



MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Fall, 2021



Fall Activities Schedule at Missisquoi NWR *29 Tabor Road, Swanton, VT 05488*

The Big Sit!

Saturday, October 9th, from sunrise to sunset

The Missisquoi Marsh Mellows will again use the observation platform at the Stephen Young Marsh as the center of their 17 ft. diameter circle and try to observe as many bird species as they can from that location. Anyone is welcome to come and join them for any part of the day. Last year 33 species were recorded.

You may wonder, what exactly is a Big Sit!? Some call it a “tailgate party for birders”. It’s an annual, international, noncompetitive, extremely sedentary birding event organized by the New Haven (Connecticut) Bird Club. 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! There are Big Sit! circles all over the world, including Guatemala, India, the Netherlands, England, Vietnam, and New Zealand. Participants can come and go as they please during the day, and the circle need not be occupied for the entire 24 hours. The platform at Stephen Young Marsh is well within the 17-foot limit.

Rain date is Sunday, October 10th.



Missisquoi Matters

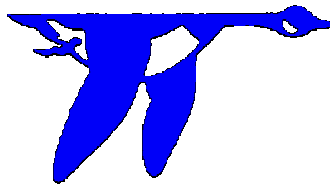
is the quarterly newsletter of the Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, dedicated to promoting a better awareness, appreciation, conservation, and responsible utilization of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

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Office Administrative Assistant
Joe Bertrand
Maintenance Mechanic

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

We are pleased to announce that we are resuming our monthly bird monitoring walks after being suspended for over a year due to COVID. Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti will lead the walks 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 136 months of walks, we have recorded 160 species of birds (Cape May Warbler was added on the May walk). Registration for the walks is not required.

COVID Notice: We will be following Vermont state COVID-19 protocols for outdoor activities. We ask that you stay home if you are feeling ill and to wear a mask if you are unvaccinated and when you can't maintain a safe social distance.

The schedule for the next three months is:

September 18: 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.

October 16: 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.

November 20: Maquam/Black Creek Trail. Meet at the parking lot located on Rte. 78, approx. 2½ miles west of Swanton village.



Cape May Warbler

If and when new Refuge 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 www.friendsofmissisquoi.org and click on "Calendar".

For more information about the refuge, visit www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi/

Refuge Managers Update - August, 2021

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR



It has been another busy summer at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. As we enter into August it is hard to believe that much of the season has flown by and we are now racing to finish biological projects as well as

planning for the fall waterfowl migration and other management projects. With such a short field season in Northern Vermont, summer is a flurry of activity as refuge staff keep pace with wildlife inventory and monitoring, and habitat management, all compressed into just a few short months.

This field season, Biologist Judy Sefchick and Maintenance Mechanic Joe Bertrand have been working side by side with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies on a project to inventory native bees on the refuge. Complementing the statewide effort to look for and catalog native bees, this project is particularly interesting, as it will provide important information for the future of grassland and shrubland management on the refuge. As we learn more about the diversity of native pollinator's on the refuge, we can develop effective habitat management techniques to protect these species, especially those which are found to be rare or in decline regionally. Already Judy and other biologists have documented several rare native bees, two of which are now known only in Vermont from Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge!

Those visiting the refuge during August and through September will notice work commencing to replace the Louie's Landing boat ramp. Long awaited, we expect construction to begin soon. The new ramp will extend further into the river allowing for easier boat launching and with less impact to the river (and boat trailers!) during low

water conditions that are typical in late summer and fall. During the construction we will open the gate at Louie's Landing to allow boaters access to the Mac's Bend ramps which typically open in September.

Thanks to the Friends of Missisquoi, the refuge continues to make great strides in controlling invasive yellow iris in our floodplains. Refuge staff and volunteers have spent several field seasons mapping the entire floodplain forest to document invasive species. Yellow iris turned out to be widespread, and in some areas very abundant. Thanks to grants received by the Friends of Missisquoi, we have been able to treat over 140 acres of floodplain forest in the last two field seasons! Even better is that follow up surveys conducted by Friends member Paul Madden and volunteer John Cheserak have documented successful control following the treatment of infested areas in 2020. Paul and John's work also contributes to the grant as "in-kind services" which will help the Friends compete for future grants to control invasive plants at the refuge.

