



Long Meadow Lake from below the visitor center.

Send photos taken at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge to be considered for future publication to hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org. Photo/Richard Carr



Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends Currents

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Dear Friends,

Find *refuge* with us this winter. Whether your attraction is birding, tracking, fishing, snowshoeing, photography, or simply finding solitude in nature, we hope you join us at the Refuge.

We are hosting outdoor events to ring in the new year! Explore some of the best Refuge units for bird watching in the winter season by attending a scheduled bird walk. Learn about birds that over winter on the refuge or are late migrants.

Interested in snowshoeing but never had the opportunity or your own gear? Head to the visitor's center to rent **FREE** snowshoes - Saturdays from 12-3:30 p.m. (First come, first served)

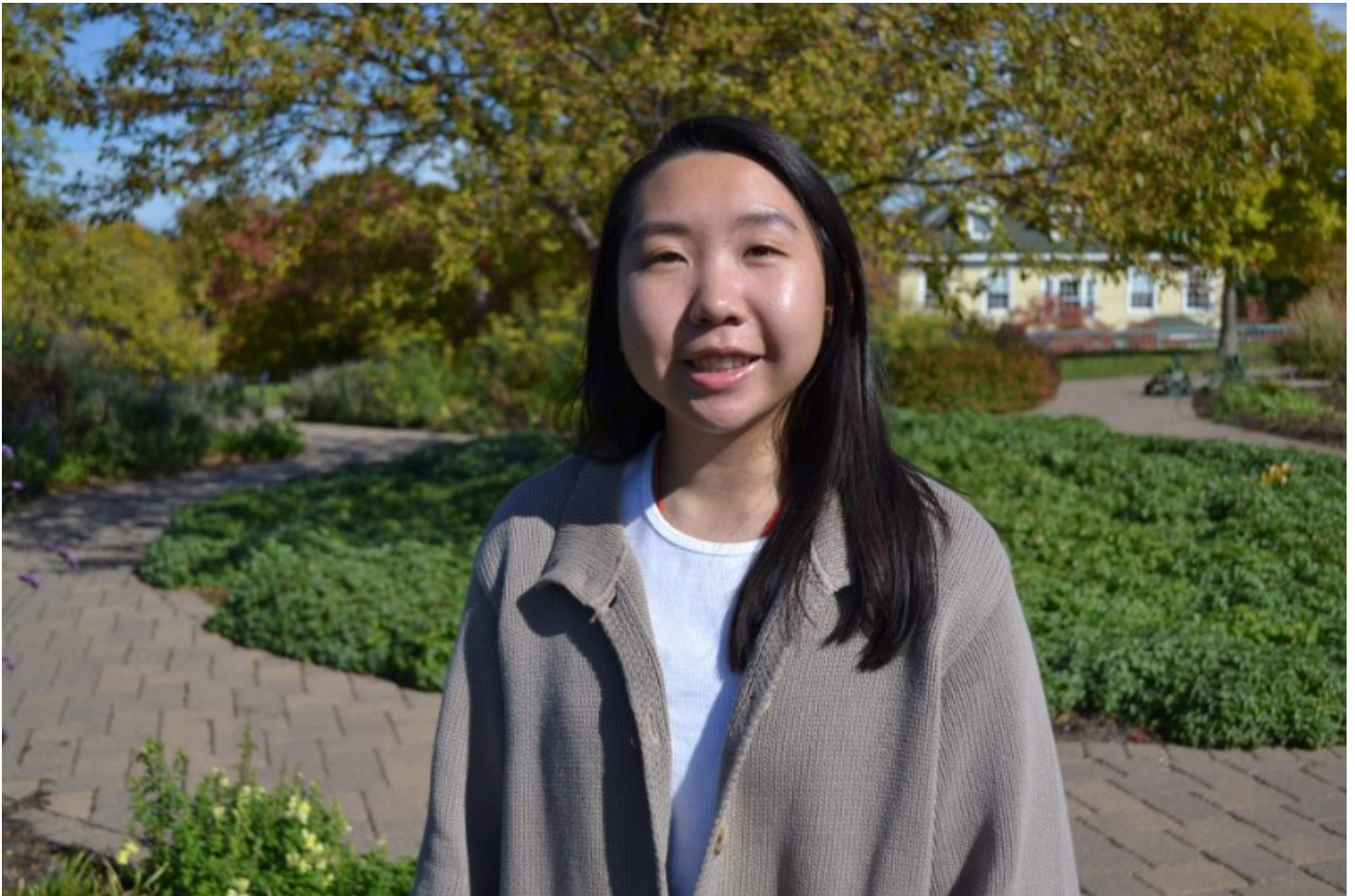
Enjoy tracking wildlife? Join us for a beginner tracking excursion around the refuge visitor center where we will use tracks, signs, and other clues to learn about the animals inhabiting the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. All events will have Covid regulations in place.

