



# MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF  
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Fall, 2020



## Fall 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 continues to play havoc with the activity schedule at the refuge. The Visitor's Center is closed until further notice. The monthly Bird Monitoring Walks are on hiatus but it is possible they may resume later this year.

It is possible that The Big Sit will occur this year. Taking place in mid-October, it's an all day count of birds with participants staying within a 17 ft. diameter circle. In the past we have used the observation deck at the Stephen J. Young marsh for The Sit. If the Friends can figure out how to modify the event to insure safe social distancing, The Big Sit could still happen. As October approaches, check the Friends website for more information.

In a normal year, fall at the refuge is a wonderful time of year. Don't let the coronavirus stop you from enjoying our wonderful refuge. All trails are open (subject to periodic closures for various hunting seasons) and waiting for you to enjoy. **Be sure to read the "Seasonal Trail Closures and Advisories" on page 4 of the newsletter.** Most fortunately, deerly activity has abated on the trails after a hellish summer deerly season. There is birding, botanizing, and wildlife watching in abundance for you to experience. Just be sure to stay safe and to respect the habitat. 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.

Make your own fun and make new discoveries!

**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".**

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

## Refuge Managers Update - August, 2020

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR



Invasive species do not care about COVID-19. While staff were sheltering in place, teleworking during the spring and early summer, the host of invasive species on the refuge did not seem to follow our lead. Nature marches on regardless of what we do.

Refuge staff had been required to telework until we were given approval for limited field operations in early June. One of our biggest concerns was ensuring that the progress we have made controlling invasive plants would not be lost while managing staff safety during COVID-19.

Fortunately, staff and volunteers have been back in the field working to survey and control invasive plants. This was particularly important to evaluate the floodplain forest for new patches of Japanese knotweed that came downstream during two floods over the last year. This species is an aggressive stand-replacing invasive that is abundant along many streams and rivers in the state. We have been successfully controlling this species through a combination of mechanical and chemical techniques on the refuge over the years. Luckily, we were able to start field surveys, and with the help of a hardy volunteer, get a handle on where these patches are springing up.

Our staff have also been working hard at controlling water chestnut during July and early August. Thanks to the Friends of Missisquoi, a grant was once again received to allow the refuge to contract invasive species control while conducting the water chestnut removal with our staff. Funds from the Friends of Missisquoi were used to control poison parsnip, purple loosestrife, European buckthorn, Phragmites, and more on refuge lands this season. Meanwhile our biologist, Judy Sefchick, and Maintenance Mechanic Joe Bertrand, have been putting in many days surveying for and removing water chestnut. The good news is that our control operations for water chestnut have paid off. Being optimistic, it appears that over the years our control efforts of this species has limited its distribution on the refuge as well as its abundance where we are still finding it.

Although much has changed during this unusual time, the refuge has stayed laser focused on ensuring

that we do not lose ground on invasives control.



I credit the dedication of the refuge staff along with our volunteers and the Friends of Missisquoi for ensuring that the march of invasives through the refuge does not get the upper hand during this pandemic. And one last comment about this pandemic. While there is little good in how our lives have changed in the last 6 months, one thing I have noticed is an increase in individuals and families walking refuge trails and accessing other natural areas. When the rest of the world seems unimaginable, it is comforting to hike in the woods, quietly watch a pond for wildlife and enjoy nature. I hope that you take advantage of these opportunities at the Missisquoi NWR and safely explore our trails.



**A boatload of water chestnut**

## Missisquoi's Field of Dreams

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR



Once upon a time, there was a bright idea. The staff of Missisquoi NWR put their heads together and thought, 'If we build it, they will come.' Lacking support, both moral and greenback, an ambassador went forth to

implore both. Upon hearing the request, the benevolent *Friends of Missisquoi NWR* immediately granted their wish. In the blink of an eye, construction was complete in the spring of 2017.

