

**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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(802) 868-4781 ext 121

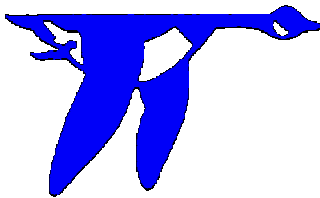
[www.friendsofmissisquoi.org](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org)

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Newsletter edited by Ken Copenhagen

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MNWR HQ hours are  
Monday thru Friday  
8:00am – 4:30pm  
Saturdays  
10:00 am – 2:00 pm

**Manager's Update – November 2015**

*by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR*

As I write this quarterly update for the Friends Newsletter, it's hard to believe it is truly November. Sure the summer seemed to zip by and fall seems to be slipping by just as quickly. Yet stepping outside this morning it seemed more like a late spring day than late fall! It's a very nice start to November when a walk on the refuge doesn't require a jacket!

Taking an assessment of this past field season, it's great to see all the accomplishments of our staff and refuge volunteers. The refuge infrastructure got great attention this year thanks to temporary laborer Jeff Harvey. It's the small things that can sometimes get over looked but really matter in the long run: all of our kiosks got cleaned and stained, a variety of repairs were completed on trails, signs and gates were installed or improved. Jeff even repainted all the parking lot lines for the Visitor's Center! Sadly we say goodbye to Jeff in mid-November, but we greatly appreciate all of the work and attention to detail he has given the refuge this season.

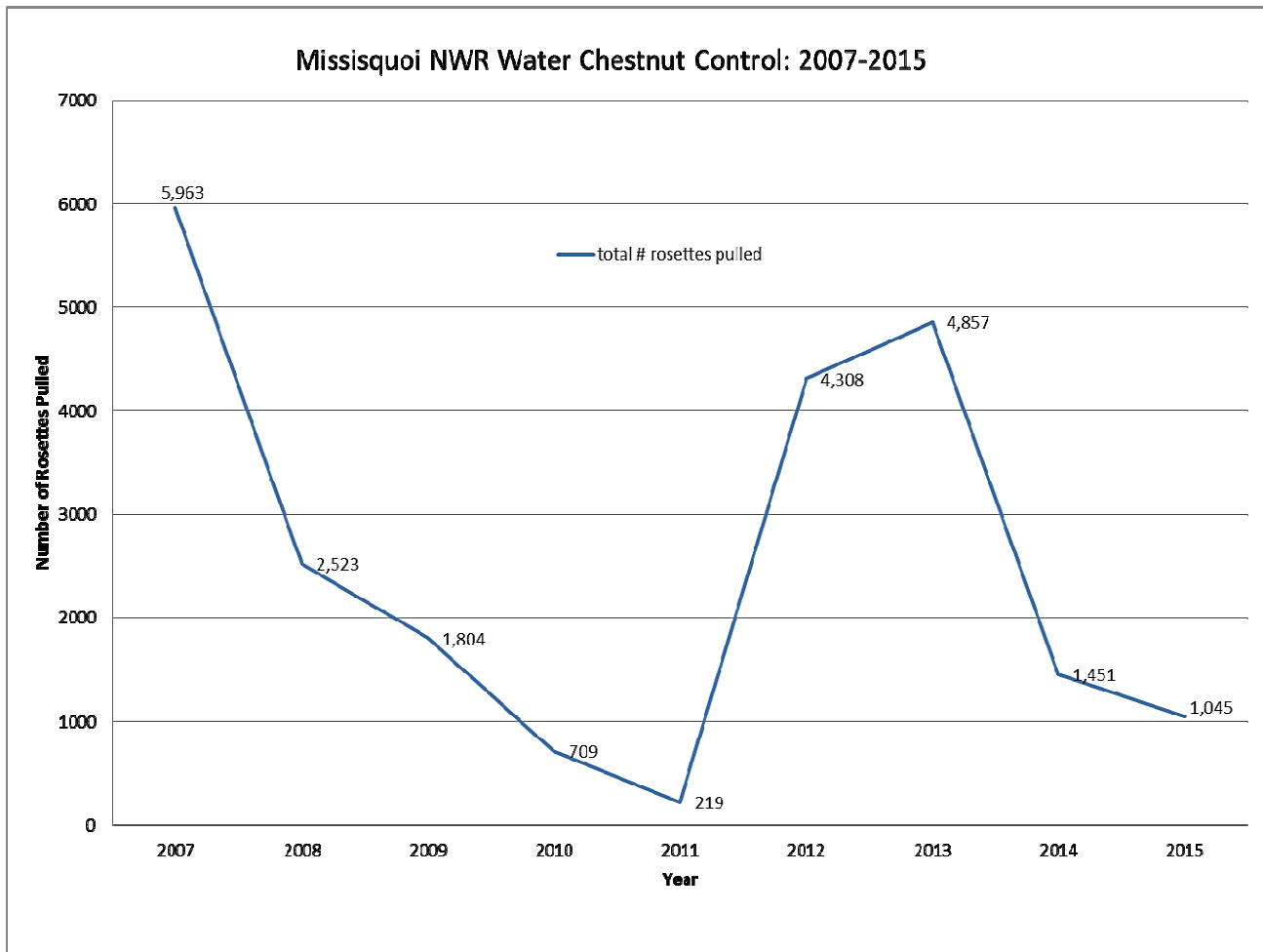
For those of you tracking construction projects, our boat ramps are finally complete at Mac's Bend. Yes it seemed to take a long time but we hope that by increasing the width and length of the previous ramps the new site will make launching boats a bit easier and safer.

