

# The BogHaunter

the newsletter of the Friends of the Cedarburg Bog  
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## THE MIGHTY MUSKRAT!

Spring, 1928: "*The Birch Island Fur Farms, Inc. of Saukville, announced that it would be starting a fur farm for the breeding of muskrats, beavers, raccoons, and other fur-bearing animals at Mud Lake near Saukville.*" "The Crossroads," The Saukville, Wisconsin Area, by John Boatman

Some sources say that the muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*) was so-named because it has musk glands and it looks like a large rat (it's about the same length as a Norway rat but, at 1 1/2 to 4 pounds, significantly outweighs one), but its name is probably much older. It was called "*moskwaw*" by the Abenaki and "*muscascus*" ("*it is red*") in one of the Algonquian languages; its genus name comes from the Huron name for muskrat. It's commonly called *musquash, marsh hare, and musk beaver.*



*A muskrat feeding on land*

Muskrats are described as "*semiaquatic rodents,*" and they're superbly adapted for life in a wetland. Their short front legs, great for digging, are too often applied to the banks of earthen dams, ponds, levees, and streams, which gets them in trouble with humans. Webbed back feet help to propel them when they swim. That scaly "rat tail," about the same length as the body, steers them, helps move them through the water, and braces them when they sit on land. An undercoat protects them from frigid

water, and air that gets trapped in their fur helps them float.



*A muskrat trail through duckweed*

It gets even better - muskrats can close off their ears and nose underwater. Like beavers, their lips are located *in back* of their teeth rather than in front of them, so they can hold vegetation in their mouths and even chew while swimming without flooding their throats! Like waterfowl, they practice "*regional heterothermia*" - that is, they can keep their feet and tail cooler than their core. Muskrats can tolerate higher concentrations of carbon dioxide than many diving mammals - handy for an animal that can spend 15 minutes under water.

Muskrats eat vegetation that they find in and around the water, snipping it off with their large incisors, but they may feed on crops in adjacent farm fields, too. They eat a variety of small animals like fish, crayfish and frogs. Muskrats don't hibernate, and they maintain the same diet in winter. Severed cattails on the water's surface and trails through the floating vegetation are signs of their presence.

Like other small mammals that are heavily preyed on (in the muskrat's case, by mink, foxes, coyotes, birds of prey, otters, snapping turtles, and even large pike), they breed early and often - at least twice each summer in our area and five times in

the south. There are generally six to eight young per litter.

Muskrats are found throughout North America (except Florida) and south a bit into Mexico. They were introduced to Europe a century ago and are not appreciated in low-lying areas where dikes hold back the sea.

Besides excavating tunnels in stream banks, they use mud and aquatic plants to construct lodges called "push-ups" that can rise four feet above the water level and be eight or ten feet long. Lodges are built in wetlands that are at least two to four feet deep, and they provide protection from predators, a nursery, shelter in winter, and a home base for under-the-ice foraging. Muskrats also make smaller feeding platforms, and both the lodges and the feeding platforms provide mini-islands that waterfowl, turtles, and snakes can nest or loaf on.

Muskrats defend territories that they mark with "scent posts" - musk deposited on a small pile of leaves. These benign-looking animals will fight fiercely, and sometimes lethally, over potential mates. They live in family groups, from which the young are evicted if the marsh gets too crowded. A three-year-old muskrat is a very old muskrat.

Like beavers, muskrats are considered "*keystone species*" because of the way they shape their habitat. They live in a variety of wetland types but favor marshes because the water depth doesn't fluctuate a lot. There, they are marsh managers.

Their populations are cyclical, with booms and busts over a six to ten year period. They love cattail and yellow water lily, and when muskrats are abundant, their feeding on favored plants determines the composition of marsh and creates

open water that is appreciated by waterfowl, wading birds, fish, frogs, and other aquatic animals. Too abundant, and they will strip a marsh of plants, turning it into a mud flat (a phenomenon called an "eat-out") and allowing erosion. Too scarce, and the eye of the marsh grows closed again.

The fur farm was never built, but if it had been, the muskrat pelts would have been marketed as "Hudson seal" (skunk fur was sold as Alaskan or Black sable). Muskrat meat is edible, but not popularly indulged in. The Native Americans who lived around the edge of the Bog undoubtedly trapped muskrats for both food and for their warm fur.



