



MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Fall, 2023



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

The Big Sit!

Saturday, October 7th, from sunrise to sunset

On Saturday, Oct. 7th, flock on over to the observation platform at the Stephen Young Marsh. The Missisquoi Marsh Mellows will once again use the platform as the center of their 17-ft. diameter circle as they 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 41 species were recorded.

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-ft. diameter circle! There are Big Sit! circles all over the world.



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-ft. limit. Someone will be “sitting” at the platform from dawn to dusk. A table for snacks is featured most years. Bring a snack to share if you’d like. Sitting for long periods really works up an appetite!

Rain date is Sunday, October 8th.



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

the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

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www.friendsofmissisquoi.org

E-mail: info@friendsofmissisquoi.org

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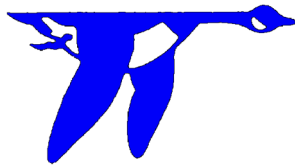
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Refuge Staff

Ken Sturm *Refuge Manager*

Judy Sefchick
Wildlife Biologist

Lisa Swainbank
Office Administrative Assistant

Chris Whitaker
Maintenance Mechanic

Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks

Third Saturday of Each Month

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. **These walks are appropriate for birders of all skill levels** and provide a wonderful opportunity to learn about birds throughout the seasons. Registration for the walks is not required. After 161 months of walks, we have recorded 162 species of birds.

The schedule for the next three months is:

September 16: 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 21: Old Railroad Passage Trail: Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center.

November 18: Maquam/Black Creek Trail. Meet at the parking lot located on Rte. 78, approx. 2½ miles west of Swanton village.

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/

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, Sept. 13th, 2023 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 November 8th at 6:30 pm

Refuge Managers Update - August, 2023

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR



Water is on my mind at the moment. One would think that working on a National Wildlife Refuge that is more than 80% wetland, water would be on my mind all the time. While this is generally true, water

has been on the minds of all Vermonters this summer.

The catastrophic July floods saw many of our communities devastated. At Missisquoi, we are at the bottom of the watershed and the receiver of all the rain flowing in the streams and the river as it enters the lake. I nervously watched the USGS river gauge in Swanton after the main rain events of July 10th and 11th, as it rose 5.5 feet in two days! Many folks reached out to me asking if the refuge received any damage.

Luckily, aside from some erosion along the banks and several riparian trees falling into the river, the refuge fared rather well. The water rose to “bank full” conditions in the section along route 78, and as it flowed into the Missisquoi Delta water began spilling over the banks, through the floodplain forest and into adjacent wetlands. So essentially, the large wetland complex that is the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge did exactly what large wetlands do so well: it slowed down the flows and dispersed the vast amount of water throughout our vegetated wetland habitats.

Of course, with so much rain it was not only the river that rose, but the lake as well. We saw the lake level jump up over two feet following the July floods, and it remains very high for this time of year. Given that the refuge is largely influenced by lake elevation, there is now water

in areas we typically do not see inundated following the spring melts in May and early June. This has been very helpful to our field staff who typically struggle to access areas of the refuge in late July and August. This will make work such as water chestnut control quite a bit easier this year and we will be able to access areas that have been difficult to impossible to survey in the past.

The timing of the floods and drenching rains would have been worse for wildlife had it come in June. However, by mid-July, the state endangered Black Terns, and grassland birds, such as Bobolinks and Meadowlarks, had largely fledged all of their young before lake levels rose, and fields became inundated. Other species may not have fared as well such as muskrat and beaver populations that build lodges or bank dens. The unusual summer lake level may have flooded families out of their homes or at best displaced them temporarily causing them to be more susceptible to predation. If water levels remain high, some wetlands may be less favorable to dabbling ducks who need water levels generally less than 12 inches deep for foraging.

While we may not fully know the consequences of the July flood to the refuge and its wildlife for some time, it is comforting to know that areas like the Missisquoi NWR are protected and function well to provide valuable ecological services during flood events. Given the predicted effects of climate change in Vermont (more water), large wetland areas and intact riparian habitat will be the key to wildlife and community resiliency into the future.

