



MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Spring 2024



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

Volunteer Trail Maintenance

Saturday, April 27th, 9:00 a.m.

Got Loppers?

On April 27th, from 9:00 a.m. until approximately noon, the Friends of Missisquoi are providing you an opportunity to come out and give back to the refuge. There are many tasks involved in getting the trails ready for spring and summer visitors, and we will be spending a morning tackling some of these jobs. Many hands make light work, so gather some friends and family and join us for a few hours of needed trail maintenance. Appropriate trimming tools will be provided, but you can bring your own loppers and/or pruners if you'd like. Following a morning of maintenance, a free lunch will be provided for all volunteers. Meet at the Refuge Headquarters on Tabor Road at 9:00am.

Note: Heavy rains will postpone this event and registration is recommended, but not required, so that we may advise you of any cancellations. Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/volunteer-trail-maintenance-day-tickets-836625899587>

Green Up Day at the Refuge

Friday, May 3rd, 9:00 a.m.

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 that has floated downstream. Other times we focus on trailhead 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 meet at the Louie's Landing Boat Launch off Route 78, about 3.5 miles west of Swanton at 9:00 a.m. 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 2024



*World Migratory
Bird Day
is again a
multi-day event on the
Missisquoi National
Wildlife Refuge!*

Come enjoy the height of spring migration in a beautiful place! Get out and enjoy the refuge as the birds return and help make this another successful weekend of eBird data collection. Even if you can't join one of our organized events, we invite you to come and independently help us document birds on your own. Either way, you will be contributing to our many years of data collection during migration. Trails are open from sunrise to sunset. 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.

Please visit the Friends of Missisquoi calendar (<http://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>) for details and registration information for the following events:

May 18th thru July 19th – The 2024 **Missisquoi Artshow** will kick off on May 18th! Enjoy the art of many talented local artists as they display their interpretations of birds of the Missisquoi NWR. All artwork will be displayed in the Visitor Center gallery until July 19th and can be viewed any time the Visitor Center is open. Please call 802-868-4781 to confirm accessibility. The artwork is available for purchase.

Saturday, May 18th – Join the Friends of Missisquoi NWR as they hold a **daybreak bird walk** on the Maquam and Black Creek trails. The walk will commence at 4:00 a.m. from the parking area. During the one-mile hike to Lookout Point in the dark, participants will be listening for owls and other nocturnal birds. Daylight birding will take place on the return trip back. Bring a headlamp or flashlight. Please register in advance for this walk.

Saturday, May 18th – Join Friends of Missisquoi NWR for their **monthly bird-monitoring walk** on the Stephen J. Young Marsh Trail. This walk is appropriate for birders of all skill levels. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd at 8 a.m., about 1 mile south of the refuge Visitor Center.

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Saturday, May 18th - Join **Refuge Manager, Ken Sturm**, as he leads a group down the Old Railroad Passage Trail to document birds for World Migratory Bird Day. This walk will take place May 18th from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about 1 mile south of the refuge Visitor Center.

Sunday, May 19th – The Friends of Missisquoi NWR will be hosting a guided bird walk specifically designated for **beginning birders** on the Discovery Trail at 9:00 a.m. Meet at the headquarters parking lot. Please register in advance for this event.

Sunday, May 19th – The Friends of Missisquoi NWR will be holding a **group birding paddle** at 1:00 p.m. You must bring your own canoe or kayak, paddles, and life jackets. Meet at Mac’s Bend boat launch. Please register in advance for this event.

Photography Workshop	Thursday, May 9th & Saturday, May 18th
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Do you wish to improve on your wildlife photography skills? Join wildlife photographer, Matthew Bode, in this photography workshop designed to take your photography to the next level. He will share some important techniques and tips to help give you photographs that you can be proud of. This workshop will take place over two sessions. You must be able to attend **BOTH** sessions to register for this workshop. Spaces are limited.

Session 1 will take place online via Zoom on Thursday evening, May 9th from 6:30-8:00 p.m..

