



A banded garden spins a watery web at Louisville Swamp. Photo by Jerrod Larson. Submit your photos and videos taken at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge for possible publication to hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org.

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends Currents

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Dear Friends:



Happy birthday, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge! Today marks the 44th anniversary of when the Refuge was established by Congressional order.

A plan was proposed by Minnesota Governor Floyd Olson in the 1930s to create a 42,000-acre park and recreational area between Fort Snelling and Shakopee. Plans were shelved due to World War II and lack of funding, but by the early 1970s, the threat of development motivated passionate local residents and Fish and Wildlife Service pioneers to preserve the Minnesota River Valley.

Today, the Refuge stretches over 70 miles between Bloomington and Henderson. It spans over 14,000 acres and beckons hikers and bikers alike with its 46 miles of trails. The Refuge also manages a 14-county Wetland Management District in East Central Minnesota.

On Sept. 29 — which coincides with Urban National Wildlife Refuge Day — our Refuge received an early birthday present. The Trump Administration announced that Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge was awarded \$1 million in additional funding to bolster its urban refuge programs.

This is an exciting time for our Refuge, which has seen the Old Cedar Avenue Bridge's redevelopment, the opening of the Nature Play Area (see photo in this newsletter), and a spike in visitors to the Refuge's 12 units.

While our Refuge is not the oldest in Minnesota - that honor goes to [Mille Lacs NWR](#) - Minnesota Valley is where the first Refuge Friends group was founded. Today, roughly 200 Friends groups that serve as an enormous resource for refuges and hatcheries.

Thanks to the Refuge staff, Minnesota Valley Trust, Friends and volunteers who offer their time, talent and treasure to help make Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge one of the country's premier urban refuges.

We hope to see you soon at the Refuge!

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



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Director Charlie Wooley and Assistant Regional Director Suzanne Baird visit the new Nature Play Area at Old Cedar Avenue. The welcome arch was designed and installed by Minneapolis-based visual artist Christopher E. Harrison. A virtual ribbon-cutting ceremony was held earlier this month to commemorate the opening of the Nature Play Area, which offers a place at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge that the whole family can enjoy. Learn more about the new Nature Play Area [here](#). Photo by Sarena Selbo/USFWS

**Celebrate with us: National Wildlife Refuge Week
Oct. 11-17**

Follow Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge on [Facebook](#) to celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week virtually. #LiveYourWild #NationalWildlifeRefuge.

by Hannah Mcbrearty

Park Ranger

National Wildlife Refuge Week, observed the second full week of October each year, celebrates the great network of lands and waters that conserves and protects the nation's precious wildlife heritage. Refuges offer nearby nature for Americans to decompress and find much needed solace during difficult times. They offer opportunities to explore, learn and practice outdoor skills for those yearning for a connection with nature. This week we invite you to rekindle and reignite your true nature at a national wildlife refuge near you.

Get Started with 5 Fall Must-Dos at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge



Overlook by Thia Xiong/USFWS

1. Visit the overlook at the Bloomington Education and Visitor Center:

The valley that the Minnesota River flows in is up to five miles wide and 250 feet deep. Take it all in from a bird's eye view atop the river's former bluffs. Location: [3815 American Boulevard E, Bloomington, MN 55425](#).



Erratic by Gina Hatch/USFWS

2. Size up the glacial erratic at Louisville Swamp

When glacial ice retreats it can leave boulders the size of small buildings in unexpected places. You can find evidence of Minnesota's last glacial melt on the Mazomani Trail in the Louisville Swamp Unit.

Location: Access the [boulder](#) from Middle Road Trail Parking, [16210 Jordan Ave, Jordan, MN 55352](#).

Park next to the fence, walk past the house and turn west past the barn. You will briefly be passing through private property. Be respectful. The Refuge entrance is across the railroad tracks.



Rapids Lake by Carrie Poster/USFWS

3. Step back in time at Rapids Lake

Stand on the river bluff and take in the fall foliage, then descend into an enormous river valley carved out by glacial River Warren some 10,000 years ago. Humans have inhabited this landscape since the glaciers receded. See evidence of recent European settlement as the trail winds towards the river. Continue on to Little Rapids (about 1 mile north on the Rapids Lake Trail), a water feature seldom visible but that may appear as a faint jagged line across the river as water levels lower in fall. Look across the river (easterly Scott County side) at the site of Inyan Ceyaka Otonwe ("Village at the Barrier of Stone"), a Wahpeton Dakota summer planting village. Location: [15865 Rapids Lake Rd, Carver, MN 55315](https://www.mn.gov/locations/15865-Rapids-Lake-Rd-Carver-MN-55315).