The refuge has completed another 2.5 acres of early successional forest management at the Stephen Young Marsh this fall. This, combined with last year's work, creates a total of almost 6 acres of regenerating young forest habitat. Cutting these trees will allow root sprouts and dormant seeds to regrow forming a dense young forest and shrubland. Birds that depend on young forests and shrublands are especially at risk in the northeast. In New England and the Mid-Atlantic, two-thirds of these bird species experienced significant population declines between 1966 and 2010. Providing and maintaining this habitat will benefit bird species such as: American woodcock, rusty blackbird, black-billed cuckoo, brown thrasher, hermit thrush, gray catbird, ruffed grouse, white-throated sparrow, chestnut-sided warbler, and many others that use early-successional habitat for some or all of their life stages. Keep your eyes on the changes to the new habitat easily visible from the viewing platform at the pond and keep your eyes and ears open to identify those species that will flock to this habitat during the breeding season.

The season wrap up can't be complete without another big "thank you" to the Friends of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge for again supporting

our work to control the aquatic invasive species, water chestnut, on the refuge this summer. The Friends were able to receive a grant from the state again this summer to support two contract workers who surveyed a total of 716 acres and pulled 1,045 water chestnut rosettes from the refuge in August. By looking at the chart you can see the direct evidence of progress that started when the Friends

received the first grant in 2012 to help get a handle on an exploding population of water chestnut. Following the first year of contract work in 2013 the numbers of rosettes pulled from the refuge have dropped significantly and are now reaching very manageable levels. We hope to continue working with the Friends next field season to ensure our fight against water chestnut does not lose ground.



Late fall and winter are the times when the refuge staff can evaluate the previous year's work and start planning for the next year. If anyone reading this newsletter is curious about what the Friends group is involved with, I encourage you to come to the next board meeting and find out! There are plenty of opportunities to get involved, and the refuge appreciates all of the support we get from our great volunteers. Lastly I hope that everyone

remembers that our trails remain open during the winter and that it's a great place to walk, snowshoe, or cross-country ski. Wildlife observation takes on a new challenge during the winter months, more like detective work looking for clues – so I encourage everyone to be their inner wildlife detective and get out and enjoy the wildlife and habitats that the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge protects and manages!