Session 2 - bring your camera to the Refuge for a learning field session. It will take place at the Refuge Headquarters on Saturday, May 18th from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/photography-workshop-tickets-836659058767>

For the first virtual workshop scheduled May 9th, we’ll be focusing on a few elements of exposure, specifically geared towards bird photography. The workshop will review aperture, creative differences in shutter speeds, and how to manage ISO. A set of recommended settings will be provided to help users get started in this creative yet technical hobby. This workshop will also analyze composition, providing basic guidelines to create appealing images and how to capture them for wildlife. The composition discussion will delve into understanding perspectives, achieving and maintaining focus, and making backgrounds and foregrounds. This virtual workshop will be an instrumental preparation step for the in-person bird photography workshop scheduled for May 18th, where we will reinforce these concepts first hand at a MNWR site.

<p>Have you missed one of the great Zoom presentations sponsored by the Friends of Missisquoi? Would you like to re-watch “Bird Tales”, or the recent presentation about Vermont Bats, or the presentations on Bobolinks and Meadowlarks, or our recent three-part series about invasive species in Vermont?</p> <p>Well, you’re in luck! Check out our Friends of Missisquoi YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/@friendsofmissisquoi1650/videos</p>	
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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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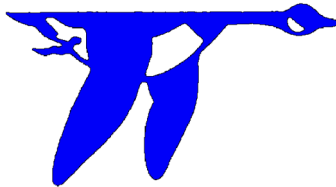
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Newsletter edited by Al Crist

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Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks

Friends board members and birders extraordinaire Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti lead the walks on various refuge trails beginning at 8 a.m. on the **third Saturday of each month (except for December, when it is on the 2nd Saturday)**. 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.

After 167 months of walks, we have recorded 164 species of birds. Registration for the walks is not required.

The schedule for the next three months is:

March 16: Jeep Trail. Meet at the Louie’s Landing parking lot located on Rte. 78, approximately 3½ miles west of Swanton village. From there we will drive to the trail head at Mac’s Landing.

April 20: 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 18: Stephen Young Marsh Trail. This walk is held in conjunction with the World Migratory Bird Day week-end. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center and across the road from the marsh.

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.



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 - February, 2024

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR



What a “winter” it has been so far. For those of us who enjoy winter and its snowfall for recreation and wildlife tracking, it has been a disappointment so far. As I write this in early February it is almost 50 F outside, and

what little snow there has been is almost gone from the ground and the river ice is melting fast. Today is 21 degrees higher than the long-term average for Swanton!

While the lack of snow cover is disappointing to some, for others it is an opportunity to be exploited. Later in the newsletter, you will read about Short-eared Owls from our biologist Judy Sefchick. We have been lucky to have several Short-eared Owls on the refuge this winter hunting the grasslands along Tabor Road. Low to no snow cover makes their job a bit easier hunting small mammals in the refuge grasslands. We have seen these owls for at least 6 weeks on the refuge and perhaps their reason for staying so long is due to the ease of hunting from the lack of snow. On the other hand, deep snow can benefit small mammals who can move about almost undetected beneath a deep snow pack during winter months. As much as I enjoy seeing the short-eared owls on the refuge, I think I side with the meadow voles on wanting more snow!

Winter is usually a time for our staff to slow down and re-energize from the fast and furious field season. It is a time for planning for the

upcoming field season and documenting what occurred in the previous year. This year we are endeavoring to complete a project on records management for all of our office files. All federal agencies are being tasked with documenting all permanent government records and submitting them to the National Archive, as well as documenting temporary records that need to be retained for defined periods before they can be destroyed. This is a huge undertaking and we have been lucky to hire a former Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employee, Kathryn Hakey, through the Experienced Worker Program, to complete this task for the refuge. It has been great to have Kathryn in the office to help us with this project and there have even been some surprises as she recently unearthed a site survey she herself conducted for the refuge to map the Stephen Young Marsh wetland!

Lastly, I wanted to thank the Friends of Missisquoi for continuing to provide educational opportunities for our local (and sometimes not so local) public through on-line programming. From our 9th annual Bird Tales to interesting presentations on the cultural history of the refuge, there has been a great diversity of topics which are always well attended. Thanks to online presentations, the Friends can reach wide audiences in the convenience of their own homes. That said, I am looking forward to planning for in person events at the refuge this spring, including our annual Migratory Bird Day celebration in May. See you on the trails!

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS

Wednesday, May 8th, 2024 at 6:30 PM via Zoom

Wednesday, July 10th, 2024 at 6:30 PM via Zoom

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

Members are always welcome & encouraged to attend.

Who Saved the Winter?

