



MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Winter, 2025-2026



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

Bird Tales

Thursday, February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM via Zoom

Birds have the capability to move people: move them physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Join us on February 5th for “An Evening of Bird Tales”, an entertaining night of avian storytelling. Listen as our presenters give us a window into where birds have taken them. Amazingly, 2026 will mark the 11th year of this popular event! Registration information for this online event can be found on our website calendar: www.friendsofmissisquoi/calendar. We hope you join in on the fun!





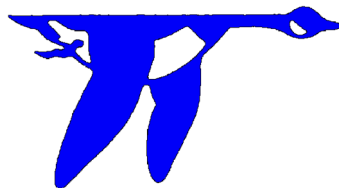
Missisquoi at Night Occasionally, through the winter

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 better awareness, appreciation, conservation, and responsible utilization of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. 29 Tabor Road, Swanton, VT 05488 (802) 868-4781 ext 121 www.friendsofmissisquoi.org E-mail: info@friendsofmissisquoi.org Newsletter edited by Al Crist

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- Jason Crooks
- Tom Hargy
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Refuge Staff

- Ken Sturm *Refuge Manager*
- Judy Sefchick *Wildlife Biologist*
- Chris Whitaker *Maintenance Mechanic*

Have you ever wondered what it's like to look through a high quality telescope; to be able to see objects hidden from the naked eye in the night sky? Well, stop wondering and come visit us at Missisquoi NWR Visitor's Center when Friends Member Brian Johnson has his powerful telescope set up!



Brian will offer views of the constellations, planets, the Milky Way, galaxies, star clouds, & nebulae. Just bring some warm clothes and your sense of adventure. The next scheduled event is for **Friday, Nov. 28th beginning at 7:30 pm**. Rain/cloud date is Saturday, Nov. 29th. Highlights will be Saturn, Neptune, and the first quarter moon. Going forward, keep an eye on our Calendar and the Friends Facebook Page for the next "Missisquoi at Night." Hope to see you there! Please register for this free event at <https://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>

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/

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 presentation on Birdfeeding Basics, or the recent presentations about Bobolinks and Meadowlarks, or our recent three-part series about invasive species in Vermont?

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

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



Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks

Friends board members and birders extraordinaire Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti lead the walks on various refuge trails beginning at 8AM 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 188 months of walks, we have recorded 166 species of birds. Registration for the walks is not required.

The schedule for the next three months is:

December 13: Maquam/Black Creek Trail. Meet at the parking lot located on Rte. 78, approximately 2½ miles west of Swanton village.

January 17: Old Railroad Passage Trail. Meet at the Trails parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile south of the refuge Visitor Center.

February 21: Discovery Trail. Meet at the Visitors Center parking lot on Tabor Rd.

Who's Out & About on the Refuge?

Meet Rebecca Laroche. Rebecca is recent retiree from Colorado who you will more than likely soon bump into on the refuge because one of her retirement goals is to visit the refuge on a weekly basis. Coming from arid Colorado, she doesn't take the refuge's wetlands for granted and is in awe of the connected system of rivers, marshes, swamps, and bogs, and the wildlife they support. She feels it makes a richer and fuller outdoor experience.

Rebecca is not a stranger to the National Wildlife Refuge System, and has visited one or more refuges in most of the 42 states in which she has birded. Because the National Parks are so crowded, Rebecca seeks out the "hidden gems" of the National Wildlife Refuge System to immerse herself in the natural world. She hasn't yet decided on a favorite trail or season at Missisquoi, since she has yet to fully experience fall and winter on the refuge. But she is looking forward to becoming intimate with each trail in each season and "just to notice" things she hasn't noticed before. Missisquoi is contained within her 5-mile radius patch, a circle

extending out 5 miles in each direction from her house, and she has a goal of becoming intimate with that patch. Rebecca raves, "I've never had anything in my life like my appreciation for nature and what it has given me. That kind of serendipity and the community of people who are part of that serendipity are what it's all about. By the end of every walk, I've seen something that has taken my breath away."



Refuge Managers Update - November, 2025



by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR

Due to the government shutdown, there will be no Refuge Managers Update for this issue.

Birding Q & A

by Ken Copenhaver

Q. This past summer, I watched two Blue Jays attack a small wasp nest under my deck railing. They caught the wasps and tore the nest apart to get the larvae inside. I've never seen this before. Is this a common behavior for Blue Jays?

