



17076 293rd Avenue NW  
Zimmerman, MN 55398

FIND US ON:      
[ExploreSherburne.org](http://ExploreSherburne.org)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

With COVID numbers continuing at acceptable levels, things are returning to a “new normal” at the refuge. Events are on the calendar, student visits are resuming, and refuge facilities are open, though Refuge Headquarters may be temporarily closed on Fridays and may also experience periodic closures due to staffing shortages. Note that all events are FREE; however, all but the Wildlife Festival require registration. To register, call 763-389-3323 or email [sherburne@fws.gov](mailto:sherburne@fws.gov).

### WILDFLOWER TOUR

Saturday, June 10, 10 am – 12 pm, Prairie’s Edge Wildlife Drive

### YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP & HIKE

Saturday, June 17, 10:30 am – 12 pm, Oak Savanna Learning Center. BYO camera or camera phone

### SUNDAES ON SATURDAY WITH THE FRIENDS FOR THE GO WILD! AMPHITHEATER CAMPAIGN

Saturday, June 17, 1 pm – 3 pm, Oak Savanna Learning Center, Free Event – All Welcome!

### BIRD TOUR

Saturday, August 19, 8 am – 10 am, Mahnomen Trail, binoculars provided

### WILDFLOWER TOUR

Saturday, September 2, 10 am – 11:30 am, Oak Savanna Learning Center

### WILDLIFE FESTIVAL

Saturday, September 30, 10 am – 2 pm, Oak Savanna Learning Center

### For updates and more information about refuge events:

- Friends Facebook page, [facebook.com/SherburneRefugeFans](https://facebook.com/SherburneRefugeFans)
- Friends e-news, the Prairie Insider. Sign up at the bottom of the Friends website home page, [ExploreSherburne.org](http://ExploreSherburne.org)

### Shop at the Eagle’s Nest Nature Store!

•At the Oak Savanna Learning Center, Thursdays/Saturdays, 10 am – 2 pm. Online at [SherburneEaglesNestStore.com](http://SherburneEaglesNestStore.com)

### Sherburne Photography Club

•Meeting and activity plans available on the club’s Facebook page, [facebook.com/groups/SherburnePhotoClub](https://facebook.com/groups/SherburnePhotoClub)

# PRAIRIE’S EDGE

A NEWSLETTER FROM FRIENDS OF SHERBURNE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

SUMMER 2023

## Safety in Nature

### Partnership Introduces Refuge to Urban Birders

By Bruce Ellingson

Monica Bryand, a Twin Cities bird-er-photographer, has posted a new bird photo to her Facebook page every single day for more than 15 years. And each day Bryand identifies where she took the photo, hoping to inspire her Facebook followers to explore the birding opportunities of the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota.



Monica Bryand

Of course, her passion has sparked interest among other urban residents who love birds. “I don’t always feel safe outdoors alone,” Facebook friends would tell Bryand, “but I want to see these birds!” “Can we join you?” they would ask. “Of course!” she would reply.

Bryand is a member of Duluth’s

“It’s about protecting the wildlife and the land they are on.”

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory board of directors, has worked with the Audubon Conservation Committee, and has worked at leading racial justice organizations, Headwaters  
Continued on Page 5