Afterwards, there were years of watching, waiting, and wondering, 'We built it, why won't they come?' Eventually, hand wringing and nail biting ensued. There were whispers about someone seeing one, then rumors about deconstruction with reassembly elsewhere. Just when it seemed that all hope was lost...*they came!* What seemed like an eternity was in fact, merely three years. In the spring of 2020, news of their coming spread quickly. "Hear ye hear ye, the Martins have arrived! Long live Missisquoi's Field of Dreams!"

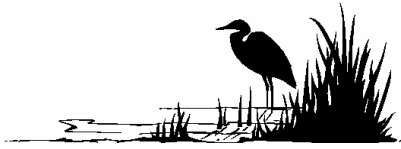
Sorry sports fans; there are no baseball diamonds, bleachers, or glimpses of Shoeless Joe Jackson here. At Missisquoi's Field of Dreams, there are acres of untamed grasslands instead of manicured three-acre fields. 'Home base' refers to an array of white gourds on a pulley, and 'safe' means that the 5,000-mile marathon-flying martins arrived relatively unscathed.

At a mere eight inches, purple martins are *the largest* swallow in North America. Early migrants from South America, they arrive in Vermont in mid-April, despite being picky eaters (flying insects only) who hate the cold! This year, Missisquoi's martins braved rain, sleet, and snow in *April and May*; even Covid-19 didn't keep them away. Seeing them, the staff jumped for joy!

Older adult male martins arrive first, but contrary to popular belief, they don't scout or act as informants. Instead, their time is spent defending territories. Early in the season, a single male can defend multiple gourds or up to 36 different compartments in a bird house! Later-arriving males defend fewer, and females defend fewer still. With all of the confusing back-and-forth and territorial behavior, it's no wonder that we could never say for sure exactly how many Missisquoi martins were there.

The spring and summer of 2020 will be remembered for many things: snow in May, extreme heat, low Lake Champlain water levels, and the isolation of a global pandemic. Although the human world seemed to stand still, nature continued as usual. What better way to spend the day than watching purple martins fly along with tree, barn, and cliff swallows, bobolinks, and savannah sparrows, in Missisquoi's Field of Dreams?





## 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)

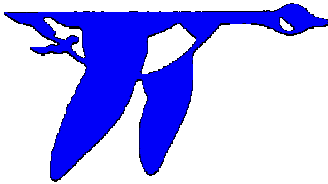
E-mail: [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org)

Newsletter edited by Al Crist

Printed copies courtesy of  
Med Associates, Inc.

### Board of Directors

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



### Refuge Staff

Ken Sturm *Refuge Manager*  
Judy Sefchick *Wildlife Biologist*  
Lisa Swainbank  
*Office Administrative Assistant*  
Joe Bertrand  
*Maintenance Mechanic*

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

## Missisquoi NWR Seasonal Trail Closures & Advisories

### Jeep Trail

#### Closed:

April 1- August 1 (Nesting Season Closure)

Youth deer weekend: Oct. 24 - 25

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 5 - 13

#### Trail Advisory:

Waterfowl Season: Oct. 10 - Dec. 8

### Discovery Trail

#### Closed:

Youth deer weekend: Oct. 24 - 25

Regular deer season: Nov. 14 - 29

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 5 - 13

#### Trail Advisory:

Archery Season: Oct. 1 - Nov 13 & Nov. 30 - Dec. 15

Small Game Season: Sept. 1-Dec. 31

### Old Railroad Passage Trail

#### Closed:

Youth deer weekend: Oct. 24 - 25

Regular deer season: Nov. 14 - 29

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 5 - 13

#### Trail Advisory:

Archery Season: Oct. 1 - Nov 13 & Nov. 30 - Dec. 15

Small Game Season: Sept. 1-Dec. 31

### Stephen J. Young Marsh Trail

#### Closed:

Youth deer weekend: Oct. 24 - 25

Regular deer season: Nov. 14 - 29

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 5 - 13

#### Trail Advisory

Archery Season: Oct. 1 - Nov 13 & Nov. 30 - Dec. 15

Small Game Season: Sept. 1-Dec. 31

The "**Trail Advisory**" is a notification that the area is currently open to hunting and visitors may proceed with caution. Trails will be posted to advise hikers that the area is open to hunting.

