

Winter
2023

Friends of Trempealeau Refuge

Refuge Focus...

It's hard to believe 2023 is behind us! Like the saying; Time flies when you're having fun! – The past year flew by quickly, and we've had some fun along the way! 2023 was a great year and we are excited to see what 2024 has for us. Before we enter the next year, we would like to reflect back on good memories of 2023.

We started the year with having our first ever Luminary Hike, we had over 350 visitors that night! It was a great evening with an amazing sunset!



Pine Creek Dike Trail

Build a Bat Box Program was a great success! We were able to host this program as part of a West Salem High School student's project and the help of funding from Friends of Trempealeau Refuge. Participants were able to build their own bat box and take them home.

In May, we celebrated World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) and River Education Days (RED). WMBD brings bird enthusiasts to the refuge, while RED is a favorite for the teachers as we bring local fifth graders from Wisconsin and Minnesota for a day long outdoor and hands-on educational experience. We hosted RED for the first time after a 3-year pause due to COVID-19 virus.

Fun Facts About Our Local Wildlife

By Scott Lee

“Dark-eyed Juncos”

The Juncos are back! Although I love those little critters, I'm not sure if I should be excited, or kind of sad, to see them arrive.



They are regulars at (or rather on the ground under) my feeders and so much fun to watch, happily munching on millet, sunflower hearts, and cracked corn. The problem is, they are a true sign of winter's arrival. Juncos spend their summers in the conifer forests of the northern U.S. and in Canada so the only time they become regulars around here is when they migrate “south” - mainly at night at very low altitudes. To them, we ARE their south. They tend to bring snowy winter weather on their wings as they migrate, so are appropriately often nicknamed ‘snowbirds’.

The dark-eyed juncos are a medium sized member of the sparrow family and tend to return to the same area each winter. Your seed feeders become a favorite for their feasting so welcome them by keeping them full, as well as sprinkling some on the ground underneath. Despite only seeing them around here through the winter, they are one of the most common birds in North America.



Group of eco-campers standing on Kipe's Island dock looking towards the water by Happy Dancing Turtle - Driftless Region

We partnered with Happy Dancing Turtle (HDT) to be the host site for their summer daytime Eco-camps. This was an exciting partnership as we're able to bring little ones to spend a whole week at the refuge!

Other ways that we were able to reach out or to be part of our community was by participating in the Youth Outdoor Fest and the Kids Family Expo in Winona, attending various school earth day events, offering on-site environmental education programs, offering Family Nature Walks through our partnership with HDT, joining the library programs at Trempealeau Library and Arcadia Library and more!

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge is a great place where many people come to enjoy the outdoors in many ways. Whether our visitors like to enjoy the refuge by birding, hiking, hunting, or joining one of these many events, we are happy to be the place they choose to enjoy the outdoors! We could not have had a successful year without the help of our Friends of Trempealeau Refuge, cheers to what 2024 has in store for us!

Dana M. Schelling – Park Ranger
Casey Bryan – Refuge Manager

The Plein Air Artists in the Refuge event is scheduled for Saturday, June 1, 2024. Contact Val Critzman if you are interested in participating. kvcritz@gmail.com

Juncos adapt to the cold by fluffing up their feathers, a term called “ptilorection”, that helps them trap as much air in their feathers as possible. They actually have some 30% more feathers (by weight) in the winter than they do in the summer. As a result of this adaptation, their life span can range up to ten years.

My favorite name for a flock of juncos is “chittering”, but they are also referred to as a flutter, crew, or host. They have a high, short ‘chit’ note that they often give in rapid succession when they fly and more slowly as they forage, primarily on the ground. Enjoy them while you can and don't worry, the robins and bluebirds will be back to replace them come spring!

Birds at Trempealeau Refuge

The annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count for the Trempealeau WI area was held on Dec. 17th. Steve Winter, Lisa Reid, Kathy Carlyle, and Casey Bryan were volunteer counters at the Trempealeau Refuge that day and recorded 29 species totaling 2,080 birds!

Interesting finds in the Refuge and surrounding area included

- 639 Tundra Swans,
- 15 Trumpeter Swans,
- 4 Red-headed Woodpeckers,
- 2 Northern Shrikes,
- 1 White-throated Sparrow
- 2 American Robins.



Note from the Friends President

GREETINGS TO YOU ALL!

This past year the Friends sponsored our first Best of the Refuge Photo Contest for youth and adults. It culminated on December 1st with 77 photographs being entered by 27 amateur photographers. The winning photos will be judged in January and announced in early 2024. Plans for recognizing the winners are in the works. The Refuge photo blind on Kieps Island has been moved by Refuge staff and volunteers to a more accessible location along the Wildlife Drive on the trail near Bea's Bench. We hope visitors and photographers will use it more often in its new spot.

On behalf of the Friends, I wish you Peace and Joy, and lots of good times at the Refuge in 2024.

Val Critzman, Friends President

Save the Dates:

February 15th – 6:30 p.m. “Animal Adaptations” with Scott Lee in the OWL Center. Bring the kids! We'll have the carpet rolled out so they can sit in front.

March 21st - Friends Annual Membership Meeting at the OWL Center. Speaker is Al Batt from Hartland, MN who is a writer, humorist (definitely), birder, and story teller. Social hour/buffet at 6:00 p.m. Speaker at 7:00. Watch for more details.

June 1st – 2nd Annual Plein Air Artists Along the Trail (at the Refuge) Entry form deadline for plein air artists is March 1st.



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 website:

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

Or the refuge Facebook page:

[https://www.facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/TrempealeauNWR)

TrempealeauNWR

And “Like” us!

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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.