Looking for something virtual? Sign your kids up for a Junior Duck Stamp Art Demonstration. Children in grades K-12 are encouraged to join us for a virtual waterfowl lesson followed by a brief tutorial on how to draw a duck and information on how to join the contest.

The current pandemic has taken a toll on us all, in this time we hope you find refuge ON the refuge.

Best,
MN Valley Refuge Friends

Meet the 2021-2022 Education Team!



Joann Wu

Joann grew up in Crystal, MN and attended the University of Minnesota Twin Cities to study Conservation Biology. She became interested in environmental education when she saw how fun it was to answer questions about the natural world and handle nontraditional animals like cockroaches, snakes, and tarantulas with visitors as an interpretive guide at the Bell Museum.



Oliver Cygan

Oliver was born and raised in south Minneapolis. He moved north to get his BA in Communications from the University of Minnesota Duluth. After graduating in the spring of 2020, he joined AmeriCorps NCCC, a federal service organization, where he worked and traveled with a team of young adults. During his internship with Minnesota Valley, he hopes to gain valuable experience that will allow him to continue in conservation-focused careers. Outside of work, Oliver enjoys making art (collage and printmaking), cooking, and sudoku puzzles.



Samantha Harden

Samantha (Sam) moved to Minnesota from Maine in September for the practicum teaching internship. She graduated from the University of Southern Maine with a degree in Environmental Planning and Policy where she also played competitive tennis. Sam has been working with children for over ten years and feels working for the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is a great opportunity to develop her professional teaching skills.



Teagan Oxley-Hase

Teagan is originally from southeastern Wisconsin, near Milwaukee, but moved to Minnesota for college. She graduated in May 2021 from the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities with a Bachelor of Science in conservation biology and loved it here so much that she decided to stay. She now lives with several of her friends and their two cats and enjoys doing cross-stitch and writing in her free time.



Refuge happenings

Winter equipment lending

Stop by our Bloomington or Rapids Lake Visitor Centers for FREE snowshoe rentals on Saturdays this winter. Snowshoes are available for rental on a first come, first serve basis from 12-3:30 p.m.

Snowshoeing 101

Sunday, January 9 and 16, 2 - 4 p.m.

Saturday, January 15 and 22, 10 - 12 p.m.

Old Cedar Avenue trailhead pavilion 9551 Old Cedar Ave S, Bloomington, MN 55425.

Register for this adventure at: [signup.com](https://www.signup.com).

Discover the excitement snowshoes add to winter hiking! Compare styles and practical considerations for ensuring an enjoyable snowshoe experience for the whole family. Instruction will be followed by practice on your own or join in on a guided hike using refuge snowshoes. Instruction and the guided hike will take place regardless of snow conditions. Open to all ages. Dress to be outside for 2 hours.

Family snowshoe hike

Saturday, January 15, 10-11 a.m.

Saturday, February 19, 10-11 a.m.

Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center, 15865 Rapids Lake Rd, Carver, MN 55315

Learn how to put on and use snowshoes and take a guided hike using snowshoes. This is the perfect opportunity to try a new activity with your family and to get outside in the colder winter months. Snowshoes will be available for free in all sizes. Dress warm and wear snow boots for both warmth and the appropriate snowshoe fit. Restroom and running water is available on site. If snow conditions aren't great for snowshoeing, we'll offer a guided hike to look for signs of wildlife in winter.

Bird walks

Monday, January 3, 8-10:30 a.m.

Monday, January 16, 8-10:30 a.m.

Wilkie Unit, 7701 County Road 101 E, Shakopee, MN 55379

Saturday, January 15, 8-10:30 a.m.

Bass Ponds, 2501 86th St. E., Bloomington

Explore some of the best Refuge units for bird watching in the winter season. We will spend time on these walks searching for birds that over winter on the refuge or are late migrants. We will study the different species of birds and learn about some other local locations to search for birds during the Winter Season. Birders of all skill levels are welcome to attend these walks. If you have them, bring along your binoculars and favorite field guide. The program will be held rain or shine - dress appropriately for the weather. No restrooms or water are available at this trailhead.

Beginner wildlife tracking

Sunday, January 23, 1-3 p.m.

Bloomington Visitor Center, 3815 American Blvd. East, Bloomington, MN 55425

Registration is required: [signup.com](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/visit/signup.com)

Join us for a tracking excursion around the refuge visitor center where we will use tracks, signs and other clues to learn about the animals inhabiting the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

Tracking is the study and interpretation of footprints and other signs such as scrapes, chews, digs, and scat (animal waste). Rediscover your true nature by learning about this ancient science that allowed our distant ancestors to survive.

