



# MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF  
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Summer, 2022



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

### Eagle Point WMA Bird Walk

Saturday, June 4th, 8 am

Join the Friends of Missisquoi NWR along with the Memphremagog Watershed Association for a morning of birding and exploration at Eagle Point Wildlife Management Area. This 420 acre tract of property on the shore of Lake Memphremagog, near the town of Newport, became part of the Missisquoi NWR in 2010 and is managed in partnership with the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

The property consists of a mix of upland and wetland habitats including northern hardwood forest, hemlock seepage forest, managed grassland, and a diverse wetland complex formed around Hall's Creek. The varied habitats should produce an impressive number of species to be seen. Note: there are no facilities on the property.



Current COVID guidelines will be followed. Please plan on wearing a facemask if not fully vaccinated. This walk will be led by Julie Filiberti and Ken Copenhaver.

### Directions to Eagle Point:

- From East Main Street in Newport (VT5) turn left on Sias Avenue (heading north) – .6 miles
- Sias Avenue turns into Darling Hill Road – 1.6mi
- Continue straight on North Derby Road – 2.1mi
- At the end, make a left onto Eagle Point Farm Road (T-17) and follow to Eagle Point WMA – 1.4 mi



## 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.

29 Tabor Road, Swanton, VT 05488

(802) 868-4781 ext 121

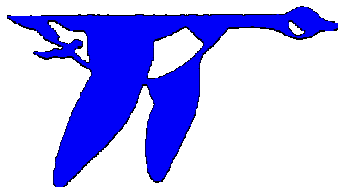
[www.friendsofmissisquoi.org](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org)

E-mail: [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org)

Newsletter edited by Al Crist

### Board of Directors

Rich Kelley	<i>President</i>
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### Refuge Staff

Ken Sturm	<i>Refuge Manager</i>
Judy Sefchick	<i>Wildlife Biologist</i>
Lisa Swainbank	<i>Office Administrative Assistant</i>
Joe Bertrand	<i>Maintenance Mechanic</i>

## Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks

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. After 145 months of walks, we have recorded 161 species of birds. Species number 161, Gadwall, was added on the April walk. Registration for the walks is not required.

**COVID Notice:** We will be following Vermont state COVID-19 protocols for outdoor activities. We ask that you stay home if you are feeling ill and to wear a mask if you are unvaccinated and when you can't maintain a safe social distance.

The schedule for the next three months is:

**June 18: Railroad Trail.** Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center and across the road from the marsh.

**July 16: Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte. 78, approx. 2½ miles west of Swanton village.

**August 20: Jeep Trail.** Meet at the Louie's Landing parking lot located on Rte. 78, approx 3½ miles west of Swanton village. From there we will drive to the trail head at Mac's Landing.

## "Art on the Refuge" continues until July 22nd

The annual art show is back in the Refuge Visitor Center this year after the show was held online last year because of COVID restrictions. The exhibit began on May 21st and will run until July 22nd.

Talented artists from several counties are exhibiting their work with a focus on Refuge habitats and the birds that live in or migrate through the area. The artwork is for sale.

If you visit the Refuge, please check out the exhibit when the Visitor Center is open. If you want to plan your trip when the Center is open, please call 802-868-4781 to confirm.

**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](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/)**

## **Another Great WMBD!**

Thank you to everyone that joined us for our 2nd annual Migratory Bird Weekend Challenge! After having to cancel in 2020 due to COVID-19, last year we switched to a more individual contributor format. While we were able to hold some group events this year, we liked the format of a weekend challenge so much, that we continued it this year.

