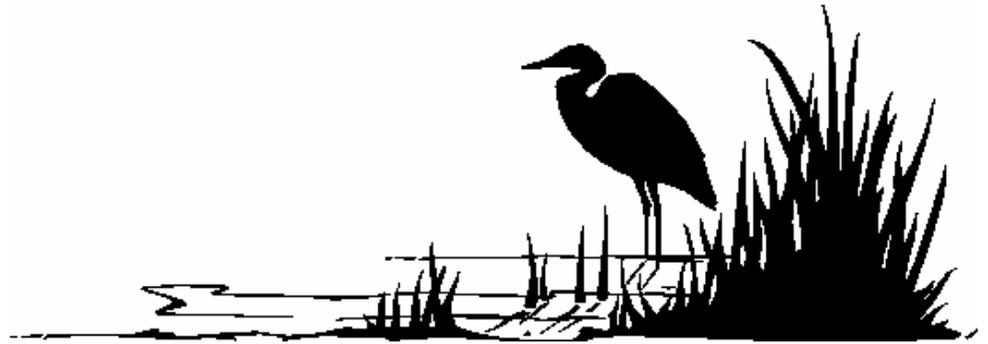
The Friends' Store at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

The Friends Store is now closed for the winter season. We thank our volunteers who helped staff the store this year. Revenue from the Store continues to generously support our programs. Any Friends member interested in helping out next season is encouraged to contact us. A brief orientation will be held in the spring.

Watch for next year's opening and special member discount sale which will be advertised in future newsletters. The Store is an excellent resource for nature books, souvenir hats and shirts, guides, water bottles, etc. And, a big thank you to all who have stopped by and made a purchase this year! Every sale makes a difference.

Cathie Waltz, Store Manager

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



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.)