Missisquoi's Dragonfly Day - Haiku Poems

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR



One magical day
Flying circles round and round
Dragons fill the sky

Flitting over fields
In unlimited numbers
I'm awe-struck again

Watching the wildness
Fills me with wonder and joy
I can't help but smile

Delightful darners
Hues of green, with brown (*females*) or blue (*males*)
Artwork in the air

A four-inch wingspan
Allows them fast, forward, flight
Thirty-miles per hour

Amazing antics
Helicopters of nature
Hover and reverse

Fleeing hungry birds
Chasing insects for dinner
All in a day's flight

A change in season
Green Darners migrate away
Wish I could fly too

A *Haiku* is a short-form poem that originated in Japan. Often about nature or seasonal change, it does not rhyme, but contains seventeen syllables in a series of three lines. The first line has five syllables, the second has seven syllables, and the third line has five syllables again.

Haiku Challenge: If you'd like to write a Haiku about nature or the refuge, please send your original work to missisquoi@fws.gov (with subject line "Haiku"). The three best entries will be awarded a prize from the *Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge*. Happy writing!

Refuge Welcomes Distinguished Visitors

On Friday, July 7th, Missisquoi NWR welcomed two very distinguished visitors; the Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, and Vermont's Congressional Representative, Becca Balint. Secretary Haaland was in Vermont to highlight \$25 million in funding from the Inflation Reduction Act for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create climate resilience across northern forests in the Midwest and Northeast Regions by improving infrastructure and habitat. This 10-state Northern Forest ecosystem provides critical habitat to millions of breeding forest birds and other wildlife and at the same time sustains countless jobs related to the outdoor recreation economy. Following a meeting in Burlington with Senator Welch and leaders of Vermont's conservation and outdoor recreation sectors, Secretary Haaland and Representative Balint headed to Missisquoi to see the refuge in person.

Secretary Deb Haaland made history by becoming the first Native American cabinet secretary when President Biden appointed her as Secretary of

the Interior. She is a native of New Mexico and is a member of the Pueblo of Laguna. Keeping with custom, Abenaki of Missisquoi Chief Joanne Crawford and her son bestowed gifts upon Sec. Haaland upon her arrival at Missisquoi, cementing the connection of their two Indigenous cultures.

Frequent passing thunderstorms inhibited the planned outing on the Missisquoi River, but a short hike on the Discovery Trail between storms allowed the guests to get a small tour and a taste of what Missisquoi has to offer. A brief stop at the newly erected "Missisquoi Lands and Waters" signage along the trail allowed Friends board member, Julie Filiberti, to read the Friends' land acknowledgement, again bringing attention to the cultural history of the refuge. In their short visit, Secretary Haaland and Rep. Balint were able to learn about the Indigenous heritage of the region, the unique ecosystems of the refuge, and the importance of keeping the refuge healthy and vibrant in the face of climate change.



**Chief Crawford and Secretary Haaland
on the Discovery Trail.**



**Refuge Manager, Ken Sturm,
and Rep. Becca Balint**

Who's Out & About on the Refuge?

Meet John and Kimberly Chesarek, dedicated refuge volunteers and Friends members for over 20 years. They both have made a habit of donating their time for any refuge project that needs some helping hands. The list of their volunteering is long; trail maintenance, helping with muskrat and invasive species surveys, wrapping trees for beaver protection, Green Up Days, cleaning out the Purple Martin houses. If there is a job that they can help with, especially with the refuge being short-staffed, neither minds jumping in. In their untold hours of volunteering they've witnessed many memorable sights; the sheer beauty of some of the restricted areas that the public doesn't get to see, a frog swimming underneath the crystal clear ice, an otter that popped out of the creek in front of them as they ate lunch, and one spring, a huge ball of garter snakes. Living close by in Alburg, the Chesareks also make the most of opportunities to visit the refuge just for pleasure, and they raised their children hiking the trails, participating in events, and taking advantage of all that Missisquoi has to offer. They appreciate that the government has set this piece of land aside for it to

remain natural, because they realize that once a piece of land gets developed, the nature is gone and won't be coming back, and it's this appreciation for the natural world that drives their willingness to give where they can.



Friends Welcome New Member to the Board

Scott Sainsbury was raised in Canandaigua, NY . After attending Franklin and Marshall College (along with fellow Friends board member Ken Copenhaver). Scott did his graduate work at Cornell University.

A career move took him to Dallas, TX where he met his wife, Pat, started their family and became engaged with environmental organizations. Scott led the water rights arm of the Texas Committee on Natural Resources, and served as Conservation Chair of the Dallas County Audubon Society.