A muskrat lodge

### **RELYING ON FRIENDS!**

Your yearly membership dues and additional donations are critical to our organization and mission. We judge our value to our community by your willingness to sustain your membership, and we depend on your financial support of our day-to-day activities.

With your annual membership dues and donations, we can continue to sponsor Bog events and educational classes for hundreds of people, and we can pay administrative expenses—like our website and database costs. Your generosity makes it possible for us to employ a part-time administrative assistant to keep you advised of Bog activities through emails, our website and Facebook. We publish this quarterly newsletter, financially support research efforts to better understand the Bog environs, and we undertake projects to protect the unique ecosystem that is the Bog. All of these organizational expenses are reduced by a very significant volunteer effort—and by the growing generosity of our members, which, over the past few years has enabled

us to grow our impact in these areas—thank you!

We supplement these monies with special fundraising efforts to support specific projects. For example, we have initiated efforts to establish and grow our endowment fund (our endowment rules permit only the interest to be used from the fund). Additionally, you may have seen our recent outreach for financial support of the Mud Lake Boardwalk Project—we're gratified that many of you have already contributed to the campaign. If you've contributed to either effort—a double thank you is in order!

Not to be confused with these special projects, we'll be starting our 2017 Membership drive in November. Please renew your \$25 membership when you get our email or letter and consider adding a donation.

Renewal is a breeze through our website, [Bogfriends.org](http://Bogfriends.org)—annual dues and additional donations can be paid online through Pay Pal, with either a Pay Pal account or a major credit card. If you prefer, put a check in the self-addressed return envelope we'll be sending you in November. Without your support, our collective impact on the Bog and our stewardship of the Bog is diminished.

*Pam Resnick Ross, Membership Chair*

### **MUD LAKE BOARDWALK**

Plans to build a rustic boardwalk from just north of Cedar Sauk Road to Mud Lake are progressing according to schedule. In late spring, the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board approved the Department of Natural Resources Master Plan for the Cedarburg Bog, which included construction of the boardwalk and of a place to store boats during waterfowl hunting season.



Mud Lake Access Point

*The Cedarburg Bog: designated an Important Bird Area and a Wetland Gem*

The boardwalk will allow safer access to Mud Lake from just north of the Cedar Sauk (south) entrance for a variety of users. It also will allow seasonal boat storage during the waterfowl season and will better protect vegetation along the path.

Jim Reinartz, Director of the UWM Field Station at the Bog, said lumber has arrived. After a drying period, sections of the boardwalk will be constructed at the Field Station's shop, with installation occurring in October.

A fundraising campaign by the Friends of the Cedarburg Bog has already raised more than \$2,400. Bruce Ross, President of the Friends, adds that "We are continuing our efforts to raise the needed funds to help make this project a reality. We are gratified by the support we have already received and hope to raise more dollars for this worthwhile project, which is expected to cost approximately \$14,000."

For those wishing to donate to the campaign, checks can be made out to Friends of the Cedarburg Bog, Inc. and mailed to The UWM Field Station at 3095 Blue Goose Road, Saukville, WI 53080 or contact [admin@bogfriends.org](mailto:admin@bogfriends.org) for more information.

*Peg Edquist, Communications Chair*

### **SUGAR MAPLES IN THE BOG**

I believe that our glorious fall colors are Mother Nature's apology for what she's about to do to us – breathtaking Technicolor before the world turns monochromatic. In and around the Bog, ash, aspen, tamarack, and oak provide counterpoints in a sea of brilliant sugar maple.

In shape, sugar maples resemble a child's "lollipop-on-a-stick" tree drawing. They can grow to more than 100 feet tall and, rarely, live for more than 350 years. The familiar leaves have five palmate lobes (arranged like the palm of a hand), and the branches and twigs are opposite each other rather than alternate. The bark is gray and shaggy and, on older trees, may develop an arrowhead pattern. Sugar



maple thrives on a variety of well-drained soil types, and at the Bog, it's found in the upland woods and on the islands, not in the wetlands. In this part of the state, sugar maple, along with beech, is part of the climax or end-stage forest community. Because their seedlings can survive in the shade of the parent trees, a beech-maple forest perpetuates itself until something disturbs it. Like muskrats in wetlands, sugar maples exert an important influence on their community.

