



# MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF  
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Spring, 2023



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

### Invasive Species in Vermont - A Friends Lecture Series

The Friends of Missisquoi NWR have put together an exciting and informative series of presentations about the invasive species that threaten Vermont's varied ecosystems. These three offerings are free online Zoom presentations and you can register for each at the Friends website at:

<http://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>

#### **Invasive Pests and Forest Health - Thursday, March 9th, 7:00 pm via Zoom**

This is the first in our series of looking at invasive species that threaten Vermont. Savannah Ferreira, Forest Health Specialist with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, will be sharing her knowledge of the pests and pathogens that are threatening Vermont's forests. Learn how to identify the Emerald Ash Borer, the Asian Long-horned Beetle, and other forest invasives, and become aware of what to do if you find them.

#### **Aquatic Invasives - Thursday, March 30th, 7:00 pm via Zoom**

The second presentation in our series of learning about invasive species in Vermont features Kim Jensen, an aquatic biologist with the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. Kim will delve into the species of plants and animals that pose threats to the waters of northern Vermont.

#### **Phenology of Terrestrial Invasives - Thursday, April 13th, 7:00 pm via Zoom**

This is the final presentation in our series of learning about invasive species in northern Vermont. Elizabeth Spinney, Invasive Plant Coordinator with the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks, and Recreation, will be sharing her work on gathering data of the phenology of some of Vermont's common terrestrial invasive plants. There is an absence of strong, widely available, Vermont specific phenology data for these species. Phenology is the study of periodic events in biological life cycles and how these are influenced by variations in climate, as well as by habitat factors. Learn why this information is needed, how it will be used, and the ways that you can get involved to help.



### 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.

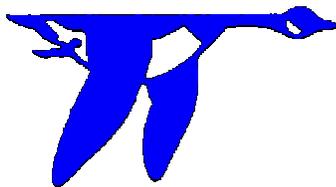
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Newsletter edited by Al Crist

### Board of Directors

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### Refuge Staff

- Ken Sturm *Refuge Manager*
- Judy Sefchick *Wildlife Biologist*
- Lisa Swainbank  
*Office Administrative Assistant*
- Chris Whitaker  
*Maintenance Mechanic*

## Volunteer Trail Maintenance

### Saturday, April 29th, 9:00 am

Gather your friends and join the Friends of Missisquoi for a morning of maintenance on the Railroad Passage Trail. Necessary tools will be provided. A lunch for all volunteers will be provided thanks to funding from Extreme Terrain’s Clean Trail Grant Program. Meet at the refuge headquarters at 9:00 am. Inclement weather will postpone the event so be sure to check the website for any cancellation.

## Green Up Day at the Refuge

### Friday, May 6th, 9:00 am

Living in Vermont we all know about the annual Green Up Day, the first Saturday In May. It is a great way to give back to your community and a great way to make a difference. At Missisquoi we hold an annual Green Up Day each year as well, however we hold it on the first Friday of May. This way we can encourage community members to help clean up the National Wildlife Refuge and also participate in their local town or city Green Up Day event. Often refuge staff will drive boats up and down the river while volunteers walk the flood plain forest picking up the season’s trash which has floated downstream. Other times we focus on trail head parking lots and road shoulders. Either way we end up leaving the refuge a little better than before. This year I hope you consider helping Green Up the refuge!

We will be meeting at the Louie’s Landing Boat Launch off of Route 78, about 3.5 miles west of Swanton at 9:00 am. We will work until noon then break for a pizza lunch. Please dress for the weather and bring water to drink. We will have gloves, bags and other supplies for volunteers. For more information please call the refuge office at 802-868-4781.



**World Migratory Bird Day**  
Water: Sustaining Bird Life



***World Migratory Bird Day  
is again a multi-day event on  
the refuge!***

**Kick-off WMBD with Zoom events  
on Thursday and Friday  
and  
continue your fun with  
in-person week-end events**

**On the Move with Bobolinks - Thursday, May 18th, 7:00 pm via Zoom**

The Motus network has proven to give great insight into the Bobolink's travels. Join University of New England professor, Noah Perlut, as he gives us the most up-to-date information on his continuing research of the northern Vermont Bobolink population and learn how the Motus tower on the Missisquoi NWR has contributed to the data they are collecting. You can find registration information for this and future virtual presentations at