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR



It was still early, but my hopes for the winter of 2023-2024 were fading. So far, Vermont's winter wonderland of frosty temperatures, blankets of snow, and ice-covered waters, was a definitive no-show. With endless gray skies of fog, wind, and rain, the jolliness and sense of goodwill

never came. Not fit for a human nor for a beast, this freezing and thawing just **would not cease**, creating menacing conditions for many. Would this be another forgettable *non-winter*? Even without a clear crystal ball, I could predict the future, immediate and all. A refuge biologist dressed in uniform jeans, staring at data on mind-numbing screens, waiting for ice that just doesn't come, and despairing of field work not getting done. The outlook seemed bleak, to put it mildly. Little did I know, there was nothing to fear...change was already (literally) in the air!

Then in a flash and without warning, a swarm of Superheroes swooped into Swanton, making the refuge their refugia, of course. One thing about Superheroes is perfectly clear: you don't know you need them, until they are here. First there was one, then there were two, **Short-eared Owls** that appeared out-of-the blue. Before we knew it, there were at least six that flew! Oh, the excitement that grew...while they silently saved winter, you, and me, too!

They came in costumes of buff, brown and white, with a black triangle mask over eyes yellow and bright.

Who needs a cape, when you have feathers just right, and a 38-inch wingspan to boot? With speeds of 25 mph at the height, flying low to the ground in fierce, fanciful flight, they tenaciously hunted by day and by night. What to them seemed a game, gave the voles quite a fright, though 70% of their pounces weren't right, producing no food for a meal.

Then people came, from far and from near, to catch a glimpse of a Hero, while it was still here. They took photos as proof of its presence. Is it a bird, or a plane, or a Short-eared in sight? Not all who came saw one, though they all thought they might. That's how it continued for days and then weeks, with refuge visitors exclaiming, "It's the owl that we seek!" The people were varied; not all were bird geeks. A pattern emerged: afternoon conditions seemed right. Then I realized these Heroes loved the low-light, and dreary conditions, that we used to dislike. Funny, but everything now seemed so bright. I thought that it must be their presence.

There is life to be lived, and lessons to learn. In this case, we just needed a Hero to confirm, that past expectations need not ruin this winter. Changes are coming, that much is sure, but the owl's larger-than-life presence here, meant even more. All at once, their mission seemed perfectly clear: the large, undisturbed grasslands were why they were here, seeking much-needed food and shelter. The importance of Missisquoi NWR is evident, indeed. This place serves a purpose and fulfills creatures needs...in its *undisturbed* grasslands, wetlands, and forests, you see.

The Friends from 30,000 feet

Recently, the Board of the Friends of the Missisquoi NWR decided it was a good time to take a look in the mirror to ensure that our mission encompasses the greatest needs of the refuge that can be supplied by a group like ours, and that we are fulfilling that mission in our activities and programs.

Our first step was to hold an internal discussion on who we are, what our aspirations are, what membership means to those who support our efforts and what members' expectations are for our organization.

Earlier this month we added important voices to that discussion by inviting two groups of members, not on the Board, to participate in those same discussions.

Our next step will be to review the insights from the discussions, and begin the reflective work of reexamining our mission, plans and programs.

Ultimately, you could see some new ideas steering our course. Or, we may simply decide that our ducks are properly in a row and it's full steam ahead.

Short-eared Owls at the Refuge - January 2024



Photo by Raven Schwan-Noble



Photo by Raven Schwan-Noble



Photo by Scott Sainsbury



Photo by Scott Sainsbury

Q. Why haven't I seen any Redpolls at my feeders for the last several years?

A. If you haven't seen any Redpolls for a while, you're not alone. I've also seen no Redpolls at my feeders, either last winter or so far this winter. In 2022 I saw small numbers (1, 2, or 3 at a time), but from January to April of 2021 I reported to eBird up to 80 at a time. That was a banner year for Redpolls!

In my previous Q&A, I answered a question about seeing Robins all winter and discussed short-distance vs. long-distance migrants. I also mentioned "irruptive" species. Well, Common Redpolls are one of the irruptive species that visit our area sporadically. Other irruptive species in the finch family include Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, and Red and White-winged Crossbills. Three non-finch species are also considered irruptive: Blue Jay, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Bohemian Waxwing. In the case of Blue Jays, while there are some here every year, great numbers can come down from Canada in an irruption year.