## Amphitheater Campaign Update

# GO WILD!

By Myrna Krueger

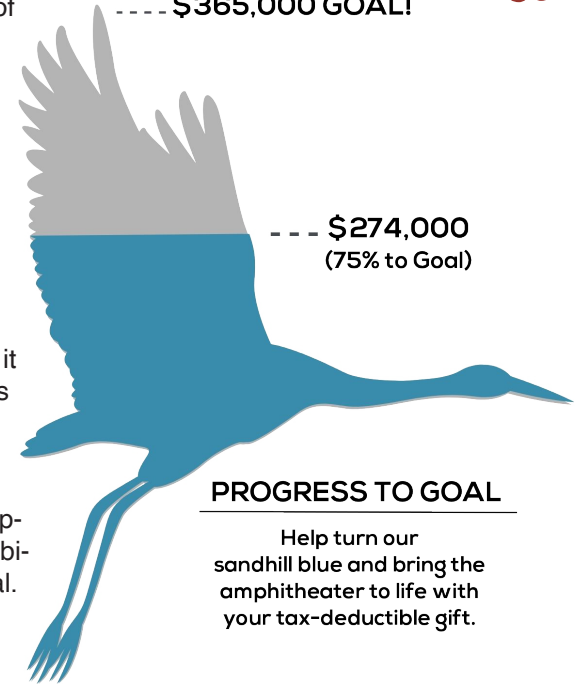
As campaign chair and on behalf of the Friends, I’d like to thank all of you who have so generously donated to the Go Wild! Amphitheater Campaign! Read on to get an update on this exciting project to raise funds for the construction of an outdoor amphitheater on the refuge at the Oak Savanna Learning Center.

Why an amphitheater? An outdoor amphitheater will make it possible for the many thousands who visit the refuge each year—of all ages and abilities – to have an opportunity to learn, connect, and grow their appreciation for the wildlife and habitats that make the refuge special. The amphitheater will provide an outdoor gathering place for refuge programs, student visits, and informal gatherings of birders, hikers, scouts, photographers, and others.

With the support and leadership of refuge staff and a cooperative agreement in place with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the construction of the amphitheater is a Friends project and will be funded by the Friends. It all began in 2020 with planning, a discovery process, and a design developed by Damon Farber Landscape Architects.

At the time of this writing, the Friends have raised 75% of the funding goal of \$365,000, leaving an additional \$91,000, a substantial amount of money. We’re hopeful that with the help of individual donors, regional businesses, and civic  
Continued on Page 7

---- \$365,000 GOAL!



--- \$274,000  
(75% to Goal)

### PROGRESS TO GOAL

Help turn our sandhill blue and bring the amphitheater to life with your tax-deductible gift.

You Are Invited to  
**Go Wild!  
Sundaes  
on Saturday!**

Saturday, June 17  
**Free Event**  
1 to 3 p.m.

at the Oak Savanna Learning Center  
Bring Your Friends!

Make a sundae, tour the amphitheater site, ask questions, learn about the amphitheater project. We’re looking forward to seeing you!



## GO WILD! Campaign Growing Our Skills to Support Refuge Needs

By Steve Chesney, President

Beginning a major fund drive is an exciting time for the Friends. Yes, it's about the planned outdoor amphitheater that will be an invaluable resource for the refuge and the public. But there is an additional story to be told. The "Be Wild" campaign of 2014-2017 helped the Friends grow our ability to help the refuge. "Go Wild" of 2023 is doing the same.

Each campaign marks a "growth spurt" for funding refuge facilities. "Be Wild" funded furnishings, trails, and other infrastructure at the Oak Savanna Learning Center. "Go Wild" will provide a major venue for programming and recreation.

The Friends have also had growth spurts. We added (and are adding) new members and community supporters



Steve Chesney

as we seek gifts from renewing and new members. We are reconnecting with old friends and new community supporters – businesses and foundations. Our financial base for current and future activities parallels that – we have increased our "money in the bank" and maintained a growing endowment that may fund future activities.

But there are also measures that are less quantifiable. The "Be Wild" and "Go Wild" campaigns grew—and are growing—our capabilities to communicate with our members and the public. We've grown in how we use technology to amplify and save bookkeeping efforts for our board and volunteers. But most importantly we have grown in our capabilities to mount such extensive campaigns. Thanks to campaign leadership like "Been There" Sue Hix and "Going Places" Myrna Krueger, the time, effort, and skills of many volunteers have been and are being well coordinated for best results. And all this is a volunteer effort. Thanks, everyone!



Art by Damon Farber Landscape Architects imagining the amphitheater, which will be located northwest of the Oak Savanna Learning Center.

## GO WILD! Campaign

Continued from Page 1

organizations, we will achieve the goal by the end of this year so that construction can begin in 2024. The amphitheater will be available for use as soon as it is completed.