Minnesota River by Kent Landerholm/Creative Commons

4. Go birding at Bass Ponds and Old Cedar Avenue Bridge

Over 250 bird species travel through the Minnesota River Valley each year. Some of the best places to catch a view of these great migrations are in low lying areas along the river like Bass Ponds or Old Cedar Avenue. Parking is available at both trail heads. Hike or bike between the two via Hogback Ridge Trail. Location: Access this unique area from the [Bass Ponds](#) or the [Old Cedar Avenue Bridge](#) parking lots.



Nature Play Area by Thia Xiong/USFWS

5. Unleash your inner child at the new Nature Play Area

This natural playground made of elements and textures from the earth such as logs, full-sized downed trees, boulders, and native plants is a feast for the imagination for folks of all ages. Build a beaver dam, weave an eagle's nest, or build a lean-to shelter. Location: [9898 Old Cedar Ave S, Bloomington, MN 55425](https://www.mnvalleyrefugefriends.org/locations/9898-Old-Cedar-Ave-S-Bloomington-MN-55425).

Keep on exploring:

[Plan Your Visit](#)

[Find a Trailhead Near You](#)

[Trail Maps](#)

What is your favorite place to send visitors who may have never been to the Refuge? Drop us a line at hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org.



Birds, bats and insects are winging their way southward for the season. How they know where and when to go remains a mystery to environmentalists. Photo: PEXELS/Creative Commons

Wildlife watch: The mystery of migration

by Mel Schneider
Refuge Environmental Educator

As October begins, southward migrations are well underway. Monarchs, hoary bats, green darner dragonflies, and all manner of birds are making their way to milder climates in the south.

As an environmental educator, I've learned that migration can be a tricky topic to teach. It brings up questions that even scientists haven't been able to fully answer yet. How do animals know where to go? How do they navigate and choose their route? How do they know when to go? Does climate change affect their ability to sense these changes?

The mysteries of migration are what make it so interesting. But one thing we do know is that migration makes for great birdwatching!

I asked our staff what birds they've seen migrating around their homes recently — have you seen any of these birds as well? Get outside in the next couple weeks and see what you can spot!

Numerous people mentioned those ubiquitous and not-so-quiet migrators, Canada geese. Seeing their perfect Vs flying overhead never seems to get old. Speaking of Canada and not-so-quiet, many people noted seeing that “oh, sweet Canada, Canada, Canada” songster, the white-throated sparrow. Most white-throated sparrows nest in Canada and make their way southeast in the fall.

Of our small migrants, Urban Biologist Nicole Menard has spotted yellow-rumped and Nashville warblers at Rapids Lake, ruby-crowned and golden-crowned kinglets, and brown creepers in her backyard.

Park Ranger and Bloomington Visitor Center Manager Joel Vos had large flocks of grackles at his feeders for nearly a week and has noted an increase in white-breasted nuthatches and woodpeckers, including a northern flicker.

Gulls, swans, and white pelicans were all spotted along the Minnesota River. Assistant Visitor Services Manager Cortney Solum notes that she has seen trumpeter swans recently at Old Cedar Avenue. Many trumpeter swans will stay in Minnesota, overwintering on the open water of large rivers.

Large numbers of raptors are also making their way south. Joel noted a number of vultures, eagles, red-tailed and sharp-shinned hawks, and a singular merlin along the St. Croix River near Stillwater. With a bit of chilly weather foreboding, volunteer coordinator Sarah Inouye-Leas said her yard has been visited by “those harbingers of winter, dark-eyed juncos.”

Some migrants from the far north will continue south, while others will find southern Minnesota warm enough for the winter. Of the nearly 240 species that breed in Minnesota, only about 20 will remain for the coldest months. So now is the time to get out and enjoy the enormous variety of birds that fall migration brings through our area.

Happy birding!

In case you missed it

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge was the highlight of an article published Oct. 1 in the [Chaska Herald](#). It explores the surge in popularity of the Refuge during the pandemic as well as how visitors can explore the Refuge this fall. Thanks to the *Chaska Herald* for showcasing our Refuge!

Give to the Max is Nov. 19, 2020



For the second year in a row, Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends is participating in Give to the Max. This is a great time for you to make your donation, become a member, or renew your membership as donations will be matched by the Refuge Friends' board of directors (up to \$1,500). [RBCU](#), which will be renamed MY CREDIT UNION starting Nov. 1, has helped to kick things off with a generous \$500 donation! Donations to Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends can be made [here](#) on the Give MN website.

Thank you in advance by giving to the max!