<https://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>



**Eastern Meadowlark Conservation in Vermont - Friday, May 19th, 7:00 pm via Zoom**

Eastern Meadowlarks have declined in Vermont over the last 50 years. We'll hear the latest research assessing this decline. Join Kevin Tolan, biologist with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, to learn what's in the 2022 Eastern Meadowlark report and what the studies show for the future of this bird in Vermont. You can find registration information for this and future virtual presentations at

<https://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>



*more WMBD events >> p. 4*

**All day Saturday and Sunday, May 20th and 21st -  
Missisquoi's World Migratory Bird Day  
"Big Weekend Challenge"**

We are bringing back our Big Weekend Challenge. We invite you to come and independently help us document the birds present on the refuge. Here's how to participate: Visit the refuge trails and/or waterways anytime from sunrise to sunset on Saturday and Sunday. For a map of trails and water access points please visit <https://www.fws.gov/media/missisquoi-trailspdf>

\*\*\*Please note the Jeep Trail will be closed at this time of year, but Mac's Bend Road will be open for walking.\*\*\*

Record all your bird sightings via eBird to any of the refuge's hotspots and share your lists with our eBird account (**MNWRBirdDay**), which allows us to have a record of your data. The more you bird and contribute, the better our data will be. To get you motivated, the Friends of Missisquoi NWR will be awarding a number of prizes for different categories of participation, so the more time you spend looking and recording (and the more data you collect for WMBD), the more chances you have to win. Don't forget to bring your camera along to qualify you for some of the photography prizes! If you are unfamiliar with eBird, please visit this video for a great tutorial on how to submit your sightings right from your smartphone: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvYYeDd05TQ>

Come out and enjoy Missisquoi NWR as the birds return to the refuge and help make this a successful weekend of data collection. As you participate, as a community scientist for the refuge, please stay on the open trails and waterways and be careful not to venture into any of the restricted areas.

**Daybreak Bird Walk - Saturday, May 20, 4:00 am**

Join the Friends of Missisquoi NWR as they hold a daybreak bird walk on the Maquam and Black Creek trails. It will commence at 4:00 am from the parking area. During the one-mile hike into Lookout Point in the dark, participants will be listening for owls and other nocturnal birds. Daylight birding will take place on the return trip out. Please bring a headlamp or flashlight. Preregistration is not required, but we appreciate having contact information in case of updates. You can find registration for this event and other World Migratory Bird Day events at: <https://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>

**Monthly Bird Monitoring Walk - Saturday, May 20, 2023, 8:00 am**

Our May Monitoring Walk each year is part of our World Migratory Bird Day weekend (see page 6 for information on the March and April monitoring walks). This will be one of several walks held over the weekend. Join us from 8:00 to 10:00 am at the Stephen Young Marsh Trail. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about one mile south of the refuge Visitor Center. Registration for this event is not required.

*more WMBD events >> p. 5*

## Birding Boat Trips - Saturday, May 20

Plans are in the works to bring back some Missisquoi River birding boat trips. Spaces will be limited. Please stay up to date on our plans by visiting our website calendar. We will post more information as plans get solidified.

## Beginner's Bird Walk - Sunday, May 21, 9:00 am

As part of our World Migratory Bird Day events, the Friends of Missisquoi NWR will be hosting a beginner's guided bird walk on the Mac's Bend Road. This flat, easy walk will last about 2 hours and cover about 2 miles (round trip). Mac's Bend Road is a dirt road but is flat and well maintained, making for an easy walk. Loaner binoculars will be available to those who need them. You can find registration for this event and other World Migratory Bird Day events at:

<https://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>

## Group Bird Paddle - Sunday, May 21, 1:00 pm

As part of our Bird Day Weekend events, volunteers from the Friends of Missisquoi will lead a group birding paddle on the Missisquoi River. We'll meet at the Louie's Landing parking area, then drive to the Mac's Bend launch site. We'll head downstream towards the Missisquoi Delta and then back upstream to the launch site. Total distance is about 5 miles. You must bring your own canoe or kayak, paddles, and life jackets. (PFDs are required.) Please pre-register in advance for this event, both so we can maintain a manageable group and so we have contact information if we need to make any changes or weather cancellations. You can find registration for this event and other World Migratory Bird Day events at:

<https://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>



## Art at the Refuge

May 20th through July 21st

The Friends of Missisquoi will again be hosting an art show at the Visitors' Center beginning May 20th, World Migratory Bird Day at the Refuge. As usual, the focus will be birds and their habitats, and will include birds that spend some time on the refuge.