It's truly been a team effort, starting with a steering committee of passionate members who care deeply about making it happen. After training early this year, committee members now share information at monthly meetings, provide input into plans, and reach out to current and prospective donors. I'd like to thank our Go Wild! Amphitheater Campaign Steering Committee, a group of terrific individuals who hail from communities surrounding the refuge: Leah

Bronken, Zimmerman; Diana Burlison, Sauk Rapids; Steven Chesney, Brooklyn Park; Sue Hix, Princeton; Bill Kolbinger, Becker; Myrna Krueger, Elk River; Roger Leider, Princeton; Helle Lukk, Princeton; Carol Mertesdorf, Anoka; John Riebel, Becker; BearPaw Shields, Zimmerman; Scott Suhsen, Princeton. Feel free to reach out to any of them; they would love to hear from you.

**Next up we're hosting a fun event—Go Wild! Sundays on Saturday—on June 17.**

In gearing up for an additional push, the Friends have launched the Go Wild! Business Challenge. We are asking regional businesses and civic organizations to join the effort and become a Go Wild! Partner. The Friends will recognize businesses and organizations who give a minimum of \$1,500 (payable over three years) as Go Wild! Partners. Partners will receive prominent recognition for their organization at Friends events and in publications throughout the campaign.

As a unique benefit to businesses and organizations, the refuge and Friends can offer meaningful opportunities for employees and members to connect, engage, and volunteer. Steering committee members are reaching out to businesses and organizations to provide information and presentations about the refuge and project.

To learn more and donate, go to [exploresherburne.org/gowild](https://exploresherburne.org/gowild). To donate by check, you can mail it to Friends of Sherburne at 17076 293rd Ave NW, Zimmerman, MN 55398.

Let's talk! What I personally love about volunteering for the Friends is being part of a community that loves nature and the refuge. Please don't hesitate to get in touch; you can reach me at [friendsofsherburne@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofsherburne@gmail.com). And most of all, please know that we appreciate your support.

**FRIENDS OF SHERBURNE NWR  
2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
Steven Chesney – President  
Carol Mertesdorf – Vice President  
Roger Leider – Treasurer  
Mike Brubaker – Secretary  
Leah Bronken – Director  
Matt Finn – Director  
Bruce Galer – Director  
Bill Kolbinger – Director  
Helle Lukk – Director  
BearPaw Shields – Director  
Scott Suhsen – Director

**REFUGE LIAISON TO THE BOARD:**  
Jade Pederson – Visitor Services

### Donate or Join Friends of Sherburne Online at [ExploreSherburne.org](https://ExploreSherburne.org)

The Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization (EIN: 41-1763001) that supports refuge projects and educational programs. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

The Prairie's Edge newsletter is published twice annually for members in cooperation with the refuge. Editor is Sue Hix.

Contact Sue or the Friends  
c/o Sherburne NWR, 17076  
293rd Avenue NW, Zimmerman,  
MN 55398, or at [FriendsofSherburne@gmail.com](mailto:FriendsofSherburne@gmail.com)



### Outdoorsman Chooses Amphitheater, Believes in Refuge

By Bruce Ellingson

Robert Morgan of St. Mathias grew up on a small dairy farm in central Minnesota and tramped about the countryside's woods, swamps, and creeks when he wasn't doing chores.

In 1974, he participated in a winter outdoor camping trip with members of the Minnesota Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. This experience brought out the explorer in him, and he has spent his adult life discovering the natural areas of Minnesota and beyond. "As best I can recall, my first involvement with Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge—beyond visits—was the writing of support letters to our

members of Congress in 2003. It was an initiative by the Friends of Sherburne to secure federal funding for a visitor center at the refuge."

Morgan points to the proximity of the refuge to the populations of major metropolitan areas and says, "It is important to have structures and services that accommodate visitors and facilitate the interpretation of a landscape where wildlife still live in mostly natural habitat."

He is supporting the Amphitheater Campaign "as an important addition to the indoor facilities that allows for outdoor presentations when

the weather is amenable or when the building is full or unavailable."

