



HERON

FALL
2025

President's Letter

It's late fall and winter is coming. The park is slowing down, too. Both campgrounds are closed, but the hunting activities are in full swing. Pheasants are being released every afternoon for the enjoyment of the hunters the next day. The deer bow hunters are here but are quiet and in full camouflage. That said, please be safe and wear some blaze orange when out hiking. This is some of the best weather for a brisk walk. No bugs! Dress in layers. Most of the leaves are down, so the views you see are greatly changed and extended from the summer months.

The BNA members are still going full tilt, too. The NEC has been closed for winter, but there is always more to plan and do. The Winter Greenery class is in early December. The First Day hike, January 1, 2026, is on the horizon as well as "Return to Romance" on February 7, 2026. The Story Walk signage is almost complete with newly lit sign posts and stories inside. Don't forget Knee High Naturalist and Live Animal days. Speaking of animals:



We have Schlitz Audubon bringing in an eagle to the visitor center on Nov. 23.

If you are a Bong Naturalist Association member, please be reminded that 2026 membership dues are coming due. \$20 for a single, \$30 for a family, \$50 for Protector level, \$100 for Patron level, and \$500 for Benefactor level. And really, the \$\$ help, but just as important is your participation. We have a great group of active volunteers but would always like more active volunteers. Our list of volunteer-lead activities has grown smaller in the recent past. That can change with your help. Come on out on Workday Wednesdays, or contact Emily Cole, our DNR liaison, with ideas and offers to help.

That said, winter is another season to enjoy Richard Bong State Recreation Area. Now over 4600 acres with the BNA's help! Shake off the winter blues, work off those holiday pounds you might gain, and get some fresh air. See you on the trails!

John Davies

Future Dates for Planning

Nov 22 Gun deer season opens
Nov 23 Schlitz Audubon Eagles and Friends
Nov 26 Thanksgiving break-no Wed. Volunteers
Nov. -- TBD BNA Board Meeting
Dec. 9 Craft time-Crapitizer
Jan. 1 First Day Hike

Phenology

In November, phenology includes the late migration of some birds like tundra swans, the arrival of others like the dark-eyed junco, the white-tailed deer rut, and the onset of winter for many animals such as bears denning and slugs burrowing. Most leaves have fallen, and the vibrant fall colors are fading or gone. The windy weather accelerated the final leaf drop. The transition to winter will include lakes starting to freeze over.



Dark-eyed Junco

Leopold stated: “Phenology connects the traditional calendar to nature’s ever-changing timetable.”

Most people are aware that many of the birds that breed during summer in Wisconsin have left by October.

If you have a feeder or are out in the woods, also be aware that a different group of birds are coming from the north to spend the winter here. They are collectively referred to as the winter finches: dark-eyed juncos, white-throated sparrows, purple finches, redpoles, pine siskins and occasionally, the rare evening grosbeaks or pine grosbeaks. If you maintain bird feeders or your woods provide cover and food, these visitors are likely to be in our woods all winter.

The northern saw-whet owl is another bird that may be passing through, or spending the winter here. “Saw-whet owls are tiny and nocturnal, so they are usually overlooked. Take a look at the owl displays in the Visitor Center and compare the sizes of the owls on display.

We also have birdfeeders behind the building. Consider donating bird seed to use in the feeders.

Fall Crane Count

Marty organized the Federal Fall Crane Count and Paula, Melody, Diane and Karen joined him at the tower. The final count for the cranes was 710--down from last count of 916 birds.

Sandhill cranes migrate annually between northern breeding grounds in the spring and warmer southern wintering grounds in the fall. Fall migration from northern breeding grounds to southern locations like Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Mexico occurs from mid- to late-October through November. This journey spans thousands of miles and is essential for survival. It leads them to crucial stopover points for rest and feeding, such as the Platte River in Nebraska. Regardless of the season, you can track Sandhill Cranes by using migration maps such as [eBird](#).

Halloween Hike

Carol’s words, “The 2025 Halloween Hike was epic!” Friday afternoon Kris W, with her BFF’s, and Carol, Renee, Chris, Emily, put up lights and decorated arches; the weather was perfect to be outside! Saturday, the weather was even better. Kris and her crew were busy with the final touches to Shelter 2; The scavenger hunt was set up, pumpkins set out, prizes and tokens set out, and campfire lit. Shelter 1 had the concessions set up, and the ladies decided that brownies were what to make! People started to arrive right before 6 and kept coming. The entrance station counted 50 cars, at least 200 people.

Winter Greenery Class

Winter greenery areas are being scouted for collecting the branches needed, with collecting on December 3. On December 6, there will be two sessions to make swags or porch pots. Just a reminder as you are beginning to think about holiday decorating, and/or if you are downsizing, remember us. This is a very popular workshop. We already have a waiting list for the sessions.

“In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.” John Muir

Fall Season of Gratitude

For many of us, fall is a great time to practice gratitude, and it also happens to be a great time to observe the wildlife in your garden! You may see new birds in your area as they migrate, or even large birds of prey hunting as they bulk up for winter. Squirrels are often seen hiding nuts throughout the garden or observing the spectacle of bird migration. You may even find a moth chrysalis in the leaves. Fall is a great time to get outside and appreciate the nature around you!