Throughout the weekend, anyone birding on the refuge was asked to share their eBird checklists with our Migratory Bird Day account. (eBird: MNWRBirdDay). You can see the results here: <https://ebird.org/profile/MTA5NzMzMw/US-VT-011>

We began our extended weekend on Thursday evening with an online presentation by renowned naturalist and author, Scott Weidensaul, about the Motus Wildlife Tracking System. This was followed by our traditional Friday presenter, Maeve Kim, and her presentation on Vermont's Endangered Grassland Birds! You can see her presentation on our YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3v0lp1pEG8>

The weekend also marked the re-launching of our annual Art Show. This year, we were thrilled to be able to return to the Visitor Center for the show! While we chose to forgo the usual Artists' Reception, it was great to be able to see the artwork in person. The show runs through July 22nd, so be sure to stop by the Visitor Center to check it out.



**Art Show set-up**

Unfortunately, this year the weather didn't cooperate as much as we hoped. High winds and the forecast of thunderstorms prompted us to cancel Saturday's planned paddle excursion to the river delta. Despite the weather, those that braved the heat & wind enjoyed some productive birding.

Beginning with a nocturnal hike, a few intrepid observers enjoyed the sunrise and dawn chorus at the end of the Maquam / Black Creek trail. Later in the morning we hosted guided walks on the Old Railroad Passage trail and our monthly walk in the Stephen Young Marsh.

By the end of the weekend, we'd received dozens of shared eBird lists from 18 birders, documenting 97 species of birds on the refuge. While this is down from last year's all-time high of 116 species, it's in line with our average count from the past 10 years.

We were pleased to add two new species to our Bird Weekend List! Early Saturday morning, an Indigo Bunting was singing near the Maquam / Black Creek trailhead. Later that morning, two Sandhill Cranes flew over the Visitor's Center and were later seen along the Old Railroad Passage Trail!

We had a tie for the most common species, with both Red-wing Blackbird and Song Sparrows appearing on 80% of checklists. 22 species only made a single appearance this year, compared to 14 species last year. Some of the notable rarities include the aforementioned Indigo Bunting, a Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Orchard Oriole, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Spotted Sandpiper, Swainson's Thrush and a Virginia Rail.

Thanks again to all who came out this year and shared their sightings with us! While we're looking forward to more group walks, this individual contributor format has been a lot of fun and has given us some interesting sightings. We're already looking forward to May 20th & 21st, 2023!

## **WMBD Results**

### **Most distance covered**

Rich Kelley	8.15 miles
Julie Filiberti	6.35 miles
Ken Copenhaver	4.50 miles
Carol Yarnell	3.70 miles
Annette Kalinoski	2.50 miles

### **Most time spent birding**

Rich Kelley	10.02 hours
Julie Filiberti	9.18 hours
Ken Copenhaver	6.50 hours
Ken Sturm	3.80 hours
Carol Yarnell	3.58 hours

### **Most species seen**

Rich Kelley	88 species
Julie Filiberti	76 species
Ken Copenhaver	61 species
Ken Sturm	60 species
Annette Kalinoski	58 species

### **Most locations birded**

Rich Kelley	7
Ken Copenhaver	4
Julie Filiberti	4
Jim Jiamachello	3
Mae Mayville	3

### **Checklists submitted**

Rich Kelley	9
Julie Filiberti	7
Bill Mayville	4
Carol Yarnell	4
Ken Copenhaver	4

### **Early Bird**

Carol Yarnell, Julie Filiberti, and Rich Kelley all began birding at 4am Saturday.

### **Night Owl**

Rich Kelley had the latest checklist, staying out until 8:28 Saturday evening.

Have you missed one of the great Zoom presentations sponsored by the Friends of Missisquoi? Would you like to re-watch “Bird Tales”, or Maeve Kim’s “Grassland Birds”, or Judy Sefchick’s “Unique Habitats and Species of Missisquoi NWR”? How about our presentations about “Wild Bees”, or “Timberdoodles”?