## Winter Activities Schedule at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

*29 Tabor Rd.  
Swanton, VT 05488*

**All programs and tours are free, but registration is required where noted.**

### **Monthly Nature/Photography Walks**      **1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of each month, 9:00 to 11:00 AM**

Join Friends of Missisquoi NWR members Joe Belanger, Mark Batchelder, and Bob Chaperon for nature/photography walks on various refuge trails, held the first Saturday of each month. Registration is not required. **Come have fun with us!**

**December 5: Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton.

**January 2: Jeep Trail.** Meet at the Louies Landing boat access area. We will drive in to the trail head at Macs Bend.

**February 6: Stephen Young Marsh Trail.** Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge headquarters and across the road from the marsh.

### **Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks**      **3rd Saturday of each month, 8:00 to 10:00 AM**

Friends of MNWR members Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti will lead bird monitoring walks year-round 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 67 months of walks we have recorded 138 species of birds.** Registration is not required. The schedule for the next three months is:

**December 19: Jeep Trail.** Meet at the Louies Landing boat access area. We will drive in to the trail head at Macs Bend.

**January 16: Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte 78 approx. 2 ½ miles west of Swanton.

**February 20: Stephen Young Marsh Trail.** Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge headquarters and across the road from the marsh.

Other winter events will be posted on the Friends website as soon as dates are known.

We also are planning to do a bird walk this spring at the **Eagle Point Unit** on the shore of Lake Memphremagog. The tentative date is **Saturday, June 11**. A date will be published in the Spring or Summer issue of the newsletter and on the website.

**To check for any schedule changes or additions, visit the Friends website at [www.friendsofmissisquoi.org](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org) and click on "Calendar."**

**For more information about the refuge, visit [www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi/)**

## So What about Saw-Whets?

by Judy Sefchick Edwards, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR

Just when you think you've heard it all, you realize...you haven't! On the way back from waterfowl banding one night, an interesting thing happened (as if banding ducks wasn't interesting enough). A sound that I didn't recognize resonated from a grove of trees right next to the refuge headquarters. It was so unusual, methodical, and monotonous, that, at first, I thought it might be mechanical. Then I realized it was a bird. But this wasn't your ordinary, "*Who-cooks-for-you*" or "*Hoo-hoo-hoot*" variety. It was a northern saw-whet owl, stopping by Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge to rest and feed, on its migratory route south.

You may ask yourself, "So what, about saw-whets?" Being the smallest owl in eastern North America, northern saw-whets are more robin-sized than owl-sized. At less than three ounces and a mere 8 inches tall, this diminutive owl pales in comparison to its twenty-one inch, 1.6 pound, barred owl relative. The saw-whet's small stature, combined with its disproportionately large head, white "V" forehead marking, and deer-in-the-headlights expression, gives the impression that it's nature's version of a cuddly stuffed animal. But looks can be deceiving. Saw-whet owls are nocturnal lie-in-wait predators that ambush small mammals, rip them apart, eat one-half for a meal, and save the rest on a branch for later!

For such a small owl, saw-whets have a lot to say. With around 11 different vocalizations, saw-whets twitter, skew, and squeak their way through life. Their most notable call comes during the spring and summer: If you think you hear a never-ending, back-up signal of a truck, but it's in the woods, instead of on the road, it's probably a saw-whet. This call can be heard up to half-a-mile away, and is mostly given by territorial males advertising for females. To our ears, it's an unrelenting series of repetitive constant pitches that can be downright annoying (especially if you don't know what it is). But it's music to a female owl's ears—according to

researchers, she hears variety and uses it to choose her mate accordingly!

Hearing a saw-whet owl is a lot easier than seeing one. Their small size, secretive character, and solely nocturnal nature make them easy to overlook. During the day, saw-whets silently roost in coniferous trees, but don't think that makes them easy to spot. Being masters of disguise, they remain motionless when sensing danger. Relying on their camouflage feathers to hide, saw-whets may even elongate their bodies and cover their faces with one wing—an act that is affectionately referred to as "playing pinecone!"