## CALL FOR ARTISTS

Artists, start planning your work. For more information on participation contact Carol Yarnell at [artshow@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:artshow@friendsofmissisquoi.org). Expect the application and art specifications on the Friends website (<https://friendsofmissisquoi.org/artshow/>) in March. Please pass this invitation on to your artist friends.

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

Friends board members and birders extraordinaire Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti 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 145 months of walks, we have recorded 160 species of birds. 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 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:

**March 18: Jeep Trail.** Meet at the Louie's Landing parking lot located on Rte. 78, approx 3½ miles west of Swanton village. From there we will drive to the trail head at Mac's Landing.

**April 15: 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.

**May 20: Stephen Young Marsh Trail.** See World Migratory Bird Day information on page 4.

## Birding Q & A

*by Ken Copenhaver*

On January 1 of this year, I received the following question via email:

**Q.** For about the past month, I have observed a drastic drop at the number of birds at my feeder here in Newport, VT. Friends in the area have reported the same thing. This is concerning to me. What do you think?

**A.** There could be a lot of possibilities, but to know if there really are fewer birds being reported overall, you would have to do some digging, species by species, in eBird. Assuming the numbers being seen at feeders have had a widespread decrease, there could be a number of reasons. Most recently, since the snow melted, my feeder birds have dropped off significantly. Yesterday I participated in a Christmas Bird Count where feeder birds generally had low numbers

throughout our circle. This could mean that without snow, natural food is easy to find, and the birds spread out and don't use feeders as much.

However, the lack of snow was only recent. Going back a bit further when we had snow, there could still be various reasons for birds not using feeders. First, it's been a generally mild winter, meaning that birds' calorie requirements aren't as great as they would be if it were colder. Also, note that studies have shown that even birds that come to feeders regularly only get a relatively small portion (maybe 5 to 25% depending on species, time of year, surrounding habitat, etc) of their diet from feeders. The rest is natural food, meaning that birds are not generally dependent on feeders.

*Birding Q & A, continued >> p. 9*

# Who Is That Bird ?

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR



Whether the river is flooding, the wind is blowing, the leaves are falling, or it's snowing, some birds are our year-round, constant companions.

Although you see them at feeders, observe them along Missisquoi's trails, or catch a glimpse as they fly by, how

much do you know about them? Each paragraph describes a familiar year-round bird. Can you guess who it is?

## **Bird #1**

Tall, dark, and handsome, but no stranger to the forest. Usually requires plenty of space (> 150 acres) to live its best life. Known far-and-wide as a skilled carpenter and excavation specialist, that carries its tools wherever it goes. Has altruistic tendencies; builds homes for other creatures (e.g., birds, small mammals, amphibians), as well as itself. Reveals its dark side by quickly evicting annoying tenants, devouring live insects and poison ivy, and hanging out in dead or dying trees. Moonlights as a head-banging drummer, capable of producing 17 beats/second. Often mistaken for the drummer of the 1970s rock band *KISS*, due to its black-and-white outfit, spiked hair, and 4-inch, pointed, barbed tongue. Hearing its maniacal laugh, you may never walk alone in the forest again!

## **Bird #2**

Cute, round, and found anywhere with a tree or a shrub. Wears a striking bowtie and top hat, but attends small informal gatherings, with groups of its own kind or others. Always the life of the party; its small stature, low weight (around ten birthday

candles), and specialized leg muscles allow it to hang from small branches right-side up and upside-down. Has a habit of carrying food to a different location to eat. Communicates threats by using additional "dee" notes in its complex, language-like repertoire. Not your typical bird brain. With a larger hippocampus (the brain region associated with spatial memory) than most birds, it caches hundreds of food items, remembers their locations, and accurately retrieves them weeks later. Since old brain neurons are replaced each fall, it's very adaptable to change.

## **Bird #3**

Endearing and energetic, with acrobatic skills that rival an Olympic gymnast. Prefers fields, edges, and roadsides, but uses trees for hide-n-seek. A master of disguise, it can appear bright, dull, and somewhere in-between, all in the same year. A strict vegetarian, it has a weakness for weeds but consumes everything from algae to maple sap. Exceptionally gregarious, especially when feeding. Flocks move in rolling, "leap-frog" fashion to maximize food consumption and avoid predators. A lover, but not a fighter; doesn't subscribe to the mob-mentality and draws the line at mobbing behaviors. Considered a late-bloomer. Bubbly, bouncy, and likes to be seen *and heard* in flight. Some associate it with potato chips and dip. No stranger to winter but prefers average January temperatures  $\geq 0$  degrees Fahrenheit.

Answers are found on Page 9.

To be continued....

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!