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

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCySplMZPi77fAEa4wq5ic8A/featured>



## **FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

### **BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING**

**Wednesday, July 13th, 2022 at 6:30 pm by Zoom**

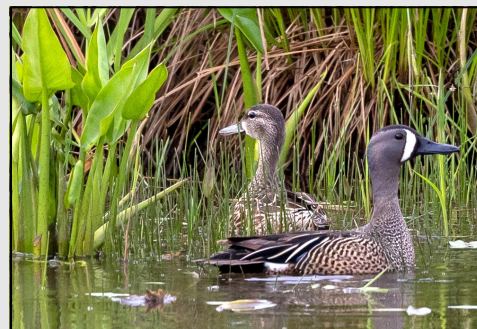
**email [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org) if you’d like to attend via Zoom**

Members are always welcome & encouraged to attend.

Next board meeting is September 14th at 6:30 pm



## **WMBD Photos**



**Clockwise from top left: Baltimore Oriole, Canada Geese with goslings, Yellow Warbler, Blue-winged Teal, Common Yellowthroat, Black and White Warbler. All pictures by Rich Kelley**

## **Refuge Managers Update - May, 2022**

*by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR*



Spring has definitely sprung and in fact the last several days have seemed more like summer. With temperatures hitting the mid 80's this week, wildflowers have rapidly bloomed and tree leaves are developing very fast. Usually I like to see the leaves develop slowly in May, as it is peak migration for land-birds, many of which will be obscured by new leaves in the tops of trees!

Yes, a walk on the refuge this time of year is a treat. Many birds have already returned and are nesting in earnest; I saw my first American Robin nest two weeks ago and Canada geese have goslings in Stephen Young Marsh. However, many other birds are still moving through to nest in higher elevations or more northern habitat. It is truly a treat to see the many warblers that use the refuge for nesting and during migration, and this month is just about the best time to see them!

Migration and bird habitat are precisely the reason Missisquoi NWR (and many other national wildlife refuges) were established. In Missisquoi's case, it was initially to protect migratory waterfowl, given that this refuge provides the most significant waterfowl habitat in the Champlain Basin. Recognizing this way back in 1943, the refuge was established under the authority of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929 (MBCA). This enabling legislation clearly directs the way this refuge is managed: The Secretary of the Interior may "acquire, by gift or devise, any area or interests therein; which he determines to be suitable for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds."

The term "inviolate sanctuary" is significant and is the reason why national wildlife refuges established under this authority maintain areas completely closed to all public uses. Indeed these areas on national wildlife refuges are truly "for the birds". If you are interested to see what areas are closed to all uses at this refuge you can download a map on our website: <https://www.fws.gov/media/missisquoi-nwr-open-closed-areaspdf>.

While Missisquoi was recognized early on for its contribution to waterfowl habitat, the MBCA also includes migratory birds defined in previous treaties: such as the treaty between the United States and Great Britain for the protection of migratory birds concluded August 16, 1916 and the treaty between the United States and the United Mexican States for the protection of migratory birds and game mammals concluded February 7, 1936 to name two. These two treaties list a host of other migratory birds, many warblers, other land-birds, and shorebirds as protected by these laws.

It is these legal establishing authorities that allow me to revel in the return of all migratory birds, waterfowl to warblers, to the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. It is a testament to the forethought of those who wrote these laws, established the treaties between nations, and protected areas such as National Wildlife Refuges that we have such wonderful protected habitat in north-western Vermont and can enjoy the migration of birds when walking refuge trails. I hope everyone can take time out of their busy work week, grab a pair of binoculars and see some of these amazing returning migrants on a refuge truly "for the birds!"



## **Joe Bertrand to Retire: Not Your Average Joe**

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR



He's the go-to guy with a seemingly endless supply of knowledge, skill, and know-how for what works and what doesn't at the refuge. His ability to understand the complexities of machinery and motors means he can diagnose, fix, or rebuild almost anything. A seriously skilled sawyer, he can climb a ladder with hip waders on, limb a tree, and predator-guard a nest *from a boat*, as easily as he can fell a tree on land. He's been known to fix refuge boilers and finish plowing snow in the parking lot, before I finish my first cup of morning coffee. Sometimes I think he should wear a Superhero costume underneath his refuge uniform!

