



MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Spring 2025



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



*Join us to celebrate
birds and art at World
Migratory Bird Day
Weekend on the
Missisquoi National
Wildlife Refuge!*

Join the Friends of Missisquoi and celebrate World Migratory Bird Day with a weekend of art and nature. Don't miss this incredible fusion of art, wildlife, and conservation! Save the dates May 16th -18th and celebrate nature and local art with us. Get out and enjoy the refuge as the birds return and also experience our Art On The Refuge Celebration. Even if you can't join one of our organized events, we invite you to come and explore the refuge on your own and browse the Art Show at the Visitors Center.

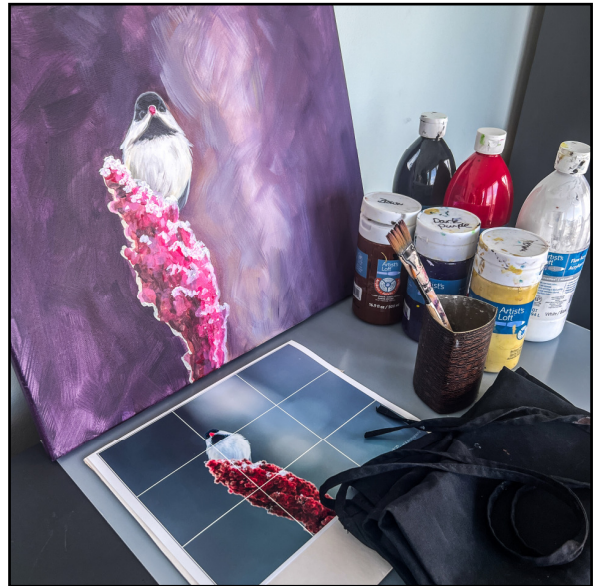
If you're a birder, help make this another successful weekend of eBird data collection. Participate in scheduled events or independently help us document birds on your own. Either way, you will be contributing to our many years of data collection during migration. Trails are open from sunrise to sunset. 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.

Some events require registration and, unless otherwise noted, you can find registration information for Missisquoi World Migratory Bird Day events at <http://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>

Live Painting Tutorial

Friday, May 16th, 5:00 pm - The week-end kicks off with a Live Painting Tutorial. This year's Painting Tutorial is in honor of birds found on the refuge. The subject is a Black Capped Chickadee sitting on sumac berries. Join us at the Refuge Visitors Center on Tabor Rd. and paint your own masterpiece! All the materials to paint this 16" x 20" acrylic on canvas project are supplied, and complete instruction will be provided by Claire Payne. All you do is register and get ready for creative fun!

To cover supplies, there is a suggested donation of \$20 to the Friends of Missisquoi for participation. Donations can be made at the time of the event. This class will be limited to the first 24 registrants, and then a wait list will be developed in the order of submitted registrations. **For the Live Painting Tutorial, each participant must register using this link: <https://forms.gle/ASN47H5SdiYiauoSA>**



Meet the Artist Reception

Friday, May 16th, 7:00 pm - Immediately after the Live Painting Tutorial, there will be a Meet The Artist Reception where local artists, whose works will be displayed in the Missisquoi Artshow, showcase their refuge, habitat, and bird-themed art. Attendees will have the opportunity to discuss the artists' methods and ideas about their work. Pieces exhibited at the event will be available for purchase.

Missisquoi Artshow

May 17th thru July 18th - The 2025 Missisquoi Artshow will kick off on Saturday, May 17th! Enjoy the art of many talented local artists as they display their artwork inspired by local wildlife, habitats, and birds. All artwork will be displayed in the Visitor Center gallery until July 18th 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.

Daybreak Bird-walk

Saturday, May 17th, 4:00 am - 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 am from the trail parking area, located on Rte. 78, approximately 2½ miles west of Swanton village. During the one-mile hike in the dark to Lookout Point 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.