Besides their cool look, and quirky disposition, saw-whet owls are the poster child for how much humans have *yet to learn* about birds. Project OwlNet—a continent-wide mist-netting and banding effort, started in the 1990s, to monitor saw-whet populations and migration—blew the lid off of some common saw-whet misconceptions. Once considered rare throughout most of their range, saw-whets are now known to be one of the *most common* forest raptors in North America. In addition, it was found that while some saw-whets silently migrate through the night to a new winter destination, others remain on their breeding grounds. Whoohoo knew that northern saw-whet owls react to lunar events? During the light of a full moon, saw-whets hunt less, and may temporarily stop migrating, in order to lessen their chance of being eaten by predators, including other owls!

In Vermont, we're lucky. Not only do northern saw-whet owls nest throughout our coniferous and mixed forests, but they migrate through the state in even greater numbers. Every September, October, and November, the fall migration is on, so why not enjoy the fall darkness with these amazing migrating creatures in mind? After all, you just never know when a saw-whet, in all its wily wisdom, will show up to rest and feed in a woodlot near you!

## **Friends News Shorts**

- **School groups at the Refuge.** Did you know that the refuge is a frequent destination for school groups? Just since the beginning of this school year, 132 students from 7 different schools visited the refuge for environmental education. Since at many schools the cost of transportation is an obstacle for taking field trips, the Friends offers up to \$100 per field trip for reimbursement of bus transportation costs. By subsidizing busing, the Friends have enabled many school groups to visit the refuge over the past two years. At the November board meeting, the directors voted to continue the busing reimbursement program. If you know any teachers who might want to take a field trip to the refuge but need help with busing costs, please let them know about how the Friends can help.
- **Water Chestnut Removal Grant.** The Friends will again be applying for a grant to fund water chestnut removal in summer of 2016. The \$4000 grant is provided by the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership. As during the past several years, it will be used to pay contract workers to pull Water Chestnut, an invasive species that the refuge and the state of Vermont have an interest in controlling. The Friends will apply for the grant and administer payments to the contractors and for other expenses. This is a project that the refuge would likely not have the resources to fund on its own, and they, as a federal agency, cannot apply for such grants. The Friends, however, can receive and administer the grant funds for the benefit of the refuge. This is just one of the many ways that the Friends can help support the refuge.

- **Tree Planting.** In September, energetic volunteers from UVM (see photo) helped celebrate National Public Lands Day by planting 300 trees across the river from the Black/Maquam Trail parking lot. The goal of the tree planting is to stabilize an eroding riverbank and begin the process of reforestation.



- **Duck Banding.** Every fall hundreds of ducks are banded on the refuge. This year, with the help of 11 volunteers and the entire Missisquoi staff, they managed to band 522 ducks (392 Wood Ducks, 120 Mallards, 7 American Black Ducks, 2 Northern Pintails, and 1 black duck/mallard hybrid), making this the fourth best season since rocket netting started. Rocket netting is a technique by which ducks are attracted to an open area by baiting the area with corn. When sufficient numbers of ducks are visiting the area daily, refuge staff members will set up a large net that is launched by “rockets.” The staff and volunteers then hide from the ducks’ view, and when a large group of ducks is within the target area, the net is launched. The banders then scramble to capture as many of the ducks as possible. They record data for each duck, including species, sex, age (“hatch-year” vs adult), etc.; place a numbered band on one leg, and release it as soon as possible to minimize the stress on the bird. When bands are recovered, often by duck hunters, important information is learned about annual harvest rates and annual survival rates. The data is used to determine appropriate hunting regulations each year.



## **“Giving Goose” Donations**



In the lobby of the Refuge Visitor Center is a nearly 25-square foot painting, titled “Blue Goose Marsh.” Along the top of the painting is a flock of 50 brass geese. These geese, patterned after the National Wildlife Refuge System logo, can be engraved with a commemorative message honoring donors, or memorial donations, to the Refuge and Friends organization.

The leader of the flock has been engraved with the name of Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Fries. The Fries are the parents of former Friends director Christine Sweeny and parents-in-law of retired Refuge Manager Mark Sweeny. Memorial contributions made at the time of Mr. Fries’ passing were used to fund the initial design and fabrication of the geese.