When visiting the refuge, you may catch a glimpse of him; he's the one humbly and tirelessly working in the background. Not only does he maintain refuge habitats to provide food and cover for wildlife, but he also keeps the buildings functioning and vehicles and boats running. Fixing, mowing, plowing, towing, building, envisioning, and creating, are just some of the many duties at his one-stop, do-it-yourself, one-man-show that is all in a day's work. Make no mistake, he is not your average Joe. He's **Joe Bertrand**, the multi-talented refuge maintenance mechanic that Missisquoi NWR has depended on for the past 21 years.



Heavy equipment? No problem. I dare you to find a piece that he can't skillfully operate. He knows the workings of a backhoe like the back of his hand, and he's just as adept at mowing grasslands for Bobolinks, as he is at transporting excavators for island projects, or using a dump truck on refuge roads. Specialty equipment doesn't scare him. Imagine my surprise, as he told me to stand out-of-the way so I wouldn't get hit by a flying tree, when he was operating a Hydro-axe (a powerful, specialty machine that chops and shreds trees, mows brush, and mulches everything in its path) to create early-successional habitat for Woodcock and other species!

More than this, Joe is a genuinely nice guy and honorable man, whose handshake and word you can trust. Well-known and liked around town, he's long been the face of the refuge to the local community. His uncanny ability to relate to others, combined with his even-keeled, laid-back temperament, and kind, patient ways, make everyone from refuge volunteers to researchers want to work with him. In fact, most consider him a friend by the time they leave here.

As you may know, Joe grew up in the local area and had a penchant for wild things and wild places from the start. Nature was his playground and was where he honed the skills of a modern-day woodsman. When he wasn't fishing Dead Creek, he was tracking, trapping, and river running. In his late teens, Joe fell hard for Maquam Bog, one of the great loves of his life (sorry Nancy!). He scouted and hunted in this shrubby, unforgiving habitat, eventually knowing every inch of it. He later used his exceptional navigational skills in the bog to lead walks for delighted refuge visitors, or lead search-and-rescue crews safely in and out.

In high school, a shop teacher recognized young Joe's innate talent and eagerness to learn as something special. Instead of having Joe take the class as a regular student, the teacher gave him special assignments or had him help teach the class, since Joe had already mastered the skills! After-school jobs taught him the value of hard work and perseverance. Joe went on to repair vehicles, drive trucks, use heavy equipment, weld, build houses, and become a maintenance

***continued >> page 7***

**from << page 6** supervisor for the state. When a maintenance position opened at the refuge, Joe was perfect for it, especially since he had volunteered here for years before ever receiving a paycheck!

As Joe's involvement in refuge biology grew over the years, so did his various nicknames. Keen eyesight earned him the nickname, 'Eagle Eye Joe,' He became the refuge's official 'Master Blaster' after receiving training for (black powder) rocket net use during duck banding operations. In 2019, he became the refuge's unofficial 'Bee Slayer,' since he could catch more native wild bees than the rest of us, while blindfolded and with his hands tied behind his back (or so it seemed). Joe's excellent observational skills made my job much easier; he'd often call from the shop or field to tell me about a different looking bird or plant that I'd later find and identify. Truthfully, while Joe may have learned some things from me, I know I learned a lot more from him.

Whether maneuvering a boat through the floodplain forest during high water or wrestling a boat through thick refuge mud during low water, Joe has done it all and more. There has never been a situation that Joe

couldn't get us in or out of. For a long time, I've said (in complete seriousness), "If I'm ever stranded on a deserted island, I want to be with Joe." Seriously. He's the only person I know who could build a shelter, find food, and have the resourcefulness to get us rescued. He's a natural-born problem solver who always strives to know more and do better. If he doesn't know something, he admits it. As a life-long learner, Joe takes classes or reads books to find ways to accomplish things that others may not even consider. Working hard throughout his life, Joe probably accomplished more than 6 men ever could in a lifetime.