A. Yes, Blue Jays are known to eat wasps. Blue Jays are opportunistic feeders, eating a variety of fruits, seeds, nuts, insects (including wasps), and even small animals. In fact, they are known to seek out wasp nests, mainly for the rich source of protein in the larvae. To get to the larvae, they need to kill the wasps, which will guard the nest fiercely. Blue Jays can handle the wasps with their sharp beak and strong talons without being stung. They will often discard the wasps, as they're mostly after the larvae.

Blue Jays aren't the only birds that eat wasps and other bees. A prime example is the Bee-eater family, consisting of 31 species found in Africa, Europe, Southeast Asia, and Australia. They prey on large flying insects, especially wasps and bees, removing the stingers before eating them. Another example is the European Honey-Buzzard, whose diet consists mainly of wasps and hornets, including larvae, pupae, and adults. Honey-Buzzards can follow a wasp many miles back to its nest, then perch on an inconspicuous branch and catch wasps in the air or raid their nest. Also the Red-throated Caracara in Central and South

America feeds mainly on wasps, bees, ants, and termites.

Closer to home, some of our more familiar birds are also known to eat wasps and their larvae. For example, Scarlet Tanagers capture adult bees, wasps, and hornets in flight, then beat them repeatedly against a branch or other hard surface until dead. While Northern Shrikes are best known for capturing smaller birds, they will also capture bumblebees and other insects in flight. Eastern Kingbirds eat honeybees, mostly the larger drones. Northern Mockingbirds, Tree Swallows, and Purple Martins, are also known to eat bees and wasps. While Hairy Woodpeckers mostly eat ants, they can also eat bees and wasps. Since ants, bees, and wasps are all in the Hymenoptera family, birds that eat ants will often eat bees and wasps as well.

Of course, eating stinging insects has its dangers. Birds must be able to avoid being stung, either by killing the insect or removing its stinger. They must also have a strong digestive system to digest their venom. Some species feed on bees and wasps mainly during the nesting season to take the larvae to their chicks.

While we might seldom witness birds catching bees or wasps or raiding their nests, it is a common practice among many species.

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.



Paddler's Corner

by Jason Crooks

The paddling season is over for 2025. But here's something to whet your appetite for spring of 2026!

If you have half a day and are looking for a new waterway to paddle, you might try Dead Creek at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, starting at the Shipyard Road launch in Highgate next to the Tyler place.

This can be a one-way paddle or an out and back if you're interested in a full day.

Starting at Shipyard Road boat launch, paddle left and follow the shoreline. You'll see plenty of ducks and gulls. There's an interesting marsh area where you have to turn north to head up and around an outcrop of land before you descend into Dead Creek. The Dead Creek delta, where the creek empties into the lake, is often a great place to see a lot of ducks, terns, and gulls. It may be windy here, so plan for that. Once you get around the corner and head south again you'll be in Dead Creek and the wind should subside.

Look for shore birds along the banks of the creek and enjoy the huge silver maples towering over the creek. You can also see turtles along the banks. Wind through here and eventually you'll come out on the main Missisquoi River. Turn right here and keep your eyes peeled for more turtles. Not too much farther and you'll see Louie's Landing boat launch, on your left, where you can end your paddle

or turn around and return back to Shipyard Road. Make sure you visit Devyn's Creemee Stand, 2 miles west of Louie's Landing on Rte. 78, before you go home!

One Way: 5.7 miles, approximately 3 Hours and 20 minutes



FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS6

Wednesday, January 14th, 2026 at 6:30 PM via Zoom

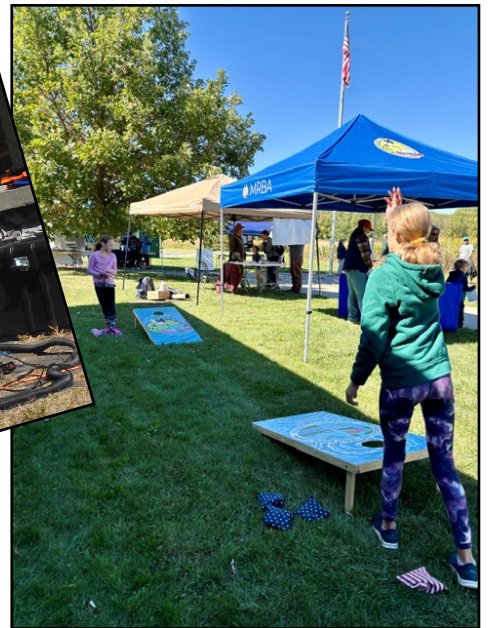
Wednesday, March 11th, 2026 at 6:30 PM via Zoom