Deep shade under the maple canopy discourages growth of sun-loving, early successional plants (even maple seedlings like some extra sunlight for their first few years) and the dense canopy distributes rain unevenly beneath it. Maple fruits are double *samaras* – two joined fruits with an attached “key” or “wing” (though only one of the paired fruits will have a seed). Seeds mature and “fly” in early fall (they’re “helicopter seeds”), and the trees drop their leaves at about the same time, covering and insulating the seeds.



Maple Seed

Maple leaves contain potassium, calcium, and magnesium, and as the leaves decompose, these minerals fertilize and “sweeten” the soil. Sugar maples produce so much seed, especially during “mast years,” that birds and mammals barely make a dent in it (white-tailed deer love to browse on the seedlings). Sugar maples are cool-loving trees whose historic range includes roughly the northeastern quadrant of North America. They moved south in front of the glacier, ranging from Kentucky to Alabama and into northeastern Mexico at the height of the most recent glaciation, and it

took close to 4,000 years for them to return to Wisconsin. It has been suggested that in the next century, global climate change could push their range north and could drastically alter the period when sap can be collected.

The range of sugar maples has expanded since the time of First Contact, when, depending on the soil type, between 15% and 50% of forest trees in the Northeast were sugar maple. The cessation of fires favored maple forests in the northern part of Wisconsin.

Join UWM Field Station Director Jim Reinartz on October 16 for a walk in the beech-maple woods.

### **BOARD PHENOLOGY**

It's the season when your Friends' Board undergoes an annual metamorphosis -- outgoing and incoming Directors and leadership, so we have some farewells to say. Specifically, to Mark Murphy and Sue Shumacher who are leaving the Board after 9 years, each, of service — wow!

During his time on the Board and particularly as chairman of the Stewardship Committee, Mark's organizational skills kept the Friends' Bog protection mission consistent and on track. With all the players -- Friends' volunteers, internal collaborators, and external partners like UW-M, the DNR and the EPA, Mark's sure and clear communications allowed us to grow our stewardship efforts from the early and modest volunteer buckthorn control to today's professional and expansive effort; to create a Trail Steward program; to ensure a consistent effort in parking lot and bordering road cleanups; and to allow us to prioritize and align effort with the highest threats to the Bog. Thank you Mark!

Susan Shumacher had a similar impact in the Education and Events committee. From helping develop objectives to focus Friends' energies; to unheralded but critical support of events; to research, design and creation of Bog natural science and history posters featured at the kiosk and on trails--if you've spent any time at the Bog, you've benefited from Susan's behind-the-scenes work. She also championed the Bog

Friends of the Cedarburg Bog  
Supporting stewardship and appreciation of the Cedarburg Bog through land management, preservation, research and education.

and its Friends in the community. Thank you too Susan!”

My own two-year tenure as president expires the end of September. Since my professional passions run to organizational development, that's where my strongest effort has been. I'm pleased to have seen the Friends' organization develop a succinct guiding mission statement with thoughtful and strategic approaches to accomplishing supporting goals.

We benefited from private and grant benefactors like never before, allowing us to hire part- and full-time employees to accomplish our most critical missions, while growing our endowment over 1300%! We helped push through the long-delayed DNR Master Plan for the area and collaborated with important groups with which we'd never initiated formal contact—but should have! And we're on track to construct a boardwalk into Mud Lake in October.



Tiger Salamander

These accomplishments were only possible through strong member support and that of an active, committed and vibrant Board. As I step down, I'll be handing the proverbial gavel to Tim Vargo, as we also bring new Directors onto the Board. We're still finalizing the candidates, so if you have a suggestion, let us know. We'll be introducing the candidates, announcing the leadership team and with your support, voting them into office at our Potluck and Annual Meeting on 2 October at the Field Station—hope to see you there!