I cannot mention invasives without commenting on our work to control water chestnut, also supported by a grant received by the Friends of Missisquoi. Maintenance Mechanic Joe Bertrand and Biologist Judy Sefchick have begun pulling water chestnut rosettes in refuge wetlands. The refuge and the Friends Group have been working on this project together for over a decade and it has been very successful in reducing the abundance of water chestnut in refuge wetlands. With low water conditions on the lake, this year's work is especially challenging, but we hope to reach all the traditional sites to keep this invasive plant in check. Look out for updates on this work in the next newsletter!

The Truth about the Birds and the Bees

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR



Although I feel it necessary, it is a bit embarrassing and uncomfortable, to say the least. Not speaking about it or postponing it, however, will not make it any easier. The time has come to have **the talk**. You know the one, about the birds and the bees of Missisquoi National Wildlife

Refuge!

So many birds...so many bees, and so little time to discuss the intimate details of their lives. In April of this year, the story of the birds began with an epic commotion in refuge grasslands. Flurries of fanciful flights and a cacophony of 'spring-of-the-year' songs, made it obvious that the time for hanky-panky had come. Despite the initial awkwardness of the situation, I was elated to see them, especially when I realized there were at least five pairs! Hip, hip, hooray, Eastern meadowlarks are here to stay, at least, for a little while! Really, why would these not-black blackbirds worriedly woo somewhere else when the refuge provides all they need? Throughout the breeding season, refuge grasslands offer 300-acres of peaceful, undisturbed (no haying, mowing, or grazing) swooning space, high-energy protein snacks (grasshoppers, grubs, and caterpillars), and an array of grasses and forbs to cover even the slightest indiscretion. What's more, the refuge's 'Area Closed' (a.k.a. 'Do Not Disturb') signs provide the utmost in privacy, thwarting any would-be interruptions from the prying public!



Eastern Meadowlark

The story of bees began in May 2018, with the refuge's first-ever Bumble Bee inventory. By the time I netted my first queen, I was smitten. During

spring, queens awaken, find nest sites, gather pollen and nectar, and lay fertilized eggs that become an all-female workforce. With her daughters doing the drudgery, the queen's only job is to expand the workforce and colony, by laying more eggs. With fall comes a plot twist that no one could imagine: the queen lays unfertilized eggs to produce **male** bees! Can you see where this is going? Hanky-panky happens and some lucky female workers become next year's queens! Truth really **is** stranger than fiction.

Fast-forward to 2021 when the plot of the bee's story thickens. This year, the refuge's first-ever Native Wild Bee Inventory has begun. With over 300 species in Vermont, and 7,000 acres of refuge habitat, this undertaking is not for the faint of heart! What's more, many, many species are small, black, and fuzz-less, making them **not** look like bees at all. I'll admit, my 'all-things-that-buzz' obsession continues to grow as I learn more about this group's diversity. For example, bees can be solitary or social nesters. Some are a brilliant green color or a subtle shade of blue. Certain species carry pollen on their legs or abdomens; others ingest it and regurgitate it later. Then there are 'bee specialists' that require specific plants to thrive and survive! Who knew?

Now comes the uncomfortable part of this story. It's embarrassing for sure, but it's my job to include it. Sadly, Eastern meadowlarks, once an abundant and easily recognized grassland bird, have experienced an 89% population decline during the past 50 years. An **annual** 8.7% population decline in Vermont means that meadowlarks are proposed to be listed as a **state-threatened species**. How I hope the black 'V' on its chest stands for victory!

Unfortunately, a worldwide decline in insects means the story of bees is similar. Once common species, the rusty-patched bumble bee is now on the Federal Endangered Species list, and the yellow-banded bumble bee is now a State-Threatened Species in Vermont. Although the truth about the birds and the bees is sobering, seeing them thrive at a place like Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge gives me comfort and hope. Threatened and endangered means there's still time...it's up to us.

Friends of Missisquoi to Receive Grant from “100 Women Who Care”

Earlier this month, refuge manager Ken Sturm was contacted by a member of the Franklin County branch of “100 Women Who Care” who told Ken that the Friends had been nominated to receive a grant from their organization. Established in February 2018, the Franklin County branch consists of a group of local women interested in making a difference in Franklin County. The organization’s mission is to provide financial assistance to non-profit organizations that have a strong presence in, and serve the residents, of Franklin County, Vermont.

