Summer Issue 2026

Friends of Trempealeau Refuge

Friends Focus...

Bird City designation

Congratulations to the **Village of Trempealeau o**n earning **Bird City Wisconsin "HIGH FLYER"** status! This is an incredible achievement and a true testament to your community's dedication to bird conservation and creating a healthier environment for both wildlife and people. High Flyer status is awarded to communities who go above and beyond for birds, including prohibiting free-roaming cats. Aside from habitat loss, outdoor cats are the #1 threat to birds worldwide, in the U.S. it's estimated that we lose 2.4 billion birds to cats, each year! Your efforts are making a real difference, and your community should be proud!

Featured Friend/Member Spotlight Darlene Ritter

Meet Darlene Ritter who has been a member of Friend of Trempealeau Refuge since its founding in 2007. Darlene visited the refuge for the first time in 1966 and spotted her first eagle. Since that moment, the Refuge became her second home where she could experience the freedom and the wonder of nature. She cherishes the Refuge's remarkable diversity from the Mississippi River backwaters to the bluffs, to the prairies, and of course the wildlife and birds.

Friends of Trempealeau Refuge is grateful for members like Darlene, whose enthusiasm, generosity, and love of nature inspire others and help ensure the Refuge remains a special place for generations to come.

Fun Facts About our Local Wildlife—by Scott Lee

"Gray? Brown? What the heck!"

OK, what's going on? Earlier this spring we got this big onslaught of all these big, gray, long-necked birds that I identified as Sandhill Cranes – always exciting to see them return - wonderful sign of spring around here! Now I look all over for them and all I can find are a whole bunch of big, long-necked birds in the same places that look just like those cranes - but they're all BROWN! What's the deal?!

Well, guess what - they ARE the same sandhill cranes I'd been seeing! They just decided to "change clothes" and put on ones that will give them a better chance of survival in their habitat of choice – the marsh. They intentionally preen themselves with mud (yuch!) to camouflage themselves during breeding season – a pretty good example of the sacrifices parents make for their kids! The youngsters are a sandy brown color with darker heads (the parents' heads are red).

They're not done with their "clothes changing routine" yet, however, as they seem to prefer the gray hues for the non-breeding months. By the time they head south for the winter, the mud-stained feathers have cleaned themselves up so they begin their migration all decked out in their preferred winter color of gray. Yet another "wonder of nature"!

A Note From the Friends President

History of the National Wildlife Refuge System

The National Wildlife Refuge System began more than a century ago and reflects the growing commitment of the United States to conserve wildlife and habitat.

Origins: Pelican Island (1903)

Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge became the first national wildlife refuge on March 14, 1903, when Theodore Roosevelt signed an executive order protecting the island's nesting birds from plume hunters. At the time, egrets, pelicans, and other wading birds were being killed in large numbers to supply feathers for the fashion industry. This action marked the beginning of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Creation of a Unified Refuge System in 1966

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act formally established the National Wildlife Refuge System as a unified network managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

The Act established that:

*Wildlife conservation is the primary mission of refuges.

*Compatible public uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation are encouraged.

The Refuge System Today

Today, the National Wildlife Refuge System includes:

*More than 570 refuges.

*Over 95 million acres of land and water.

*Hundreds of millions of additional acres managed in marine national monuments.

*Habitat for thousands of species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and plants.

The system stretches from Alaska to Caribbean islands and across the Pacific, serving as the world's largest network of lands dedicated specifically to wildlife conservation. The National Wildlife Refuge System is often described as "America's wildlife heritage network," protecting critical habitat while providing opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation, education, and conservation stewardship.

For more info go to this website: https://www.fws.gov/program/national-wildlife-refuge-system

Jim Welander - President of The Friends of Trempealeau Refuge

Looking for a meaningful way to support the Refuge? The Friends of Trempealeau Refuge is seeking enthusiastic volunteers to serve as Associate Directors and committee members. Whether you have a few hours a month or want to take a more active role, there are many ways to help advance our mission of conservation, education, and community engagement. Interested? Email friendsoftrefuge@gmail.com to learn more about volunteer opportunities.

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608.539.2311
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/TrempealeauNWR

And "Like" us!

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The Friends of Trempealeau Refuge 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.