*Bruce Ross, President*



UWM Field Station  
3095 Blue Goose Road  
Saukville, WI 53080

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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#### FRIENDS EVENTS

**Unless otherwise noted**, walks meet at the UWM Field Station on Blue Goose Rd. Space is limited, so please register. To register, visit [bogfriends.org](http://bogfriends.org) (click on Events). Walks are free and open to the public; a \$5 donation is appreciated. Questions? Contact (262) 675-6844 or [fieldstn@uwm.edu](mailto:fieldstn@uwm.edu). *Please, No Pets.*

#### **Fall Potluck and Annual Mini-meeting**

October 2, 3 to 7 PM  
Hike at 3; Supper at 5:30.  
Help us celebrate a decade of being Friends. Please bring a dessert or side dish to share.

#### **Quarterly Board Meeting**

October 13, 6 to 8 PM

#### **A Walk in the Beech Woods**

October 16, 12:30 to 3 PM  
The Cedarburg Beech Woods State Natural Area is spectacular in fall. Come learn what makes the community tick.

#### **Fall Owl Prowl**

November 4, 7 to 8:30 PM  
Join us for a walk in search of

these elusive masters of the night. Bundle up and bring binoculars.

#### **How do Trees Grow?**

November 13, 12:30 to 3:30 PM  
Part indoor talk and part outdoor walk, come and discover how trees grow.



#### CALENDAR

Check the Treasures of Oz website [treasuresofoz.org](http://treasuresofoz.org) for a listing of events held by our partner organizations.

#### **Noel J. Cutright Bird Club**

Free and open to the public held at RNC on the 1st Tuesday at 7 PM Free. Open to the public.

#### **Science for Everyone**

Programs on Natural History held at RNC on the 3rd Tuesday and at LLC on the 4th Tuesday 7 to 8:15 PM. Programs will resume in September. Check the RNC and LLC websites for topics and driving directions. Free, \$5 donation appreciated.

#### **Luminary Walk**

October 8, 6:30 to 8:30 PM LLC  
Hike on luminary-lighted trails, hear scary tales, view the stars through telescopes, and enjoy a campfire and refreshments.  
No registration required! Just come!

#### **Enchanted Forest**

October 22 5:30 to 7:30 PM UEC  
Meet forest characters on a guided, candlelit walk through the park, then come inside for games, crafts and hot apple cider. Costumes encouraged! Register in advance for a hike time.

#### **Protecting Birds through Action and Art**

October 27 to 29  
Get the latest information on bird conservation and migration ecology at a meeting co-sponsored by the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative and Bird City Wisconsin, held in Rothschild, WI. For information, see [wisconsinbirds.org/annualmeeting2016.htm](http://wisconsinbirds.org/annualmeeting2016.htm).

#### **Invading Swine, Swans, and Worms – Oh My!**

November 10, 1 PM Havenwoods  
Environmental Awareness Center, Milwaukee  
Learn about exotic plants and animals that are invading our area at the Southeastern Wisconsin Invasive Species Consortium (SEWISC) 2016 Annual Symposium. Free and open to the public. For more information [sewisc.org](http://sewisc.org)

#### **Kohl's Wild Theater Performance**

November 19, 1 PM MNP  
Enjoy a performance by this outreach group from the Milwaukee Zoological Society and stay for crafts and snacks. Free and open to the public, *please* pre-register at (262) 242-8055 or email Amy at [amyw@mequonnaturepreserve.org](mailto:amyw@mequonnaturepreserve.org).

#### **Riveredge Christmas Bird Count**

December 17, 5 AM to 5 PM RNC  
Count birds in the field or at your feeder, all day or part of it. For info, contact [mholleback@riveredge.us](mailto:mholleback@riveredge.us).

#### **RNC – Riveredge Nature Center**

4458 County Hwy Y, Saukville  
[riveredgenaturecenter.org](http://riveredgenaturecenter.org)  
(262) 375-2715 (800) 287-8098

#### **MNP – Mequon Nature Preserve**

8200 W County Line Rd, Mequon  
[mequonnaturepreserve.org](http://mequonnaturepreserve.org)  
(262) 242-8055

#### **LLC – La C Lawrann Conservancy**

300 Schmidt Rd, West Bend  
[lclawrann.org](http://lclawrann.org)  
(262) 335-5080

#### **UEC – Urban Ecology Center**

Riverside Park, 1500 E Park Place, MKE  
[urbanecologycenter.org](http://urbanecologycenter.org)  
(414) 964-8505