Ken, accompanied by Friends Board Member Cathie Waltz, then made a presentation at their August meeting to request funds for environmental education and interpretation, especially for kids, at the refuge. Since the loss of Park Ranger David Frisque, the refuge has been unable to provide meaningful programming and interpretive walks for school groups, camps, and for the public. Thanks to “100 Women Who Care”, the Friends will be receiving a grant to help provide these services to our community! We greatly appreciate being nominated and selected as organization to receive funds from this fantastic group of women!

Friends Welcome New Board Member, Kelly Smith

Kelly joins us as a fierce advocate for outdoor engagement and place-based education. As a graduate of the Liberal Arts college, Saint Michael's College, she believes that connection to community and hands-on experience is a true driver of learning and growth. Kelly is excited to begin her work with Friends of MNWR and hopes to expand our circle of engagement through various social media platforms. It is her goal to share the wealth of opportunities that thrive in the Refuge and encourage folks to see for themselves!"



Refuge Visitor’s Center Now Open!

After an extended Covid related closure, the Missisquoi NWR Visitor’s Center on Tabor Road has re-opened. It is now open Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 7:00am until 3:30pm. However, the Friends Book Store, located in the Visitor’s Center, remains closed.

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!



Seasonal Trail Closures and Advisories-

Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

**For a pleasant and safe hiking experience at the Refuge,
use this guide to help plan your outing.**

Jeep Trail

Closed:

April 1- August 1 (Nesting Season Closure)

Youth deer weekend: Oct. 23 - 24

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 4 - 12

Trail Advisory:

Waterfowl Season: Oct. 13 - Dec. 11

Discovery Trail

Closed:

Youth deer weekend: Oct. 23 - 24

Regular deer season: Nov. 13 - 28

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 4 - 12

Trail Advisory:

Archery Season: Oct. 1 - Nov 12 & Nov. 29 - Dec. 15

Small Game Season: Sept. 1-Dec. 31

Old Railroad Passage Trail

Closed:

Youth deer weekend: Oct. 23 - 24

Regular deer season: Nov. 13 - 28

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 4 - 12

Trail Advisory:

Archery Season: Oct. 1 - Nov 12 & Nov. 29 - Dec. 15

Small Game Season: Sept. 1-Dec. 31

Stephen J. Young Marsh Trail

Closed:

Youth deer weekend: Oct. 23 - 24

Regular deer season: Nov. 13 - 28

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 4 - 12

Trail Advisory

Archery Season: Oct. 1 - Nov 12 & Nov. 29 - 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.

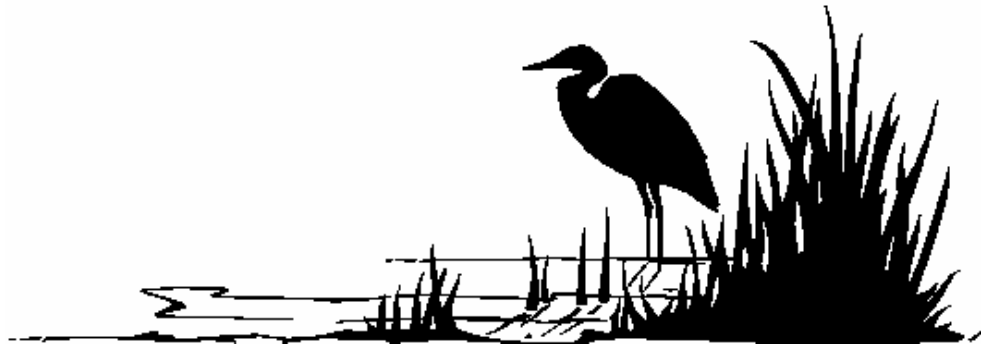
The **Black Creek/Maquam Creek Trail** area is completely closed to hunting and is a great choice for those not wishing to hike in an area which may have hunters.

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, September 8th, 2021 at 6:30 pm by Zoom

email info@friendsofmissisquoi.org if you'd like to attend via Zoom

Members are always welcome & encouraged to attend. Next board meeting is Nov. 10th 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. 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: _____