In Vermont, Scott and Pat owned a 400 acre field and forest farm along the Mad River in Moretown. They worked for 30 years with the Dept. of Agriculture, Friends of the Mad River, Winooski Conservation District, Audubon Society, and others to battle erosion, improve habitat for forest and field birds, combat invasive plants, and use the land as a learning and sharing resource for birders, area youth, and environmental organizations.

Scott led the Board at the North Branch Nature Center in Montpelier, where he helped to spearhead the strategic planning and fund raising that resulted in expanded facilities, programs, and staffing.

Two years ago, Scott and his wife, Pat, sold their Moretown farm. For many years, Scott had birded the Champlain Islands and Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. So when a property in North Hero became available, they jumped at the opportunity.

Living in North Hero has brought the lake and the wildlife refuge into much closer focus for Scott. He is a member of the North Hero Parks and Recreation Committee, which administers the Pelots and Camp Ingalls Natural Areas. And we're extremely pleased that he has joined the Board of the Friends of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. Scott hopes that his experiences can provide an added dimension to the Friends group, and hopes to make meaningful contributions to the refuge.

New Trail Card System

Photo cards replace punch cards at trail card boxes

For the past five years, the Friends have offered a sew-on patch as an incentive for hiking all five of the refuge's trails. Hikers were asked to use a punch card to verify that they had hiked each trail. This program has been quite popular, and we are pleased to have given out many patches every year.

However, due to the difficulty of keeping cards stocked in the boxes and keeping the punches in operating condition, we have replaced the punch cards with "photo" cards to be used for photo documentation of visiting each trail. Each of the existing trail boxes will have a label on the outside and a card inside showing the name of the trail, such as this one from Black/Maquam Creek Trail:

MAQUAM

We are replacing the trail punch cards with photo documentation.

As you hike each trail on the refuge, look for these boxes.

Take a photo clearly showing this card. It can be a selfie or just the card.

When you have photos of all 5 cards, email them to
trailcards@friendsofmissisquoi.org.

Please include your name and mailing address.

You will be mailed a patch indicating that you have hiked all 5 refuge trails!

Alternatively, you can present your photos at the Refuge Visitor Center.

Just follow the directions on the card: Take a photo that shows the card on the outside of the box or the card from inside the box. The photo can be a selfie (preferred) or just the card itself. When you have taken photos showing all five cards, email them to trailcards@friendsofmissisquoi.org to receive your patch. (If the photos exceed your email size limits, separate them into several emails.) Please include your name and address so that we can send you your sew-on patch. You can also show your photos at the Visitor Center when it is open and receive your patch there.

If you have already started a trail punch card, you can complete your punches or submit photos in place of the remaining punches.

We hope you find the photo system to be more convenient than needing to keep track of your punch card and being sure you take it along on each hike. And please give us any feedback on how this is working for you by emailing trailcards@friendsofmissisquoi.org.

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.



Q. Do most birds mate for life?

A. I've received variations of this question from time to time. The answer isn't as simple as we might like it to be. In general, we humans seem to approach the "mate for life" question in an idealistic way, wanting to impose our own morals and the ideal of monogamy on the natural world or, conversely, have the natural world confirm those ideals. But the truth is, birds basically do what's best for the survival of the species. Sometimes it takes the form of monogamy, sometimes it means a new mate each breeding season, and for some it can mean a lot of cheating (more on that later).

For some species, having a life-long, or nearly life-long, mate is most efficient. Many of the larger species fall into this category, including geese, swans, cranes, eagles, owls, vultures, loons, and even some ducks. As for efficiency, consider that most migratory birds spend their winters separate from their mate, but when the ospreys rejoin each other at their old nest site or loons rejoin each other at last year's lake, they don't have to expend energy finding, courting, and possibly fighting for a new mate, and they don't have to expend energy finding a new nest site. If they raised young successfully the previous year, they'll most likely just get right to it and try to do it again. However, if the nest was predated the previous year, they might find a new nest site. This happens frequently with loons. Or if the nest was unsuccessful, due to eggs not hatching or chicks dying of natural causes other than predation, one or the other of the pair might "divorce" and look for a new mate. Also, when a mate dies or doesn't return to the nest site in the spring, most species will seek a new mate, either that year or the next.

Most songbirds, on the other hand, do not mate

for life, but will choose a mate each breeding season. Since males and females of most songbird species share in raising the chicks, they form a strong bond that lasts for the season. Again, it's "efficient" being committed to each other and to the raising of chicks.