All of these species except Blue Jay breed in far northern Canada. Blue Jays breed everywhere in Vermont, and Red-breasted Nuthatches breed in higher elevations in Vermont. What all irruptive species have in common is that they don't have regular migration patterns. Instead, in winter they move to wherever their preferred food is most abundant.

Each species has one or more types of tree seeds that they depend on most. For example, Common and Hoary Redpolls forage on alder, spruce, and birch crops. Pine Siskins prefer White Spruce, while Red Crossbills prefer Eastern White Pine but will also go for Red and White Spruce. White-winged Crossbills also like spruce and can often be found foraging on planted native and ornamental spruces in urban and suburban areas.

Pine Grosbeaks, Evening Grosbeaks, and Bohemian Waxwings eat berries. During irruptive

years they can often be found eating the berries of ornamental trees such as crabapples in parks and yards.

Many conifer species produce seed cones in cycles, with a bumper crop one year and nearly nothing the next. The birds that are dependent on these seeds have learned to migrate from areas with poor crops to areas with abundant crops. They may need to move hundreds of miles south or even east or west to find a good food source. An irruption may also follow an exceptionally good breeding year when an abundance of first-year birds consumes the available food and are pushed out of their home area. This is thought to be the case with the Snowy Owl, whose dependence on rodents forces many young birds to move south following an especially successful breeding season.

If you want to know which irruptive species might be visiting your feeder in a given winter, check in on the Finch Research Network's annual "Winter Finch Forecast." Throughout the summer, the Finch Research Network receives reports from dozens of volunteers throughout Canada who observe the relative abundance of the various seed crops. The reports are combined to determine patterns of where crops are more or less abundant. From that data, they make a forecast of where each species that I mentioned above might be found in the coming winter. Their forecast for this winter can be found at: <https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2023-2024>

Even though reports of Redpolls have been few and far between in Vermont this winter, the winter isn't quite over yet, and there's always next year!



© Mykola Swarnyk

Who's Out & About on the Refuge?

Meet Kathy Roberts. Kathy, or at least her front yard, is probably well known by the local birders that come to the refuge. She is lucky enough to live on Tabor Rd., surrounded by an expanse of refuge lands. Because her front yard supports quite a collection of birdfeeders, she's used to birders with binoculars pulling up in front of her house to see what's coming in to feed. Kathy loves living next to the refuge as much as she likes to feed the birds.

Last spring, after she had read about the lack of adequate staffing at Missisquoi, and the National



Wildlife Refuge System at large, she reached out to Ken, the Refuge Manager, to see if she could help out in some way. Because she likes to mow her lawn, she suggested that maybe she could help mow the grassy areas of the refuge. She was surprised by Ken's excitement at her suggestion; for she had just shown up and volunteered to fill a void that he was wondering how he was going to fill. Kathy went on to spend the summer keeping areas around the headquarters neatly trimmed. She even cruised the mower along the grassy areas of the Old Railroad Passage and Stephen Young Marsh Trails when she saw they needed it. She began by using her own mower that she was comfortable with, but quickly got used to the refuge's zero-turn mower after a bit of practice.

She loves mowing and she's looking forward to hopping on the mower and helping out again this season. Kathy still has the keys to all the mowing equipment, so she feels pretty confident she has the job. Missisquoi is certainly lucky to have such a wonderful neighbor! Be sure to wave hello if you see Kathy out there mowing this summer.

New Off-site Exhibits Interpret Refuge Ecology & Cultural History

The refuge is happy to announce two exhibits hosted off-site that will be viewable this year. The first is a project the refuge has been working on with the ECHO Center in Burlington for several years. This exhibit will be located on the ECHO's second floor and is an interactive virtual trip along refuge waterways and wetlands. The public will interact with the exhibit to "paddle" through areas as a volunteer performing invasive species and nesting bird surveys while learning about refuge wildlife and habitat along the way. With an estimated 167,000 visitors a year at the ECHO Center, we hope to inspire visitors to learn more about



the refuge and even take a trip to walk one of our trails or paddle the rivers after seeing this exhibit.

The refuge has also collaborated with the St. Albans Museum, the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi, and the Vermont Dept. of Historic Preservation to host a display in



St. Albans. Hosted by the St. Albans Museum, the display highlights the rich cultural history of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge through archaeological items recovered from the refuge. We hope to continue to improve this display by developing interpretive panels highlighting the cultural significance of the Missisquoi Delta and bring awareness to our local community of this unique part of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

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)
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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.)