The **Black Creek/Maquam Creek Trail** area is closed to hunting and is a great choice for those not wishing to hike in an area which may have hunters.

## Refuge Update - July, 2020

At every bi-monthly Friends of Missisquoi board meeting, Ken Sturm, refuge manager, gives the board members a “refuge update”. I find this extremely interesting and for me it is often the highlight of the meeting. I plan to post an abbreviated version of Ken’s most recent update in future newsletters. Here are the highlights from our July Zoom meeting. Enjoy! (*editor*)

### **Biology:**

- Judy Sefchick (refuge biologist) was permitted to return to field work on June 8. We are still emphasizing teleworking when weather conditions do not allow for field work.
- First round of contractor invasive species spraying occurred in June. There will be a follow up along Rt. 78 and Mac’s Bend in late July. This project will be funded by the Friends Grant with the Lake Champlain Basin Program.
- Black tern surveys were conducted in June and July. Still some nests with eggs in early July.
- Three eagle nests on the refuge with two chicks each.
- Great Blue Herons not nesting at Shad Island possibly for the first time in decades; established a smaller rookery in Big Marsh Slough (similar to last year). About 50 nests counted.
- Flooding in fall and winter seems to have increased Japanese knotweed throughout the floodplain.
- Continued mapping and controlling invasive yellow iris in floodplain forest. Thanks to Paul Madden for his help!
- Herpetologist Jim Andrews completed survey of refuge for spotted turtles. None found but many other interesting observations.

### **Public Use**

- Visitor’s Center was closed in late March.
- RV summer volunteers were cancelled due to Visitor’s Center closure.
- All programs cancelled until further notice.
- Continuing work with ECHO in Burlington on an interpretive display about the Missisquoi NWR.

### **Maintenance**

- Completed road work on Mac’s Bend in April.
- Installing “boardwalks” on the Discovery trail to elevate the path slightly where it is typically wet.
- Adding rock to the Black/Maquam trail.

### **Other**

- Louie’s Landing Boat ramp project may happen in 2021, but mussel surveys will occur this summer.
- Visitor’s Center will remain closed until the state enters “phase 3” of COVID-19 recovery based on White House “gating criteria” and DOI guidance.
- Identified an Abenaki hearth in the riverbank. Worked with Vermont Department of Historic Preservation and UVM to document and sample the site before it is lost to erosion. Contents of hearth are being examined by UVM and will be reported to the refuge and the Vermont Department of Historic Preservation.

---

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!



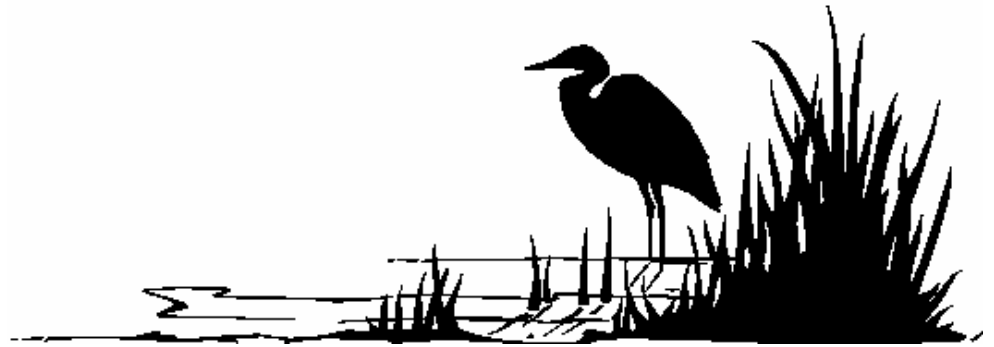
**FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

**BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING**

**Wednesday, September 9th, 2020 at 6:30 pm by Zoom**

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

Members are always welcome & encouraged to attend. Next board meeting is November 4th 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.)