## Refuge Manager's Update - February, 2023

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR



Spring is the time of change in the environment. Living in the North Country many of us (most?! ) look forward to the waning of winter and the change that spring gives us. We watch carefully for the subtle changes

in plants as they wake up from their winter torpor – tree buds break and flower, spring beauties pop up in the forest, and early migrants like red-winged blackbirds settle in our marshes.

This spring at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge we are seeing a big change – a change in staff. Our stellar Maintenance Mechanic, Joe Bertrand, retired last summer leaving a huge hole in our staff as well as our ability to keep refuge projects moving forward in 2022. I am happy to announce that we have hired a new Maintenance Mechanic who just started this February! Please welcome Chris Whitaker to the staff of Missisquoi NWR!

Chris comes to the refuge directly from the ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain in Burlington where he has worked in facilities and as the STEM and exhibits manager since 2015. Chris's experience doesn't stop there, with some time spent as a Middle School science teacher, a crew leader for the Youth Conservation Corps at Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and even as a biological technician at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. However his skill with equipment, engines, facility maintenance and

construction (as well as his enthusiasm!) will be most on display in his new role at the refuge.



Chris has had a long interest in working for the National Wildlife Refuge System and this position fulfills a dream dating back to his days

as a biological technician at Parker River. When not working, Chris spends time with his wife, Anne and two girls: Charlotte and Maeve, playing in the outdoors and tinkering with tools. Please welcome Chris Whitaker to the staff of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge!

Spring has not yet sprung in the North Country, but change is happening. Change in refuge personnel occurs over time and every new individual brings their own talents and interests to the refuge. And soon we will see those changes on the landscape as well. I for one am not quite done with winter, but I must say I will be happy to hear those first calls of the red-winged blackbirds in Missisquoi's marshes!

### **FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

### **BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING**

**Wednesday, March 8th, 2023 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 May 10th at 6:30 pm



Bird #1  
Pileated Woodpecker



Bird #2  
Black-capped Chickadee



Bird #3  
American Goldfinch

*Birding Q & A, from <<p. 6*

So in a year when food is abundant, they could be getting an even lower percentage of their food from feeders. On the other hand, if natural food is scarce in a particular area, birds can just move on to where there is better food and could be using available feeders there to supplement their natural diet.

Note that most of our winter birds are somewhat nomadic. They aren't tied to a territory like they are in the breeding season. The extreme examples of this are the "irruptive" species that adjust their winter range by hundreds of miles from year to year to where they find the best food sources. One year they will stay in northern Canada all winter,

and the next year they might migrate deep into the U.S. Some aren't feeder birds (like Crossbills), but many are, like Redpolls, Siskins, and all the Finches. Even Blue Jays and Nuthatches can wander great distances in winter.

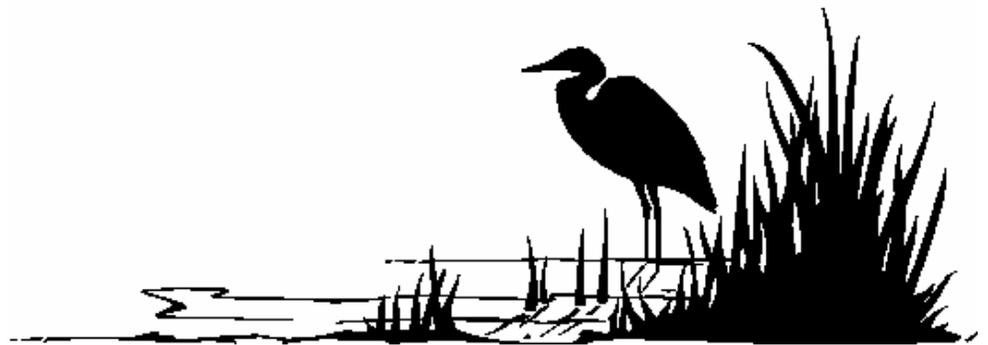
These are some guesses that could explain normal fluctuations, and probably there are more that I'm not thinking of. Nature is complicated! Recent studies from Audubon and Cornell have shown a long-term decline in bird populations in general, though the greatest declines have been with neotropical migrants, including warblers, grassland birds, and insectivores. But these aren't the species that are coming to your feeders!

Have you missed one of the great Zoom presentations sponsored by the Friends of Missisquoi? Well, you're in luck! Check out our Friends of Missisquoi YouTube Channel at:



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCySplMZPi77fAEa4wq5ic8A/featured>

**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](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:

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(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.)