The plaque at the base of the painting reads, **“What a country chooses to save is what a country says about itself.”** This is a quote from Mollie Beattie, who was a University of Vermont graduate and the first woman director of the Fish & Wildlife Service.

**The Friends Board of Directors has set a minimum donation of \$300 for a goose. Geese will be engraved with the donor's name or message. Gifts may be made in honor of, or in memory of, a family member, friend, loved one, corporation, or organization. If you wish to support the Friends and the Refuge through a generous Giving Goose donation, please contact the Friends by emailing [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org).**

### **FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE Bi-monthly Board Meeting**

**Wednesday, January 13, 2016 at 6:30 pm**

**At the Refuge Visitor Center**

Members are always welcome to attend.

Come and see what the board is planning and contribute your ideas.

**Next meeting: Wednesday, February 9, 2016 at 6:30 pm**

# The Friends' Store

at the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center

BOOKS

GAMES

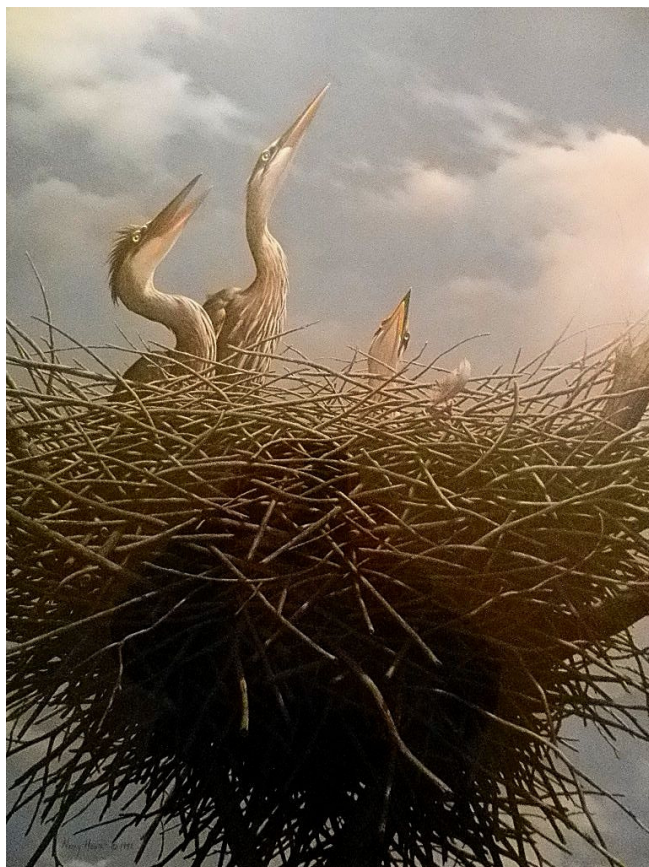
GIFTS

TEE SHIRTS

HATS

for people of all ages who love the outdoors

## Baby Blues



19" x 24" signed and numbered print by artist Nancy Howe

\$50.00, includes a 1-year membership in the Friends of MNWR

In honor of Missisquoi NWR's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1993, Nancy Howe, Vermont artist and winner of the 1991-92 Federal Duck Stamp Contest, created a painting entitled "Baby Blues." The artwork features three Great Blue Heron young in their nest. Nancy spent one day in a blind in the Refuge's heron rookery. She observed and photographed the birds to get material for this painting.

Signed and numbered prints are being offered by the Friends for \$50. Purchase of a print includes a 1-year membership in the Friends.

Consider giving a print as a holiday gift to a special bird-lover or nature-lover. Prints can be picked up at the refuge, ordered via the Friends website, or use the order form below. If ordered by mail or via the website, prints will be sent in a mailing tube. Shipping is free! (If using the order form below, also please fill out the membership form on the front page of this newsletter.)

### Store Order Form

To order by phone, call 802-868-4781. To order by mail, fill out this order form and send to:  
The Friends' Store MNWR, 29 Tabor Rd, Swanton, VT 05488

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me: ☐ **Baby Blues print (\$50.00, Free Shipping)**

Payment: Enclose check or money order, or fill in Credit Card information.

Type of card: ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_