Some songbirds engage in polygyny, in which one male will have several females within one nesting territory. Examples of this are Red-winged Blackbirds and Bobolinks. What happens here is that if a male claims a particularly good territory, more females are willing to share that territory. (Remember, it's the female that decides whom she mates with.)

And then there's the cheating, known as extra-pair copulation. Many songbirds, including the Black-capped Chickadee, are "socially monogamous," meaning that they have a territory with one declared mate, but will also mate outside their pair. For instance, a male might sneak into another male's territory and mate with a female there. The male is trying to spread his DNA as widely as possible and perhaps trying to produce offspring that another male will help care for, and the female is hedging her bets that maybe the intruder's DNA will be better than her mate's. And, to make it even more complicated, some females will sneak off and lay one of their eggs in another nest, presumably to push off the work of raising their chick to another female. Of course, the birds aren't thinking through the logic of this equation; they've just learned what works best over millennia of trial and error. With the advent of DNA testing of chicks, researchers are learning that the chicks within one nest are often produced from far more extra-pair copulations than was previously suspected.

Meet the Editor of the New Missisquoi NWR Newsletter for Kids

Hello! I'm Melanie (Mel) Berthiaume, creator of the new Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge Kid's Newsletter, *The Rookery*. The name comes from the nesting place where so many Great Blue Herons once raised their young here at the Refuge. The goal of the newsletter is to encourage young people to grow up appreciating nature by informing them of the joys of this refuge and nature in general. They are our future. The average age of visitors to National Wildlife Refuges is 56! It is my hope that we can bring that number down somewhat through this concerted effort. *The Rookery* will be made available at local establishments in order to further its outreach. In future issues, I hope to share more photos of the refuge and offer suggestions for ways young people can enjoy nature. Please share any photos and ideas you have!

A little about me: I am a retired elementary school teacher and school librarian having worked mostly at the Swanton Elementary School. I currently work part-time at the Swanton Public Library. I volunteer at the Refuge Headquarters Front Desk and Gift Shop and at

my church. Over the years, I have spent many enjoyable hours at the refuge with my students and friends, exploring and learning from the trails and exhibits. I hope to continue to share my love of nature with children by leading an occasional program.

My husband and I currently live in Fairfield. We have 2 adult children and 3 grandchildren. You will see my granddaughter on the second page of this issue of the Rookery! My husband is a former BFA math teacher. He continues to coach girl's volleyball and softball and also volunteers at our church.



Seasonal Trail Closures and Advisories– Missisquoi NWR

*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. 21 - 22

Regular Deer season: Nov. 11 - 26

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 2 - 10

Trail Advisory:

Various Waterfowl Seasons: Sept. 1 - Dec. 31

Discovery Trail, Old Railroad Passage Trail, & Stephen J. Young Marsh Trail

Closed:

Youth deer weekend: Oct. 21 - 22

Regular deer season: Nov. 11 - 26

Muzzleloader Season: Dec. 2 - 10

Trail Advisory:

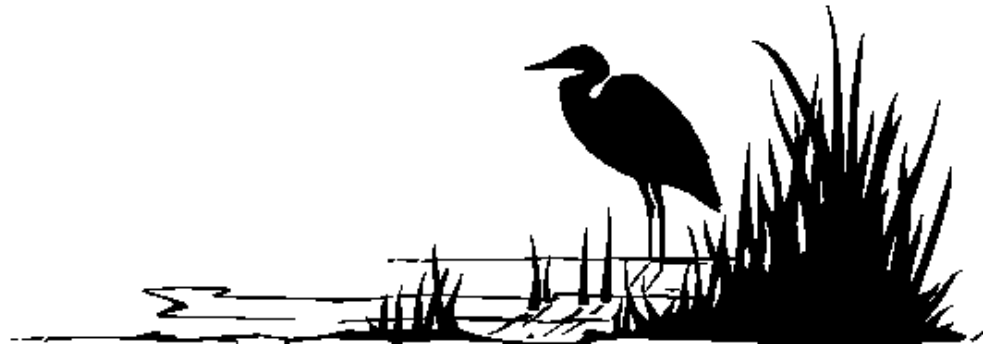
Archery Season: Oct. 1 - Nov 10 & Nov. 27 - Dec. 15

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, 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.)