

Friends of Trempealeau Refuge

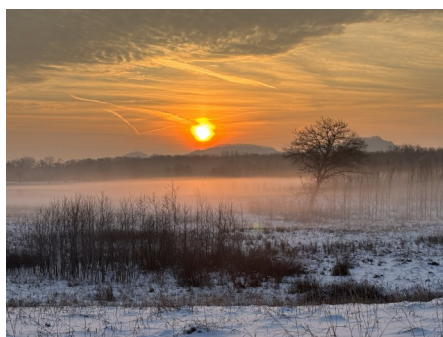
Friends Focus...

Fun Facts About our Local Wildlife—by Scott Lee

Winter Wonderland!

Each season has something to offer. Winter brings the silence and tranquility of a landscape covered in a majestic white blanket. Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge has already seen quite a bit of snow this season, making it an ideal place to enjoy the wonders of winter. During the winter season we've seen visitors enjoy bird watching, wildlife photography, running, walking with their furry friend, while others enjoy a variety of winter recreational activities such as ice-fishing, snowshoeing, hiking, and cross-country skiing. Snow covered prairies and ice capped wetlands, the winter season is here and so are great opportunities to explore the refuge. Come check out the new bird feeder outside the Refuge Office which is getting a lot of activity. Bundle up and come enjoy the winter scenery at Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge!

-Ranger Dana M. Schelling



Sunrise
at the
prairie
during a
winter
morning
by Casey
Bryan /

Eagles, Eagles Everywhere"

To paraphrase an old saying, "Eagles, eagles everywhere but not a fish to eat", just how can a fish-eating bird survive where most of the water freezes solid? They can't, can they? They must all fly south where the water doesn't freeze, right? Well, that surely isn't the case with the bald eagles around here. Granted there are more of them during the other seasons, but there is no shortage of them in and around the refuge during our winters.

Fish is definitely their food of choice, but finding them in frozen waterways is no easy task so they seem to have three options – head south where water isn't as likely to freeze, search the area for open water, or give up on their favorite food and find something else to eat. All three seem to be what they choose. Many, obviously, migrate south and then head back this way come spring. Back in 1994, my son and I stood on the observation deck at the refuge on the first day of spring, with the migration back in full swing, and in a 180-degree scan with the binoculars, we counted 149 eagles! They were sitting on the very thin ice, seemingly finding the winterkill of fish that had floated up to the small amount of open water and just under the thin ice to feast on. 149 eagles! At a time when eagles were still pretty rare! Later that summer I had the privilege to spend time with Roger Tory Peterson and shared that sighting with him. Even he was extremely impressed. He commented to me, "That's a place I need to visit!" I, of course, invited him but, sadly, he passed away before getting that opportunity.

Those eagles that stay, but refuse to give up on their fish diet, spend their time in areas such as below the lock and

dams, where the water stays open year round. Shortly before this past Christmas, after most of the river had frozen up, I counted 22 eagles on the ice, flying, and in the trees right below the dam in Trempealeau. It's pretty rare to visit there without seeing a number of eagles taking advantage of the fishing opportunities. The eagles that do revise their eating habits must find other opportunities for food. One place I always see them is along County G, just northeast of Pine Creek (about 7 or 8 miles from the refuge). There is a big turkey farm there and the eagles seem to be able to find plenty of food in that area. During the annual Christmas Bird Count for Trempealeau County this year on December 14th, my route includes this area and I counted 43 eagles in less than a one-mile stretch there, including 17 in one tree!

The American bald eagle is, obviously, a very resourceful critter and, as a result of this resourcefulness, has made a remarkable comeback from near extinction caused by the use of DDT back in the 1960s. We live in a wonderful area to witness that comeback!

Birds of Trempealeau Refuge

The annual Audubon Christmas Count for the Trempealeau WI area was held on December 14th. Steve Winter, Lisa Reid, and Kathy Carlyle were volunteer counters at the Trempealeau Refuge and recorded 27 species totaling 476 individual birds. Last year's Refuge count recorded 29 species and had a total of 2,080 birds. The frigid below zero temperatures that day and lack of open water contributed to the lower numbers and significantly reduced waterfowl species. Interesting finds in the Refuge area included:

- 1 Red-breasted Nuthatch
- 1 Northern Harrier
- 1 Northern Flicker
- 2 Rough legged Hawks
- 1 Barred Owl
- 1 Fox Sparrow
- 11 American Robins
- 2 Common Grackles



Friends of Trempealeau Refuge
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<http://www.friendsoftrempealeaurefuge.org>



Would you like to contact the refuge?

Here's how! Call 608-539-2311

For more information visit our web-site:

<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/trempealeau/>

Or the refuge Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/TrempealeauNWR>

And "Like" us!

2026

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The [Friends of Trempealeau Refuge](http://www.friendsoftrempealeaurefuge.org) is committed to providing an independent citizen voice for the protection, conservation, and enhancement of fish and wildlife and their habitats at Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge.

A Note from the Friends President

Happy Winter! Last weekend near Kieps Island parking lot in the Refuge, Ken and I spotted several Robins in the little creek near the road. What a beautiful sight to see Robins wintering in Wisconsin.

I want to share with you that I will be stepping down from my position as Friends President. I have really enjoyed leading the board for eight years. I am happy to be a part of The Friends of Trempealeau Refuge which has a strong membership that promotes and supports our Refuge in many ways. Board member Jim Welander, who is an active member and volunteer, will become our new president in February. Thank you to Jim for taking on this position!

On your next visit to the Refuge, be sure to check out Phase One of the Habitat Restoration project around the OWL Center. Thanks to the Gerald Hiebsch Trust, the Friends were able to begin this project which also includes additions to the Playscape area.

The Refuge is currently creating interpretive signage. Coulee Region Ecoscapes will continue to work with us to design and implement additional phases.

I welcome you to come out to the Refuge and enjoy all the sights and sounds of Nature!



-Val Critzman

Save the Dates

Luminary Hike: Feb. 27th

**Friends Members Annual Meeting: April 9th ,
Social Hour from 6 to 7, Program at 7
OWL Center**

**Movie Night—A Visit from Will Dilg
Thursday, March 12, 6:30 p.m.
OWL Center**

Producer Steven Marking plays Will Dilg, the singular driving force behind the formation of the Izaak Walton League and the formation of our Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

World Migratory Bird Day events: May 8 & 9th

Artists Along the Trails - Plein Air: June 6



Come check out the new bird feeder constructed by Ken Critzman outside the Refuge Office.