This program is led by Refuge Naturalist Donnie Phyllaier. Donnie is a charter member of the Minnesota Wildlife Tracking Project and a certified tracker through CyberTracker Conservation, the international gold standard for tracker certification. He is also a team leader for wildlife life surveys as well as a mentor for wildlife tracking students and has been a volunteer for US Fish and Wildlife for close to three decades.

Ice fishing

Sunday, February 6, 10-1:00 p.m.

Saturday, February 19, 10-1:00 p.m.

West Bush Lake: 9401 W Bush Lake Road, Bloomington, MN 55438 (Meet at Boat Access Point)

Register for this adventure at: [signup.com](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/visit/signup.com)

Whether you've never dropped a fishing line into the water, or you are an experienced angler, join us for an afternoon of wintery fun in a safe and welcoming setting. All equipment is provided by our Refuge Buddy Ardent Outdoors including **heated** tents. This program will take place entirely outdoors so please dress for the weather and for walking on the ice. Our friends from the Pollution Control Agency will also be on-site to answer your questions about lead free tackle and pass out samples.



Join us virtually!

Junior duck stamp art demonstration

Saturday, January 22, 10-11 a.m., virtually on Zoom
<https://zoom.us/j/3272615218>

The Junior Duck Stamp Competition has been around for over 25 years and is a great way for youth to connect with nature through science and art. Children in grades K-12 and families are encouraged to join us for a virtual waterfowl lesson followed by a brief tutorial on how to draw a duck and information on how to join the contest. For more information on the Junior Duck Stamp Contest, visit:

Virtual Audubon speaker series with MRVAC

“Studying Owls with Sound”

Thursday, January 27, 7:30-8:30 p.m.

Join us for an evening with international owl expert, Karla Bloem from the International Owl Center in Houston, MN. Did you know that there is an ongoing study of wild Barn Owls in southeastern Minnesota? And, they are finding them! Did you know that the Great Horned Owl may be split into two or more species someday? Did you know that the International Ornithological Council considers the Barn Owl to be three different species even though the American Ornithological Council does not yet? And that all of this relates to Owl Vocalizations?

A link will be released closer to the event date. To receive a link, please visit <https://mrvac.org/> and subscribe to their newsletters.



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Wood mouse peeking out of the snow. **Photo/Hanna Knutsson**

Wildlife watch

by Tanner Wileman
Macalester College Student, EE Intern

Tracks are a great way to learn what wildlife have been roaming the area, and while you may be able to find these tracks at any time of the day, the odds of finding a nice set of tracks to follow can vary dramatically. A couple hours after a snowfall is always a good time to look for tracks as the snow will be fresh. Dawn is also a great time to look for tracks because overnight winds will often resettle the snow and clear some of the tracks left by other visitors. If you can find an undisturbed set of tracks, you may just stumble upon a story from the evening before.

For example, after finding a set of field mouse tracks, we may create a story like this for students taking part in one of our environmental education lessons:

A field mouse emerged from its den in the dead of night after enduring a major snowfall, taking the opportunity to resupply on food. Food is scarce in winter, and the summer diet of seeds and berries is now gone. However, the mouse found what they had been searching for, a bare patch of earth beneath a fallen tree. The mouse burrowed below and found several different insect larvae. A tasty treat! The mouse then began their trek home, carefully keeping out of sight from predators like owls and foxes.

Following tracks to create stories and solve mysteries can be a great opportunity to utilize a creative mind. You don't have to be the most experienced naturalist to do it either. If you don't feel comfortable identifying various tracks, you can find a [tracking guide](#) to carry along like these from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Happy exploring!

Before we go

Refuge Friends now on Instagram

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends is now on Instagram. Find us on the popular photo-sharing app at @mnvalleyrf. Be sure to tag #mnvalleynwr. We may just spot you and feature your photos here in *Currents*.

Support MN Valley NWR with AmazonSmile

Plan to do some online holiday shopping this season? AmazonSmile is a simple way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you.

AmazonSmile is available at smile.amazon.com on your web browser and can be activated in the Amazon Shopping app for iOS and Android phones. To select or your charity to MN Valley Refuge Friends:

1. Sign in to smile.amazon.com on your desktop or mobile phone browser.
2. From your desktop, go to Your Account and select the option to Change Your Charity. Or, from your mobile browser, select Change Your Charity from the options at the bottom of the page.
3. Pick your own charitable organization by typing Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends.
4. Remember to use smile.amazon.com for future purchases. With eligible purchases, Amazon will donate .5%.



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Contributions are tax-deductible.

Thank you for your support!