Morgan has experienced first-hand the enthusiasm the Friends of Sherburne have "for helping people better appreciate the resources and the beauty of the natural world." And the outdoorsman believes an amphitheater will greatly help the interpretation programming of the refuge. Also, "it will be a guiding point for drop-in visitors to help them select a trail walk or to look for the natural habitats of the refuge's plant and animal life."

Morgan's message to potential Amphitheater Campaign supporters: "People choose to support a project depending not only on their income but also on their belief that it is a benefit to oneself or to the community they are a part of."



Robert Morgan



# S E E D S

## The Fruits of Their Labor

**Text and Photos by Bruce Ellingson**

Kris Spaeth describes the activity of seed cleaning at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge (SNWR) this way: *“The refuge keeps the seed, but everyone takes something away.”*

Spaeth is a biological science technician for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and works with volunteers who collect seed from native plants and clean the native seeds for replanting in future years. This team of refuge volunteers captures the germ of lupine, beebalm, pasqueflowers, and nearly 40 other species of native plants across the refuge’s 31,000 acres. Their goal is to help restore native bio-



diversity across the refuge’s uplands, which are home to more than 300 native flower species.

The reason for collecting seeds of plants native to the refuge is two-fold. 1. Seeds collected locally are adapted to refuge soil conditions and climate and more likely to thrive. 2. Native seeds purchased on the commercial market are expensive.

The final step in the cycle of native plant life at the refuge is when volunteers (from ages 3 to 80) pry, pull, sift, pluck, and stomp native seeds from the fluff and hulls of their origins. Last fall, helping hands (and feet) produced 26 pounds of native seed from the 2022 season. That seed was safely stored away for future use, but seed cleaning volunteers took home the shared comradery of those final moments in the seed collecting cycle.

In November, about a dozen volunteers cleaned native seeds that had been collected throughout 2022. Due to COVID restrictions, November’s cleaning was the first volunteer seed cleaning that Spaeth had scheduled since 2019. As volunteer liaison, Spaeth is also responsible for weighing the clean seed, updating the seed inventory, and placing clean seeds into cold storage, what she claims to be the easy tasks.

The task of cleaning the seed also seems simple—identify what is seed and get rid of everything else. The challenge: All seeds collected at the refuge are collected by hand and thus are “dirty,” meaning the collection includes a lot more inert material than seed. Some seeds are small as dust. Some husks are hard as nuts. Some seeds are protected with fluff and Velcro-like material that isn’t easy to remove from the seed (or from yourself).

Cleaning techniques include foot-stomping and food-processing (ear protection provided) and sifting with layered sieves. Three-year-old Reese Spaeth, Kris’s daughter, advises prospective seed cleaners to “wear shoes for stomping and look carefully for seeds.” Sometimes really little fingers and bright young eyes are an advantage.

And as Kris Spaeth notes, seed cleaners don’t take home seeds—except hitchhikers caught in a cuff—but they do leave having

**Continued on Page 6**



3-year-old Reese Spaeth (above) gets the jump on seed cleaning with the help of her toy horse. Photo by mom, Kris Spaeth. Cleaners also use pliers to separate seed from husk (right).



Cinquefoil seed pods with pod pieces and seeds, the tiny teardrop-shaped objects.



Bio-tech Kris Spaeth inventories and weighs the cleaned seeds. Hundreds of dollars worth of seeds are then stored for planting.



Everyone’s favorite refuge wildflower, lupine seeds weighed in at 17.18 ounces.

## Urban Birders Partnership

**Continued from Page 1**

Foundation for Justice, and Voices for Racial Justice. Five years ago, Bryand formed an organization whose mission is to support the Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and LGBT communities who wish to explore birding and the outdoors.

She recruited eight acquaintances who were either BIPOC or LGBT and “were pretty good birders, and we started the Urban Bird Collective. It wasn’t about being great birders. It was about creating safe space for people to be out with us.”