In this season of gratitude, we want to extend our thanks for all you do for wildlife! Every native species planted helps to restore habitat for the nation's wildlife.

Annual Meeting

The BNA Annual Meeting was held Oct. 29th. The 2026 budget was approved, reports given, and then the board and committee chairs continued with the monthly meeting.

Holiday Crafttime - Crapitizer

Crapitizer: December 9, is a purely social event. Bring what you're working on, (does not have to be a craft; some people have addressed Christmas cards) a dish to pass, beverage of choice. Meet in the auditorium. It's always fun!

BNA Dues are Due

Single \$20, Family \$30, Protector \$50 Patron \$100, Benefactor \$500. Dues can be given to Jan. Please note if you have any contact information changes.

Kneehigh Naturalist

The 2026 Program will be posted in the building and on the monthly BNA website/calendar. We traditionally have held the sessions on the second Thursday of the month, but are considering Saturdays. Please send any input about the choice of days for classes to our naturalist, Emily Cole. emily.cole@wisconsin.gov

Light Pollution Harms Migratory Birds

Every autumn, billions of birds in the Western Hemisphere embark on a trip south. For some birds, the voyage spans hundreds of miles; for others, it spans thousands. For example, the tiny blackpoll warbler, a bird that weighs about as much as an AA battery, may fly 1,500 to 2,000 miles over the Atlantic Ocean without stopping! It's a perilous, exhausting journey, but you can help by turning off your lights.

[Light Pollution Harms Migratory Birds—Here's How You Can Help - The National Wildlife Federation Blog](https://blog.nwf.org/2025/10/light-pollution-harms-migratory-birds-heres-how-you-can-help/)

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By turning off lights when they're not needed, directing light downward, and using “warmer” colored lights, we can reduce negative impacts on nearby wildlife and people. Credit USFWS

Bird Migration Data in Real Time

Showcasing the Spectacle of Bird Migration

How many birds passed last night? The tools on Bird Cast can help you explore the answers to this and many other questions about bird migration.

Bird Cast has real-time analysis maps to show intensities of actual nocturnal bird migration as detected by the US weather surveillance radar network between local sunset to sunrise.

[BirdCast - Bird migration forecasts in real-time](https://birdcast.info/migration-tools/live-migration-maps/)

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Holiday Season

In some very past years, we have met for dinner in January instead of considering planning a December Christmas party. If you are interested in a “Dutch treat” evening in January—everyone will cover their own meal and drinks --let Carol or Melody know by email or on Volunteer Wednesday time

From Carol: News from Events, Volunteer Coordinator and Merchandise

It's near the end of 2025, as a group we accomplished so many things! We had many successes: First Hike, Return to Romance, Ryan Meisel made a repeat performance, Recognition Picnic, Halloween Hike, Holiday Greenery, Knee High Naturalist, Master Naturalist, Nature Explore Family Club, educational events, Schlitz Audubon, butterfly exhibit, building an ADA photography blind, sandhill crane count, NASA moon observation, monthly solar observations and star gazing, live animal encounters and their care, NEC maintenance, and book club.

When looking at the calendar for this past year, there would be many more to list.

Merchandise was updated with new items, and clearance prices reduced the inventory. For 2026 we will see more heron and turtle items like magnets, lapel pins, patches, and more educational items. Boonie hats and a new style of tie dye t shirts were added to the turtle, heron, and the Richard Bong T's; volunteers have the choice of a blaze orange or bright yellow VOLUNTEER t shirt to wear when working or attending an event. Many volunteers stepped up with helping clear and clean out campsites and the championship tree grove, making new engraved wood signs, painting and repairing bird houses and signs, removing invasive species, planting native species, keeping the wood

vending machine filled. The storybook walk got a new look with lighted signs, and lots of landscaping done in many areas. Little Libraries are always a point of interest for all the visitors throughout the year. This next year we will have a calendar to fill with events and opportunities to enjoy the park and make it better.

Pheasant Hunting

Sat., Oct. 18, 2025 until Sun., Jan. 4, 2026.

Pheasant hunting opens at 9 a.m. and closes at 2 p.m. ATV trails open at 2 p.m., weather permitting. For additional information see property regulations:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/parks/richardbong/conditions>

Knee High Naturalist

- The program is offered on the 2nd Thursday (except Jan. 15 third Thurs./Dec. no program).
- Knee-high Naturalist is for 3 to 5-year-olds and a grown-up in their life. Siblings are welcome. Our goal is to provide environmental education through stories, crafts, hiking and playing outdoors.
- We always plan to be outside, so please dress accordingly, we will be outside! Program will always occur, but sometimes the topic will change due to weather issues.
- Programs are free, but you need a Wisconsin State Park admission sticker or pay the daily park entrance fee.

2026	Kneehigh Naturalist
Jan. 15	Wonders of Winter
Feb. 12	Owl Babies
Mar. 12	Fox and Friends
April 9	Cranes and Egrets
May 14	A Time to Grow
June 11	Around the Pond-Frogs
July 9	Flutterfly & Hungry Caterpillar
Aug. 13	It's a Fishy Day
Sept. 10	Seed Safari
Oct. 8	Bats and Spiders
Nov. 12	Turkey Tales



<https://www.facebook.com/bongnaturalistassociation/>