



The historic 1880 Jobs Farmstead at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge [Louisville Swamp Unit](#). Photo by Andy Rathbun. Used with permission. Have a photo you'd like to submit for possible publication? Email hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org.

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends Currents

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Dear Friends:

Imagine going to the pharmacist and rather than picking up a prescription for a pill, you are given a pamphlet to a nearby park.

Doctors are starting to prescribe nature to treat a variety of issues, from high blood pressure to anxiety and depression.

Americans on average spend 93% of their lives indoors, and the average U.S. child spends five to eight hours a day in front of a screen. Meanwhile, more Americans are suffering from stress, anxiety and depression.

And, yet, being outside is linked to better mood and an even better outlook on life. According to a 2019 study published in the *Journal of Positive Psychology*, spending just five minutes in nature can quickly improve your mood, which is helpful to know as temperatures take a polar plunge.

'Tis the season to be busy. We hope that you take some time to stop, breathe and enjoy the great outdoors this holiday season.

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

Upcoming events at the Refuge

All events are free to the public but may be canceled due to inclement weather. Events are held at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge's Bloomington Education & Visitor Center unless otherwise noted. Parking is available but may be limited during high-demand events. The Refuge is easily accessible via the Metro Transit Blue Line at the American Blvd. stop. For more information, call 952-854-5900.

Saturday, Dec. 14

MRVAC Christmas Bird Count Bird Watching 101 with Ranger Joel and L.L. Bean Tech Nature

Join the Refuge and L.L. Bean for some citizen science as we help out the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter (MRVAC) with the annual Christmas Bird Count. Two hikes at 8 and 11:30 a.m. with a 10 a.m. ranger-led introduction to bird watching in the visitor center. Bring your own binoculars or check out a pair from the visitor center desk. Dress appropriately and snowshoes may be used during the hikes, which are also available for checkout for free at the visitor center. [Register for hikes here.](#)

From 1-3 p.m., Park Ranger Sharon Stiteler will lead a talk on Tech Nature. Learn how to use your smartphone to identify and document birds, insects, plants and other wildlife; take better pictures with your smartphone; and contribute to valuable citizen science. Meet in auditorium.

Holiday Closures

The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Bloomington & Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Centers will be closed on Wednesday, Dec. 25, and Wednesday, Jan. 1; however, Refuge trails are open sunrise to sunset 365 days a year.

Bird Language

Want to learn more about birds and their behavior? Wonder what they're chirping about, or why they fall silent? Join volunteer Refuge naturalists Jonathon Poppele and Donnie Phyllaier for this special workshop series Sunday, Jan. 5, from 9:15 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Workshops meet in Classroom A for discussion and will head outside for observations and more learning. Bring a notebook, pencils and something to sit on. Be sure to dress for the weather. Registration encouraged. [Learn more here.](#)

Bird Walks at Bass Ponds

Join refuge volunteer naturalist Craig Mandel for a bird walk to learn about some of the 220 species that stop here during migration. Birders of all levels are welcome to join. Bring along binoculars and a field guide, if you have one. Please dress for the weather. Walks are held Monday, Jan. 6; Saturday, Jan. 18; Sunday, Jan. 26; and Saturday, Feb. 1, from 8-10:30 a.m. Meet at the Bass Ponds Trails, 2501 86th St. E., Bloomington, MN 55425.

Saturday, Jan. 18

Doughnuts & Coffee with MN Valley Refuge Friends Natural Dyes Textile Demonstration

Come to the Refuge and enjoy a hot coffee and doughnut while learning about volunteer activities and upcoming events with Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends and a Refuge staff member. Stay to watch artist Emily Donovan do a natural dye demonstration that includes examples from locally foraged materials, including oak gall and black walnuts, and how natural colors can be manipulated with additives or mordants like iron and aluminum. The Doughnuts & Coffee hour will begin at 9:30 a.m. in Classroom B with the art demonstration to follow at 11 a.m. [Learn more here](#) and about the [demonstration here.](#)

MN Valley Refuge Friends Members-only snowshoe event

We are planning a members-only snowshoe event in early February complete with hot chocolate and cookies. Check our [Facebook page](#) soon and January's newsletter for details.

Wildlife watch

With tree limbs bare and evening so early, it is becoming easier to spot owls hunting for mice, voles or other small prey on after-work walks. As we creep toward the shortest

day of the year, the Winter Solstice on Dec. 21, keep an ear out for the hooting duets of great horned owls that are setting up nesting territories.

White-tailed deer bucks are beginning to shed their antlers toward the end of the month, which make a great snack for squirrels, opossums, mice, fox and coyotes that gnaw on the protein-rich antlers containing calcium and phosphorus.

Ponds and lakes are beginning to freeze up, but it takes a lot to freeze a body of moving water like the Minnesota River. Frazil ice is the term for the slushy mess of broken ice seen on a partially frozen river. When cold enough, the frazil may freeze together to form larger plates affectionately called pancake ice. Look for beaver, mink and otter tracks along creeks and waterways, and remember ice needs to be at least four inches thick for safe walking.

Share your love of fishing... Become a Refuge Fishing Buddy

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and MN Valley Refuge Friends are currently recruiting mentors to work with youth, young adults and families interested in exploring fishing.

Commitment: Mentors are expected to provide at least 20 hours of mentoring per month. Refuge Staff will provide mentors with planning and coordination support, all required equipment and a monthly stipend. This new program, an extension of our Refuge's urban outreach activities, is made possible in part from a generous grant from the Bosch Community Foundation.

Qualifications: Experience and passion for fishing and the outdoors. Interest in working with beginning anglers within their own communities. Enjoy working with youth and families. Ability to speak Spanish, Hmong or Somali highly desirable.

What's new at the Nature Store

At the Blufftop Nature Store, you will find a good selection of large-format books about the Minnesota River Valley and regional Native American culture. Find winter-themed note cards and inexpensive stocking stuffers like finger puppets and sticker books for children. Treat a favorite teacher to a Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge-themed t-shirt, reusable water bottle or [Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends membership](#). The Blufftop Nature Store is located inside the Bloomington Education and Visitor Center and is open 9 a.m.-4 p.m. seven days a week except for holidays and when the center is closed to the public. Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends receive a 10% discount on select items. The store is operated by Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends volunteers, and all profits support environmental education programs at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge that support youth of all ages with nature.

Save a tree. Sign up for this newsletter at <https://www.mnvalleyrefugefriends.org/newsletter.html>