Today, UBC has 22 leaders who facilitate birding events around the state. The events are communicated through the Urban Bird Collective’s Facebook page and the UBC website [urbanbirdcollective.org](http://urbanbirdcollective.org). Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge (SNWR) has become one of those spaces with the help of Friends of Sherburne and staff of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.



Participants in a refuge birding tour led by the Urban Bird Collective during June of 2021.

“We love to show visitors the outdoors and communicate conservation issues,” says Bryand. “It’s not just about birding, it’s about protecting the wildlife and the land that they are on. We take people to where we’ve been because we know the areas and we break down that barrier of the unknown.”

Loreen Lee of St. Paul is a birder, an elementary school teacher, and a UBC leader. As an Asian American who grew up in California, Lee knows the experience of being different in Minnesota, a state whose green spaces she loves and whose spring she describes as “a present under the Christmas tree! It’s like six weeks of birds, birds, birds coming through.”

Lee says the refuge “feels magical.” Her goal in leading newcomers to the refuge trails and birds is to help them feel the same sense of place and beauty.

UBC asks that participants RSVP to their events, limiting tours to 12 to 20 persons to assure sufficient interaction between leaders and participants. Tours include a lunch, permitting participants to get to know each other while enjoying the outdoors. Many are newcomers to the refuge coming from the Twin Cities and suburbs. The Friends of Sherburne provide support for transportation, food, and stipends for UBC leaders.

**PAGE 5**



Experienced hands as well as tiny hands are needed to cleave seeds from their shells. Left to right are seed cleaners Laura Pipenhagen, Gary Pipenhagen, Debbie Russell, Kris Spaeth (also USFWS team lead) and Phyllis Pesola-Krumholz.

**PAGE 4**





Refuge Great American Outdoors Act Crew (from left): Corey Gray, Tyrrell Halvorson and Christopher Dauw.

## Inside the Refuge

### Outdoors Act Adds Maintenance Forces To Attack Projects

By Greg Dehmer, Deputy Project Leader

Something that is new and exciting for the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge Complex is our new Great American Outdoors Act Strike Team.

The Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA, pronounced GO-AH), enacted in 2020, authorizes the use of up to \$1.9 billion a year in energy development revenues for five years for needed maintenance

of critical facilities and infrastructure in our wildlife refuges, national parks, forests, recreation areas, and American Indian schools. This Public Lands Restoration Fund directs 5% of energy development revenues received annually—or \$95 million per year—to the Refuge System.



Greg Dehmer

Infrastructure, including buildings, roads, trails, and water control structures, is always degrading: As one structural problem is fixed, others develop. US Fish and Wildlife Service

(USFWS) structures are particularly vulnerable to deterioration because of remote field locations and the old age of many facilities. Unfortunately, many of the needed repairs are not completed due to funding shortfalls. This creates a maintenance backlog at National Wildlife Refuges.

Earlier this year, Sherburne NWR hired three new maintenance workers who will serve as one of three GAOA Strike Force Crews within our eight-state Midwest Region. The Sherburne Crew will be working on the maintenance backlog at the Sherburne NWR Complex for half of their time and spend the other half of their time traveling within the Midwest Region working on other GAOA projects. Occasionally the crew will work on national projects with other crews from the USFWS.

You may have already seen some GAOA projects on the refuge, including the placement of crushed granite on the trails on the Wildlife Drive. Other projects that we hope to complete this year include the replacement of the boardwalk on the Prairie Trail, improvements to St. Francis Pool, and the re-siding of the Rice Lake NWR office. There will be more projects to come in future years.

We are very excited to see these projects getting completed for the benefit of the wildlife that call our refuges home—and you and all visitors to the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge Complex. So, when you are out and about on the refuge, keep an eye out for the handiwork of the Sherburne GAOA Crew!

## S E E D S

Continued from page 4

“enjoyed the fun and relaxed atmosphere. It’s so enjoyable being in a roomful of people who share the same interests and passions that you do. I love seeing new faces and hearing stories from the veteran cleaners. There are usually plenty of laughs and no shortage of tips and tricks to cleaning difficult species being shared,” says Spaeth.