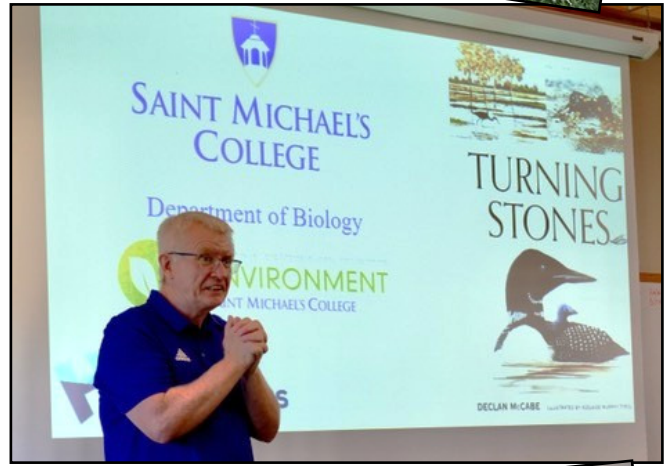
email info@friendsofmissisquoi.org if you'd like to attend via Zoom

Members are always welcome & encouraged to attend.

Scenes From the Missisquoi Wildlife Fair

The 2nd Annual Missisquoi Wildlife Fair on Saturday, Sept. 20th was a resounding success. The day began chilly and clear but soon warmed up and became a beautiful fall day. Over 300 people descended on the refuge Visitors Center to see the many fascinating wildlife-themed displays, listen to the interesting presentations, hear live music while eating lunch from the food truck, and see all of the refuge equipment on display. The Friends of Missisquoi and Green Mountain Audubon also sponsored early morning nature and bird walks. The presentation of live raptors put on by the Southern Vermont Natural History Museum was especially popular. Many thanks to all of the volunteers who pulled together a wonderful event! Plans are already in the works for next year's Wildlife Fair.





MISSISQUOI MATTERS FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NWR WINTER, 25-26



Big Sit 2025 Results

15 dedicated birders took part in our 9th “Big Sit!” event on Saturday, October 11th.

The Big Sit! is an international event, sponsored by the New Haven (CT) bird club that’s held annually in early October. It’s been described as a “tailgate party for birders.” The idea is to identify as many species of birds as possible on a single day while birding from within a 17-foot circle. As in years past, the location we’ve used is the observation deck at the Stephen J. Young Marsh.

On a beautiful fall day, we noted 41 species of birds, which tied our 2nd highest total and was

well over our average of 36. We added one new species to our lists, a Red-shouldered Hawk. Other highlights included a Lincoln’s Sparrow, and a 6-species woodpecker sweep.

Data from Big Sit! circles around the world, including ours, is entered into eBird, an online database of bird observations run & maintained by Cornell University’s Lab of Ornithology. This data is available to scientists and researchers worldwide, providing information on migration patterns and bird distributions among other things.

If you’d like to get involved, our 10th annual event will tentatively be on Sat., Oct. 11th, 2026.



Species seen in 2025:

- | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. American Crow | 13. Cooper’s Hawk | 25. Pileated Woodpecker | 35. White-breasted Nuthatch |
| 2. American Goldfinch | 14. Dark-eyed Junco | 26. Red-bellied Woodpecker | 36. White-throated Sparrow |
| 3. American Robin | 15. Double-crested Cormorant | 27. Red-shouldered Hawk | 37. Wilson’s Snipe |
| 4. American Woodcock | 16. Downy Woodpecker | 28. Red-tailed Hawk | 38. Wood Duck |
| 5. Bald Eagle | 17. Eastern Phoebe | 29. Red-winged Blackbird | 39. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker |
| 6. Belted Kingfisher | 18. European Starling | 30. Rusty Blackbird | 40. Yellowlegs - Greater/Lesser |
| 7. Black-capped Chickadee | 19. Great Blue Heron | 31. Sharp-shinned Hawk | 41. Yellow-rumped Warbler |
| 8. Blue Jay | 20. Hairy Woodpecker | 32. Song Sparrow | |
| 9. Canada Goose | 21. Lincoln’s Sparrow | 33. Swamp Sparrow | |
| 10. Cedar Waxwing | 22. Mourning Dove | 34. Turkey Vulture | |
| 11. Common Grackle | 23. Northern Flicker | | |
| 12. Common Raven | 24. Northern Harrier | | |

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:
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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.)