



Photo of a white squirrel by Chad Lawson/USFWS. 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,

Our fiscal year ended in September. Now is an excellent time to look back and share some exciting results in how Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends continues to play a critical role at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

Because of generous support from members like you, as well as funders that include the Minnesota Valley Trust, Cargill, and the Bosch Community Fund, Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends has been able to:

- Transport thousands of students from nearby school districts during the 2019-2020 school year to and from the Refuge with the Blue Goose Bus Fund. Schools where at least half of the student population receives free or reduced-cost lunches qualify for this fund.
- Provide countless volunteer hours to staff the front desks at the Refuge visitor centers and operate the Blufftop Nature Store, assist in environmental education learning, and support events both at the Refuge and throughout the community, including the Minneapolis Monarch Festival and Minnesota Bat Festival. During the pandemic, we've supported the Refuge staff in its efforts to pivot to virtual events and establish the [Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends YouTube channel](#), now home to a treasure trove of online environmental education resources.

- Provide support for five interns and temporary employees at the Refuge in community outreach, conservation, and environmental education, giving them opportunities to grow and develop as conservation leaders.
- Conduct habitat-related projects on the Refuge, including goat grazing to remove invasive species at the Bloomington Education and Visitor Center and to begin testing of chloride in Ike's Creek, a restored brook trout steps away from the Mall of America.
- Work with Refuge staff to secure a partnership with Bloomington theater and visual arts nonprofit organization Artistry to rethink the Refuge's gallery space and its use.
- Create a new urban mentoring program for youth to learn an outdoor activity both on and off the Refuge. We worked with Refuge staff to establish a birding program with the nonprofit organization Urban Bird Collective.
- Continue funding the position of our organization's first-ever staff member and Executive Director Sara Blood. She has modernized our organization's operations and has placed us on firmer footing both financially and culturally.

No National Wildlife Refuge "gets by" without a little help from its Friends—there are now 218 Refuge Friends organizations throughout the country. Through these and many other activities, YOU are helping the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge secure its rightful place as one of the country's premier urban refuges. Thank you! With time and your continued support, we hope we can also say one day that the Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends is one of the nation's premier Refuge Friends groups.

But the year ahead is not without its challenges. During the pandemic, our Blufftop Nature Store at the Bloomington Education & Visitor Center – a primary funding source for Refuge Friends' activities – will remain closed for the foreseeable future. Our hope to re-engage in activities with members like you both on and off the Refuge are postponed. During this time, our staff and Board of Directors will continue to forge ahead on behalf of the Refuge, thanks to the firm foundation of support that you, our donors and volunteers, have helped provide us.

Thank you,

Robert "Randy" Petzel, M.D.
President, Board of Directors



Give to the Max is Thursday, Nov. 19 Help us reach our fundraising goal of \$3,000

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). [My Credit Union](#) 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 for giving to the max!



Virtual groundbreaking ceremony

On Nov. 6, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hosted a virtual groundbreaking ceremony in partnership with Minnesota Valley at Rice and Fisher lakes in the [Wilkie Unit](#). The groundbreaking marks the start of the new multi-year Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project to address increasing flood events and erosion. This project will lower high water levels through the installation of culverts and water control structures, allowing aquatic plants to grow and restoring 2,000 acres of quality feeding and resting habitat for waterfowl. [Learn more about the project.](#) [Watch the previously recorded live broadcast.](#)

Photo is of Refuge Manager Sarena Selbo (third from left) and representatives from the U.S. Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the contracting firm. Photo credit: USFWS

Refuge happenings

by Hannah McBrearty
Park Ranger

The Refuge has always been a popular spot for locals to take out-of-town guests during the holiday season. While our doors remain temporarily closed, there's still plenty to delight new and seasoned visitors alike this winter:

1. Go see turkeys in the wild around the Bloomington Education and Visitor Center. These birds are not like the ones you buy at the supermarket! [Impress your friends and family with your knowledge of this fascinating bird.](#)
2. Walk off the holiday pie. Get out for a hike on one of our 46 miles of trails. Whether you're looking to beat the pavement or take a rustic ramble, there's a trail for you. [Explore a Refuge trail near you.](#)

3. It's not too late for a picnic! Ditch the fancy dinnerware and move your holiday meal or family gathering outdoors this year. [Keep your crew warm and merry with these winter picnicking tips](#) from our friends at the Minnesota DNR.



