

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge  
W28488 Refuge Road  
Trempealeau, WI 54661  
608/539 2311

Website address:  
<http://midwest.fws.gov/trempealeau>

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov>

Individuals with hearing impairments may reach Trempealeau NWR through the Federal Relay System at 1 800/877 8339.

Available in alternative formats upon request.



# Trempealeau

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*

Black tern chicks,  
*Jack Barthomal*

Printed 2001





*Young black terns sit  
on their floating nest,  
a great blue heron  
gracefully flies over the  
wetland, a gentle breeze  
blows across the sand  
prairie, and a wood  
duck finds shelter in  
the bottomland forest.  
Welcome to  
Trempealeau  
National Wildlife  
Refuge!*





*This "Blue Goose," designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

This 6,200 acre refuge lies within the Mississippi River flyway. The refuge's rolling prairies, rich wetlands and bottomland forests support a variety of wildlife species. Established in 1936 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the refuge is a breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. It is an isolated backwater, cut off from the Mississippi and the Trempealeau Rivers by dikes, providing needed resting and feeding areas for waterfowl and other birds.

### **Rolling Sand Prairies**

The refuge is situated in a unique geological formation known as the driftless area. Thousands of years ago glaciers surrounded but did not pass over the land. Blown into mounds, sand and silt from melting glaciers formed the rolling sand prairies of the refuge.

### **Usually it's Wet; Sometimes it's Mud**

Wetlands are a prominent feature of the refuge. Before the railroads arrived or the lock and dams were built, the lands within the refuge were part of the Mississippi River. As such, these backwaters experienced floods and droughts. This cycle of wet and dry is necessary for plants to flourish in a river habitat. Today, using dikes and control structures, managers can mimic this natural cycle of lowering the water to expose mudflats and allow plants to germinate. When water levels rise, aquatic insects, fish, and waterfowl, thrive on the abundant food supplies.

### **Bottomland Forests**

River birch, swamp white oak and silver maple meet at the water's edge. Large cottonwoods stand tall. A healthy forest needs a variety of species and ages of trees. Refuge staff and volunteers plant seedlings to improve the hardwood stands. Birds, from warblers to wood ducks, benefit from these efforts.



**Visiting the Refuge**

People can visit the refuge year round, during daylight hours. There are plenty of opportunities for hiking, bicycling, snowshoeing, or cross-country skiing. Come back and visit during each season to see the variety of wildlife at the refuge. Accessible trails lead to the observation deck and through a loop of the Prairie View Trail.

**Hunting**

Details about programs for disabled hunters and hunting permits are available at the refuge office.

**Fishing**

Bullheads, northern pike, panfish and yellow perch are caught in the refuge waters. Hand powered craft and boats with electric motors can be launched at the landing near Kiep's Island.

**Watching Wildlife**

Early morning and dusk provide the best times to view wildlife on the four mile self-guided wildlife drive. The road winds through the rolling sand prairies, marshes, and hardwood forest.

A popular way to see wildlife is by hiking, biking or skiing. The Prairie View Trail, observation deck and various dikes provide different opportunities to catch a glimpse of the flying, sliding, scurrying, or burrowing wildlife.

**Volunteering**

Do you want to help collect biological data, paint, mow, greet visitors, or work with school groups? If you're interested in volunteering or want to know more about the Friends group, please contact the refuge.

*Spring*

Spring snowmelt and rains recharge the wetlands with nutrient rich waters. Ducks, geese, and swans visit the refuge on their way north. Bald eagles loaf on the ice, eating fish. Sandhill cranes trumpet their return to the marshes. Songbird migration is in full swing, peaking in late-April through mid-May. Shorebirds take advantage of mudflats. Blandings turtles travel the dikes and roads. Prairies blackened by prescribed burns show signs of revegetation. In May, wild lupine, puecoon and eastern bluebirds shower the prairie with color.





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### *Summer*

During summer most wildlife quiet down as they raise their young without drawing attention to predators. Broods of wood ducks, mallards, and Canada geese paddle among the lily pads, pickerelweed, lotus, and arrowhead. Black terns nesting on floating vegetation mats are one exception to the quiet rule. They can be seen and heard calling as they fly along looking for insects and fish.

In early July, young eagles and osprey fly from their nests while pelicans gather in large groups herding fish and taking turns getting their fill. Muskrats gather food for their young. Coneflowers, bergamot, blazing star, and partridge pea begin blooming in the prairie. Mosquitoes and deer flies pester visitors.

The sound of chainsaws and the swish of sweep nets tells you that the refuge staff is working to improve the habitat. By cutting locust or catching and releasing beetles to eat invasive purple loosestrife and leafy spurge, the prairies and wetlands will grow healthy and strong.



## *Fall*

There is a cool breeze as the birch, oak, and ash turn shades of red and yellow. Refuge staff count migrating ducks as they flock to the refuge. In early fall, soras call and egrets gather in the marshes. Monarch butterflies gather among the prairies and forest preparing for migration. Pelicans are replaced by tundra swans in mid-October. Eagles soar overhead while coots, commonly called mud-hens, appear by the thousands. Little blue stem with its reddish purple stems and white fluffy seeds and golden-colored Indian grass provide beautiful fall colors in the prairie.

## *Winter*

Snow blankets the prairies and ice forms on the wetlands. In late afternoon great-horned and barred owls can be heard calling. Eagles sit on the ice or soar overhead. Some years a northern goshawk, long-eared owl, or great grey owl finds a winter home on the refuge. Traveling from tree to tree in undulating flights are the pileated, red-bellied, hairy, and downy woodpeckers. Playful river otters slide down the snowy banks. Refuge staff analyze data, plow snow, and plan for the next season.

