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April Currents - News from MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge

1 message

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends <hello@minnesotavalleyrefugefriends.org>
To: Sara Blood <saranoelblood@gmail.com>

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"Morning Swim," a photo recently taken of a river otter at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge by Michael Kurtz. Used with permission. Do you have a photo or video from the Refuge you'd like to submit for possible publication? Please send it to hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org.

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends Currents

Issue 9, Volume 1 | April 9, 2020



Dear Friends:

Since March 17, the two education and visitor centers at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge have been closed to ensure your wellbeing as well as the health of all visitors, employees, and volunteers. With this, the Minnesota Governor's Stay at Home Order also invites everyone to spend some time outside.

Are you one of the neighbors seen running, hiking, dog walking, cleaning trash or bird watching at the Refuge while practicing safe social distancing?

In the age of COVID-19, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge truly has become a *REFUGE* for wildlife and residents alike. Trails not impacted by flooding are open daily from sunrise to sunset, providing a much-needed respite for those battling to avoid the virus from home or from the front lines.

We know the Coronavirus is affecting everyone in a myriad of ways. From our children to teachers, grocery, restaurant, and medical workers, we have learned how to adapt.

In this time of staying in place, we hope you all find a place to escape to nearby and outside to listen to the birds, feel the sunshine and watch things get greener by the day.

And just like winter turning into spring, this season we are in will surely pass.

We hope to see you soon at the Refuge.

Sara N. Blood
Interim Executive Director
[MN Valley Refuge Friends](#)



Refuge Volunteer Michael Kurtz at Grand Teton National Park. In addition to being a great volunteer, he is also a great photographer. See his photo of a river otter at the top of this newsletter.

Meet a refuge volunteer: Michael Kurtz

How did you learn about Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge?

I learned about the Refuge through a good friend, James Myster at the USFWS Bloomington offices. I had finished college and was looking to gain experience and after a couple of referrals, it led to (Refuge Volunteer Coordinator) Sarah Inouye-Leas' number. After meeting at the Refuge visitor center, I knew I would be here for years to come.

What made you interested in volunteering?

I had been to a few different locations of the Refuge before but did not know the history or about the Refuge in general. It was an easy decision to make because I was interested in wildlife at a young age and, not long after that, photography.

How many years have you volunteered at the Refuge?

This summer will mark my third full year as a volunteer. At the Refuge, I work at the visitor center front desk, feeder watch, do trail ranger reports, and help with special events.

What is your favorite thing to do at the Refuge?

To watch and photograph the rare mammals. More recently I have gotten into birding and enjoy stopping at the bird feeders every time I am in the visitor center.

What are you often asked about the Refuge?

Where is the Refuge and visitor center because my friends see my posts on social media.

What is another favorite outdoor spot?

My favorite spot to visit every year is the [Black Hills](#) because I am Lakota and the area is culturally significant. Every trip I get great photos. In Minnesota, my favorite spots right now are the [Sax-Zim Bog](#) and [Jay Cooke State Park](#).

Upcoming events at the Refuge

In compliance with the Minnesota Governor's Stay at Home policy for Minnesota, and to ensure the safety of visitors, volunteers and employees, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge visitor centers in Bloomington and Carver will remain closed through the beginning of May, in line with Minnesota schools. While programs and events are postponed at the Refuge, trails not impacted by local flooding remain open and staff is monitoring conditions closely. Please visit the [Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge website](#) and follow its [Facebook page](#) for the latest updates.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is proud to provide opportunities for safe, enjoyable outdoor experiences at many of the National Wildlife Refuges and National Fish Hatcheries during the coronavirus pandemic. If visiting the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge or another location, it is critically important to follow guidance from the CDC and state and local public health authorities on social distancing, staying home if unwell, avoiding overcrowding, and exercising good hygiene. If a parking lot is full, please do not stop. While the outdoors can help relieve stress, these guidelines must be followed for our public health and safety.

Questions may be directed to minnesotavalley@fws.gov or the Facebook Messenger app.

Wildlife watch: Spring Ephemerals—Don't blink!

by Refuge Education Practicum Melissa Schneider

One of my favorite things in April is spotting the short-lived bursts of beauty we refer to as "spring ephemerals." If you don't look closely and quickly, you may never know they were there. Our native spring ephemerals are deciduous woodland wildflowers that spend most of the year underground. In early spring, before the trees put out leaves, ephemerals are able to take advantage of the extra sunlight and the extra rich, moist soil. Their high photosynthetic rate allows them to bloom, pollinate, set seed, and die back in a matter of weeks—before the trees overhead block the sunlight from reaching the forest floor. Their flowers are beautiful on their own, but when you realize what amazing and specific adaptations they have developed to survive, they become an even more precious sight!

Be on the lookout for some of these well-known spring ephemerals: alien-looking species such as Jack-in-the-pulpit and the foul-smelling skunk cabbage (its Latin name-part foetidus

literally means "foul-smelling", but that smell is how it attracts its fly pollinators!); delicate lavender hepatica; purple and golden showy pasqueflowers; and those that seem to recall the disappearing snow with their bright white petals like dutchman's breeches and bloodroot (its name comes not from red petals, but from a red sap contained in its stem and leaves. Also, bloodroot is not a true ephemeral—its flowers die in spring, but its leaves remain above ground and active throughout the summer).

Celebrating Earth Day While Staying in Place

Wednesday, April 22, marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, a day to demonstrate your support for environmental protection. While many communities organize activities around the day, the order to stay home may have you wondering what to do.

Teach your children or grandchildren your love for the Earth by reading them a book about nature. Use FaceTime, Google Duo or Zoom to see each other's faces when you can't meet face to face.

Take a walk in the neighborhood to see where spring is already popping up. Bring a pair of gloves and a trash bag to pick up trash along the way.

Pledge to reduce the use of plastic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some local grocery stores are practicing extreme caution to avoid the spread of the coronavirus by prohibiting the use of reusable tote bags. [According to KSTP-TV, the city of Minneapolis is not enforcing the 5 cent surcharge it implemented for using plastic bags.](#) Find other ways to reduce the use of plastic where you can.

Work in your yard. Digging in the dirt is not only good for your physical health but your mental health as well.

Pledge to volunteer at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge later this fall. We have many exciting opportunities in seed collection, invasive species removal, classroom learning and much, much more. Many activities will be delayed this spring, making our need for volunteers greater than ever.

To learn more, please contact us at hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org.

DONATE



What's new at the Nature Store

Located at the Bloomington Education & Visitor, the Blufftop Nature Store will also remain closed until May. The bookstore is a significant funding source of Refuge Environmental Education activities and programs. We know the coronavirus has impacted you in many ways. If you can, [please consider joining or renewing your membership with Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends for \\$25.](#) If we all pitch in a little, we can make a big difference in supporting the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge as a thriving urban refuge where nature connects people, communities and wildlife.

Thank you.

Before we go



We have started a YouTube channel where we'll be adding videos of our beautiful Refuge.



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