A buck munches away at one of the Refuge's bird feeders. Photo credit: USFWS

Wildlife watch: The signs deer leave behind

by Mel Schneider
Refuge Environmental Educator

White-tailed deer are ubiquitous in Minnesota, even in urban areas like the Twin Cities, and are the largest mammal that calls Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge "home." In November, deer are leaving behind extra clues of their presence, and it's a great time to put on your detective cap and get outside to look for these signs.

November is the peak time for the white-tailed deer's yearly "rut" or mating season. During this time, bucks are very active seeking out does to mate with, and in this process, they leave behind two very distinct signs to mark their territory and communicate with other deer.

The first of these signs is rubs. A rub is created when a buck rubs his antlers against a tree trunk to leave scents from his forehead glands. Scent is an essential communication tool for deer, and they

can smell things up to one-third of a mile away! To find rubs, look for bark that has been shredded off the trunk about 1.5-3.5 feet above the ground.

The second sign is a scrape. To create a scrape, bucks paw at the ground to clear a large area underneath a tree, leaving behind scent from glands between the toes of their front hoofs. To ensure that they've communicated thoroughly, they will urinate on the spot and chew a branch above the scrape, leaving scent marks from their saliva. If you're in the woods and come across a clearing under a tree with a broken branch pointing down at it, you've likely found a buck's neon sign communicating, "THIS IS MY SPOT."

Other common signs to look for in November include tracks, bedding areas, and of course scat. After a fresh snowfall, tracks will begin to appear almost everywhere you look and can be exciting to follow. Bedding areas may appear in wooded areas out of the wind and may be identifiable by the oval impression left in the snow.

Although their fur may seem too short to keep them warm while sleeping out in the winter air, they have a special winter coat made up of hollow hairs, which helps insulate them down to 30-below! Lastly, don't forget to keep your eye out for their pebble-like scat atop fresh blankets of snow.

Deer move quickly and are sometimes difficult to spot, but they leave behind many signs that they've been there. On your next visit to the Refuge, especially after fresh snow, see how many deer signs you can find.



Volunteer opportunities at the Refuge

Social Media Content Creators

Do you like taking photos while exploring outdoors? Help the Refuge tell the story of the seasons on its Refuge Facebook page! We're looking for volunteers who would like to submit nature or recreation photos or help to draft Facebook posts.

Environmental Education

Join the Refuge in the virtual classroom! Volunteers are needed to assist Refuge Education staff with delivering live virtual lessons in their online classrooms. Volunteers will assist the staff lead with lesson activities, reading stories, prompting students and responding to student questions.

Position details:

- Connect to online meetings where virtual lessons will be held.
- Assist lead teacher with student activities for grades K-5.
- Engage students in developing naturalist skills through the study of insects and birds this fall.

Questions or interest? Email hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org.



Refuge 'Day of the Dead' celebrations held

In late October and early November, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge celebrated Dia de los Muertos, a Mexican holiday that combines nature and art to celebrate the lives of those who have passed and one that also coincides with the arrival of Minnesota's monarchs in Mexico. It's not too late to join the celebration:

On Oct. 25, Refuge Latinx Family Liaison Oscar Hernandez attended Festival de las Calaveras, a Latinx festival focused on Day of the Dead. Here he gave out 90 nature and art kits for families to take home. [These same crafts were posted on the Refuge website for all to download and enjoy.](#)

The Refuge worked with two local Mexican Artists, Maricela Herrera of Mari's Crafty Hands and Guillermo Valadez, a muralist. Together, they created a [Sugar Skull-themed face painting tutorial](#) to accompany the previously posted [Monarch Butterfly face painting tutorial](#) on the Refuge Friends' YouTube channel. Valadez also created [10 printable coloring sheets](#) highlighting Minnesota wildlife.

On Facebook, the Refuge honored a few late Latinx conservationists and highlighted the Monarch Butterfly's arrival in Mexico. [Learn more about the connection between Monarch butterflies and Dia de los Muertos.](#)

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