Monthly Bird-monitoring Walk

Saturday, May 17th, 8:00 am - Join the Friends of Missisquoi NWR for their monthly bird-monitoring walk on the Stephen J. Young Marsh Trail. Our May walk each year is part of our World Migratory Bird Day weekend! This walk is appropriate for birders of all skill levels. Meet at the parking lot at 8:00 am, about 1 mile south of the refuge Visitor Center on Tabor Rd. The walk will finish up at 10:00 am.

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Plein Air Demonstration with Corliss Blakely

Sunday, May 18th, 9:00 am - Watch internationally recognized Vermont artist Corliss Blakely bring the refuge to life with a live landscape painting demonstration. Discover her techniques, materials, and artistic vision as she provides a plein air demo at the refuge visitors center on Tabor Rd., for all to watch and ask questions along the way.

Plein air painting is the practice of painting outdoors, capturing the natural light and scenery directly from observation. This technique became popular in the 19th century, particularly among Impressionist artists who sought to depict the changing qualities of light in their work.



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 am 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 170 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 15th: 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 19th: Old Railroad Passage Trail. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center

May 17th: 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.



Bird-walk leaders, Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti



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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Green Up Day at the Refuge

Friday, May 2nd, 9:00 am

Living in Vermont, we all know about the annual Green Up Day, on 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 may 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 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.

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 [https://](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi)

www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi

Have you missed one of the great Zoom presentations sponsored by the Friends of Missisquoi? Would you like to re-watch the latest "Bird Tales", or other recent presentations?

Well, you're in luck! Check out our Friends of Missisquoi YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@friendsofmissisquoi1650/videos>



Refuge Managers Update - February, 2025

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR



Life below the snow.

By all accounts it's been a snowy winter in Vermont this year. Looking out the window of my office there is a white blanket stretching as far as I can see. For many species of wildlife, winter is a time of inactivity, migration, and hibernation. But there is more out there than meets the eye. It occurs beneath the snow, in the subnivean zone.

I love the word subnivean for some reason. Taken from latin roots (sub and nives) it means "under the snow" and refers to an open shallow layer under a deep snowpack. Taking a walk through the snow you may often see small holes here and there with mouse tracks leading to and from them. What you don't see are the tunnels which small mammals, like mice or voles, create under the snow. These tunnels link different parts of their habitat (areas for foraging, sleeping etc.) under the protection of the snow above them. While the outside air temperature may be well below freezing, the relative protection of the snow layer creates a rather stable climate in the subnivean zone, typically hovering around 32 degrees Fahrenheit.

One would think that a deep snowpack would

be fabulous protection for the mice and voles who go about their business in tunnels in the subnivean zone, rather than being exposed as they are during the rest of the year. Although this does provide much cover and protection, predators are still active during the winter and still need to eat. Hawks and owls have developed excellent hearing and can detect rodents moving about in their tunnels under the snow. Also, other animals like the red fox famously leap high in the air to pounce on the unsuspecting vole scurrying through tunnels under the snow. However, the one animal that probably has the best predatory advantage is the weasel, specifically long and short tailed weasels. These predators have cylindrical bodies and can move easily through established rodent tunnels under the snow. Their coats turn white to camouflage them in the winter and they are known as voracious predators. Weasels will even take over a tunnel system to make it their own!

As you walk, snowshoe, or ski the refuge trails, keep the subnivean zone in mind. Look for the holes and tracks that provide clues to the activity under the snow. As snow melts, these pathways also become visible in the vegetation below the snow. And as I've said many a time, lets all be glad that weasels are not the size of dogs!

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS

Wednesday, May 14th, 2025 at 6:30 PM via Zoom

Wednesday, July 9th, 2025 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.

Birding Q & A

by Ken Copenhaver

Q. Should I take down my bird feeders to prevent the spread of bird flu?

A. The short answer is “no” with a few caveats. While there has been widespread transmission of H5N1 avian flu among waterfowl and raptors, transmission to songbirds has been very low. By following all the usual guidelines for regularly cleaning your feeders to prevent transmission of diseases in general, there is little chance that bird feeders will increase the spread of avian flu.