“You truly get a sense of fellowship when you see something come full circle,” she notes. “A lot of these people see the blossoms on the landscape. They’re out there collecting in the bugs and in the prickles and the poison ivy...and when it’s time to clean, you get to see the fruits of your labor.”

Debbie Russell was a first-time seed cleaner in 2022. She described the experience this way, “I would like to say that I *evolved* in the course of this experience. I mean, you have got to let go, and that’s when you learn that perfection is the enemy of good enough, and you have to find what is good enough!

“But it was nice to have the experienced people there so you could show them what you had and hear ‘Oh, yeah, good job.’” Russell’s favorite plant to clean was penstemon. “You can just sort of pop a husk and pull out the however-many seeds are in there and put them in a little dish. I could easily see what I’d accomplished!”

“If you know someone who is a volunteer seed cleaner,” says Kris Spaeth, “I ask that you thank them for the work they do. If you love to admire the beautiful flowers across the refuge, love to take pictures of them, smell them, sketch them. Just know that there is a group of dedicated volunteers that played a vital role in those continued efforts across the refuge to improve and sustain our valuable native habitats.”



Lupine life cycle

## Visitor Services

### Refuge Would Love to Have You As A Volunteer!

By Jade Pederson, Visitor Services Specialist

Maybe you find your refuge nature connection through hiking, photography, or attending events. After all, there are endless opportunities for education, memories, and adventure within the 30,700 acres. But, if you are looking to get more out of your connection, consider volunteering! Continue to do what you already love while also making a positive impact in our community.

Currently, we have nearly 180 active volunteers who provide invaluable assistance to our mission and conservation goals. Yet we are always pursuing connections with new friends and Friends. There are more than 20 different refuge volunteer roles in five categories: biology, nature education, outreach, maintenance, and administration. Vol-



Jade Pederson



Volunteers are essential to offer activities at family events like Spring Celebration.

Photo by Sandy Clemons

unteers dedicate time at the refuge year-round, but we have the greatest need in spring and fall. Keep reading to learn about the positions we are recruiting for now!

Interested in working closely with refuge staff and interacting with the public? Consider volunteering as a **front desk volunteer**.

If you are concerned with litter on the refuge, join one or many of the “**Adopt-a**” programs. Help keep the refuge clean by picking up litter on trails, at kiosks, along the river, and on roads.

Want to help younger generations to connect with their natural environment? Become a **nature education volunteer**.

If you care about habitat restoration or are interested in native plants, join the **seed collectors**.

Looking to help but only have limited hours you can spare? Volunteer as an **event assistant** at our free, family events, including bird and wildflower tours, Spring Celebration, and Wildlife Festival.

If volunteering at the refuge sounds interesting to you, fill out a volunteer application at [fws.gov/refuge/sherburne/get-involved](https://fws.gov/refuge/sherburne/get-involved) Please also feel free to reach out to me at [jade\\_pederson@fws.gov](mailto:jade_pederson@fws.gov) or 763-389-3323 x 104.

Thank you to all the current volunteers who dedicate their time, perspectives, and knowledge to the refuge!



Ruthie Lucht

### Friends Scholarship Recipient Pursues Biology Degree

“Hello! My name is Ruthie Lucht and I am a sophomore at St. Cloud State University majoring in Biology: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Evolution.

I am truly grateful to the Friends of Sherburne NWR for helping me continue to pursue my love of nature through education. I can’t remember a time in my life when I wasn’t around animals or a body of water.

I am so lucky to have had the opportunity to attend the same summer camp for the past 13 years. As a camper, I signed up for as many outdoor activities as possible but left plenty of time to explore the fish, turtles, frogs, toads and snakes in the camp.

As a counselor this past summer, I was able to share my knowledge and love of nature with other young girls. I am also a competitive swimmer so I am always around the water...and I truly love the ocean!

My goal is to obtain a graduate degree in Marine Biology and contribute to the conservation of marine wildlife and plants on one of the coasts.”