It has been a pleasure and honor to work with Joe Bertrand during the past 15 years. I cannot imagine a better coworker or friend. If the critters and habitats could, they'd give him the long, standing ovation that he deserves, while saying thanks for the care, commitment, and a job well done. Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is better because you were here, Joe.

Just as the refuge will remain in Joe's heart, his presence and spirit will remain at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

**Happy Retirement Joe. We already miss you.**



**Joe on the river in spring,  
just after ice-out.**



**Joe putting up a bee nesting box that  
he designed and built himself. Bees  
nested in it!**



## **Refuge “Land Acknowledgement” Wins O’Brien Prize**

The Friends of Missisquoi are in the process of developing a land acknowledgement recognizing the refuge lands as the ancestral home of the Abenaki. We are working with the Abenaki Nation, the local Abenaki community, the Vermont State Archeologist, and the National Fish & Wildlife Service’s Tribal Liaison to develop an acknowledgement statement, post signage on the refuge, produce literature, and promote native cultural events on the refuge.

By promoting events through a partnership of the Abenaki Nation and the Friends of Missisquoi, attention will be brought to the refuge, the Friends group, and the tribe. This partnership will continue to support the Friends’ work of bringing awareness to the refuge and all that it offers.

In conjunction with this initiative The Friends of Missisquoi are thrilled to announce that we’ve been selected as the recipients of the National Wildlife Refuge Association’s O’Brien Prize. The O’Brien Prize is awarded annually to recognize and help support a worthy Friends group project. The prize award is \$2,000, which will be used to highlight the history and cultural traditions of the original inhabitants of Missisquoi.

Friends board member Julie Filiberti originated and is spearheading this initiative. In Julie’s own words, here is how she came up with this wonderful idea:

“I have been on a personal journey to become more educated on the history of the colonization of the United States and of the slaves that built this country through their sweat, their blood, and their tears. I’ve educated myself on what the colonizers did to the indigenous

people that lived in this land for tens of thousands of years. That knowledge brought me to an “ah hah” moment about the refuge lands. Many organizations and entities have developed and orally share their land acknowledgements, but the Friends of Missisquoi had no such tribute to the Abenaki land that the Missisquoi NWR encompasses. I realized that we, as a Friends group, could have an important role to play in bringing awareness to the history of those who were here before the Europeans took control of the land. This particular journey began with my suggestion to the Friends board members about why the Friends should formally adopt a land acknowledgement. Three of us set to work informing ourselves on the Missisquoi Abenaki history and the process of forming a land acknowledgement. A land acknowledgement serves the purpose of honoring the land and the people who cared for it before it was taken from them, but it also serves to bring awareness to the stark realities of colonization and the hardships the indigenous people endured with the arrival of the Europeans on their homelands. A land acknowledgement always means well, but if no good comes from it in the end, it is meaningless. Through our work connecting with the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi, the Friends hope to bring public awareness to our local Abenaki people and the struggles they still endure.

Adopting a land acknowledgement is only the first step as we strive to find ways to educate the public about Abenaki history and Abenaki culture.”

Stay tuned for more news as we finalize the wording of the land acknowledgement, post interpretive signs on refuge trails, develop educational literature, and bring native cultural events to the refuge.

## **Refuge Gets Greened-up**

On May 6 the Missisquoi NWR hosted it’s annual Green Up Day event. We had a great turn out including volunteers and other USFWS staff from the Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Resources Office in Essex. Launching two boats for river clean up and walking Route 78, Tabor Road, and trail head parking lots we picked up a full dumpster of trash from the refuge. Thanks to all who participated in keeping Missisquoi Green!



**A full dumpster!**

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](mailto: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.)