While songbirds have not generally been affected by bird flu, they can theoretically transmit it via their feces. So if you have a backyard poultry flock, additional precautions are needed. Since H5N1 flu is very transmissible among poultry, it is recommended that you keep your flock separated

from wild birds. Therefore it is best not to attract wild birds to your yard with bird feeders. Many sources are available for the proper care of backyard poultry flocks, so I won't go into that here.

If you would find a sick or dead bird, avoid contact with it. If you must move it, wear gloves and a face mask. Place dead birds in a double-bagged garbage bag. Throw away the gloves and mask. Wash your hands well with soap and water.

In short, if you don't have a backyard poultry flock and if you clean your feeders regularly, it should be fine to continue feeding birds. However, as new strains of the flu develop, recommendations could change, so be sure to follow any new state or national advisories.

Who's Out & About on the Refuge?

Meet Tuck and Sandy Cantrell. They are both loyal Friends members. Tuck grew up in a family that spent lots of time in the natural world, so his youth was spent surrounded by wildlife, birds, and flowers. Sandy grew up with a brother that developed a passion for birds, and although she didn't develop the interest alongside her brother, she grew to appreciate them once she was older.

They now reside in Williston and make frequent trips to Missisquoi to join in on the monthly bird monitoring walks. Although they haven't spent as much time at Missisquoi in the summer, they enjoy coming to Missisquoi in all seasons. They particularly enjoy the spring and fall migrations and have very vivid memories of the birds that they've see on their outings. The owls, the hawks, and the osprey are particularly memorable. Of all the refuge trails, Sandy likes the Stephen J. Young Marsh Trail the best because of its variety of

habitats. Tuck is just happy to be out on any of the trails. They love the comradery of the bird walks; meeting new people and reconnecting with those they know. They both feel fortunate to have a wildlife refuge so close to home and see Missisquoi as a great asset. They commend the staff and the volunteers for all the care that goes into it.



“An Evening of Bird Tales” tradition continues

The Friends hosted their 9th Bird Tales event on February 6th. This organic event can best be described as a handful of storytellers relaying a short tale having to do with birds. What makes it special is normal everyday people sharing stories that have the ability to move people emotionally.

This year’s theme was “Where have birds taken you?”. The evening featured 5 individuals sharing their interpretation of that theme. “Where birds had taken them” proved to be a very reflective exercise for each speaker, and the beauty of this

year’s tales was in how each storyteller's personal reflection emanated from them; their excitement, their vulnerability, their anxieties, and most of all their passion for birds.

Through their stories, the audience was able to travel throughout North America and see a wide variety of birds and landscapes, while getting to meet some great people on a personal level. If you missed this year’s event and would like to watch it, it is available on our YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/hM1-WZ0LZgo>

Here are some screenshots from this year’s Bird Tales:



An Urgent Need to Support National Wildlife Refuges

by Ken Copenhaver

As you are likely aware, the current presidential administration has been making cuts throughout the federal government. While several departments have made headlines, we don't tend to hear much about the Department of the Interior. (National Wildlife Refuges are part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service which is one of 11 bureaus within the Department of the Interior.) So you might have missed the news that on February 14th, 420 positions were cut within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFS), of which 36 positions were within the Northeast Region. The positions cut were new employees in their 1-year probationary period (or 2 years for some positions). Subsequently, about 50 of these positions were restored, mostly in law enforcement and other positions deemed critical. Also, an unknown number of employees may have taken the "buyout" that was offered, and there could be a future reduction in force (RIF).

Within the refuge system, the recent cuts reduced employees from 2,353 to 2,230. These 2,230 employees manage 573 refuges on 95 million acres of land plus 750 million acres of marine habitat. To put this in perspective, with these cuts, there is now a 31% decrease in number of employees since 2010. National Wildlife Refuges were already understaffed before the most recent cuts. It's possible that some refuges will need to be closed to the public, or if left open, won't have sufficient staff to control their use. Fortunately, Missisquoi NWR did not have any probationary staff and was not affected by this round of layoffs.

Besides reducing the number of employees, it is likely that the new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) will eventually be looking for other cost savings. These could include stopping new building construction or other building improvements (even if construction is already underway), eliminating anything related to climate change, and halting on-going wildlife studies deemed unnecessary. Also, pausing federal grants

has caused chaos in many areas, and some grants are still frozen even after the pause was temporarily rescinded.

