

# FRIENDS OF THE REFUGE HEADWATERS

Winter 2009-2010 Newsletter



## Swans Stop at the Refuge

Fall migration brings masses of birds to the normally calm, tranquil backwaters of the Upper Mississippi River. The river transforms with the high-pitched trumpet of the tundra swan resting and searching for a treat of arrowhead and wild celery tubers, also known as duck potato.

When the eastern population of tundra swans from Alaska and the Northwest Territories are making their way to Chesapeake Bay, N.C., to spend the winter, they stop on the river to rest their three-foot wings and eat an estimated six pounds of duck potato per day, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

The tundra swans begin arriving in the last few weeks of October and build up in population until they reach numbers of about 30,000-50,000 by mid-November.

Upper Mississippi River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Biologist Eric Nelson said his favorite part of the migration is what he calls the “swan fall.”

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## What's New on the Refuge

The intent of closing the Big Lake area of Pool four to migratory bird hunting was to increase the number of migratory birds that use the area and from the numbers the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service counted during aerial surveys it worked!

According to Refuge Biologist Lisa Reid, they counted the most birds ever in this area.

As of Nov. 6, Reid counted 3,600 tundra swans compared to only 300 in 2008 and 130 in 2007.

Canvasback duck numbers also increased to 8,200, a large jump from the peak of 300 in 2008 and 500 in 2007.

“Some hunters may have been displaced, but the area is functioning as it was supposed to,” said Mary Stefanski, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Winona District manager.

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### Swans continued...

“When migrating from their long flights, they are very tired and recognize that they are in the refuge area. They get very excited, tip their wings, and just drop from the sky, flipping and flipping the whole way down,” said Nelson.

After they have had their rest, indulgence of duck potato and the river begins to freeze in mid-December, they hold their necks straight and fly thousands of miles in one span to make it to their winter resting place.

Tundra swans haven't always used the Mississippi River as a rest stop in their journey. According to data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it has been within the last 15 years that they have been coming to the river more steadily due to a loss of habitat from drainage into waterways in the Dakotas and northern Minnesota.

Large congregations of tundra swans on the refuge make the areas of Brownsville, Minn., and Reick's Lake near Alma, Wis., which are popular viewing areas.

### What's New continued...

Surveys also show that hunters around the area did just as well this year as in previous years, reporting harvested waterfowl numbers close to average. On opening weekend hunters averaged one point seven birds per hunter, slightly less than the previous 10 year average of two birds per hunter.

Watch for an upcoming National Geographic feature of the Mississippi River with segments filmed at Big Lake.

## Duck Potato



Refuge Engineer, Sharonne Baylor, displays jars containing three pounds of duck potato. Two jars equal the amount one tundra swan eats each day.

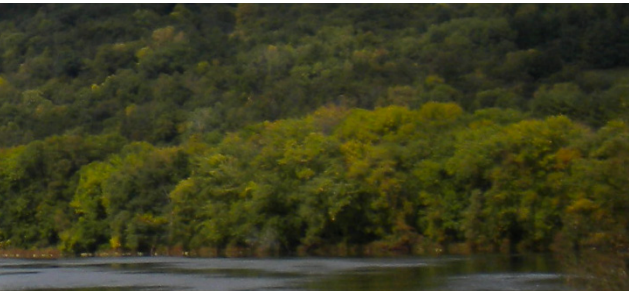
## Follow the Friends Online

Become a fan of the Friends on Facebook to view pictures, learn about upcoming activities and ask questions. Search Friends of the Refuge Headwaters on [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com).

You can also view news about the Friends including meeting minutes, the brochure and newsletters at: <http://forh.squarespace.org>.

The Friends are now Tweeting too. Find us on Twitter to see recent activity of the Friends.





## New Year's Membership

Start off the new year with a membership to Friends of the Refuge Headwaters for you or someone special. Give a gift of membership to the Friends of the Refuge Headwaters by indicating on the membership application that this membership is a gift, who it is from and whom you would like the gift to go to. We will then send a letter and certificate of membership to the recipient. Purchase memberships totaling \$100 or more and receive a free FORH t-shirt.



## Youth Ice-Fishing Day

The annual Youth Ice Fishing Day will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 20, at Lake Park Lodge, Lake Winona.

Volunteers are needed to help with fishing, hands-on activities or food service. Donations are also needed to provide activities for the day and prizes for the children to take home.

To volunteer, call Brian Pember at 507-494-6237.



Registration for the event will begin in early January. To register, call Lisa Pember at 507-452-4232.

The event is free and open to all children ages 6-13. Children are invited to come learn about ice fishing and take part in indoor craft activities.

Bait, fishing poles and a free lunch will be provided for children and their families.

It is recommended that participants bring something to sit on while fishing and warm clothing.

## Become a Member

Cutoff this portion and return to:

Friends of the Refuge Headwaters  
51 East 4th St. Suite 203  
Winona, MN 55987

### Membership Application

(Information provided will not be shared)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number

Home: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership Dues

Blandings Turtle:  
(Student/Senior) \$10

Blue Heron:  
(Individual) \$20

American Egret:  
(Family) \$35

Tundra Swan:  
(Group) \$100

Bald Eagle:  
(Life) \$500

Pelican:  
(Donation)



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