Another priority of the administration is to open up more public lands to oil and gas drilling. We can't assume that refuges will be spared, though Missisquoi isn't a likely target. It's also possible that "oil and gas extraction" could be added to refuges' current "big six" compatible uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife watching, photography, environmental education, and interpretation). Furthermore, Congress could be looking for revenue in their next budget by selling public lands. While they would likely start with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, some refuges could also be a target.

The upshot of all of this is that refuges need your support more than ever. Much of the information in this article came from a webinar presented by the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA), a non-profit that supports Refuge Friends groups by providing resources and sharing information. They also work constantly to stay up to date on anything happening in Washington that could affect refuges and they also maintain contact with legislators who are friendly toward refuges. Their website is <https://www.refugeassociation.org/> and here is a link to the webinar mentioned above: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7ZJgmwggXw>. Their summary of the current situation is here: <https://www.refugeassociation.org/news/2025/2/14/eodwispvhseybqgiow291z3k5wxerh>

How You Can Help

The NWRA suggests the best way to support refuges is to contact your legislators. Vermont's legislators have been great supporters of refuges in general and Missisquoi in particular, but it doesn't hurt for them to know how many constituents feel that refuges are important to them. Urge them to join the Congressional Wildlife Refuge Caucus.

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Lake Champlain Basin Program Continues Support of Aquatic Invasives Removal

For the 12th year, the Friends of Missisquoi have received from the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP), a grant to be used in the removal of aquatic invasive species on the refuge. This year's award is for \$10,000.



The LCBP “is a Congressionally-designated initiative to restore and protect Lake Champlain and its surrounding watershed. We work with partners in New York, Vermont, and Québec to coordinate and fund efforts to address challenges in the areas of phosphorus pollution, toxic substances, biodiversity, aquatic invasive species, and climate change.”

At Missisquoi, Refuge staff and volunteers scout refuge wetlands for the presence of non-native invasive species. The Friends then use monies from the grant to hire and pay contractors to remove all aquatic invasive species, with the exception of invasive water chestnut. This approach frees up refuge staff and volunteers for water chestnut removal. Water chestnut is by far the most pressing

problem with invasives on the refuge.

This year the LCBP will fund approximately \$5.5 million in projects that will support the goals of their “*Opportunities for Action: An Evolving Plan for the Future of the Lake Champlain Basin.*” This plan, first issued in 1996 and updated four times since then, addresses “the latest challenges and opportunities related to nutrient loading, aquatic invasive species, contaminants, habitat conservation, and cultural heritage preservation and interpretation. This plan also highlights two overarching goals: addressing the impacts of a changing climate on water quality and ecosystem health of the Lake Champlain watershed, and including diverse voices in decision processes and supporting communities with environmental justice concerns related to the Lake.

The EPA supports much of the work of the Lake Champlain Basin Program. With the current atmosphere in Washington, the same level of support may not be available in the future.

The Friends thank the Basin Program for supporting the incredibly important fight against aquatic invasive species on the refuge.

“Urgent Need” from << page 8 Here is a website where you can send a message to your legislators:

<https://www.refugeassociation.org/advocacy-refuge-employees?emci=e8bd2699-3dea-ef11-90cb-0022482a94f4&emdi=5ba27677-42ea-ef11-90cb-0022482a94f4&ceid=1340168>

Please personalize your message by telling why Missisquoi and other refuges are important to you.

Visit the NWRA website and subscribe to receive the latest wildlife refuge news and updates.

Spread the word about the Friends of Missisquoi and urge people to join.

Volunteer at the Refuge. Currently there is a need for volunteers in the following areas: manning the front desk in the Visitors Center, trail work, light maintenance, mowing and trimming, and helping with invasive water chestnut removal. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, at 802-868-4781 ext. 3236.

Thank you from the Friends of Missisquoi NWR.

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.



Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, Inc.
29 Tabor Road
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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: _____
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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.)