

Traveler

Crex Meadows wraps up the fall season.

Kristi Pupak and Lauren Finch

Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area in Grantsburg (western Burnett County) is a busy place year-round but the fall season has us jumping, especially if this fall is anything like last fall when we hosted 39 onsite programs, 13 offsite programs and seven school groups. Those programs consisted of everything from exhibiting at Grantoberfest to a variety of guided tours. Throughout last September, October and November, there were 2,456 participants who enjoyed the numerous educational opportunities offered on the 30,000-acre property of wetlands, brush prairies, forest and more. There was a constant flow of bird watchers, hunters and outdoor enthusiasts through our doors.

Crex Meadows' wildlife education programs offer hands-on experiences to guide students pre-K-12 in discovering new concepts in science, math, literature, art and more through the natural world. From studying the pond to making wildlife homes, students explore the best features of the property. Each year, Crex hosts the Fifth Grade Conservation Day — last fall there were nine rotations for 160 students. Staff also facilitated a 10-week after school program for third through fifth graders at Grantsburg Middle School.

DNR staff also started another ongoing event — the Crex Bird Club. Crex Meadows is home to about 270 different species of birds throughout the year, and it holds some of the top birding spots in the country. It is only fitting that there be an organized group to show members of the public the amazing bird life that exists here. The members of the Crex Bird Club are able to see many interesting birds this fall, including sandhill cranes, American bittern, Virginia and sora rails, bald eagles, snow buntings, Lapland longspurs and many more. Bird Club will end in November, but will resume in the spring.

As they are every fall, the sandhill cranes are the main attraction at Crex Meadows.

Crex also hosts its annual Howl-O-Ween event. Other types of public programs offered at Crex include hunter education, wing shooting workshops, a mushroom talk and walk, wild edibles session, crane tours, and Friends of Crex Appreciation events for members and volunteers.

This variety of programming reaches a wide audience, allowing Crex to effectively examine a range of conservation issues such as threatened and endangered species on the property, hunting ethics and wildlife management recommendations.

While fall is one of the most beautiful times to visit Crex



Crex Meadows Wildlife Area is a 30,000-acre property of wetlands, brush prairies and forests scattered across a gently rolling landscape. It is located in western Burnett County. Find it from Highway 70 in Grantsburg.



Wetland management is employed at Crex Meadows primarily to increase waterfowl production. Management practices include water level manipulation, construction and maintenance of waterfowl nesting islands and platforms, establishment of dense nesting cover and construction of breeding pair ponds.



Most of the visitors come to Crex Meadows to view wildlife such as the sandhill cranes.

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Crex hosts camps for kids as well as other educational programming.

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Guided tours of Crex are available to organized groups (e.g. schools, clubs, organizations) upon request.

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HERE IS WHAT YOU MIGHT SEE AT CREX THIS FALL

AUGUST TO EARLY SEPTEMBER:

- Young birds fledging
- Concentrations of great blue herons and great egrets feeding in shallow bays
- Early migrating shorebirds feeding on mudflats
- Young eagles fledging
- Leonard's skipper butterflies
- Butterfly numbers decline

EARLY TO MID-SEPTEMBER:

- Peak numbers of blue-winged teal and wood ducks
- Duck population increasing
- Sandhill crane and goose populations building
- Peak of hawk and warbler migration
- Many shorebirds present
- First eagle concentrations
- Fall prairie plants still in bloom

EARLY TO MID-OCTOBER:

- First snow geese arrive
- Peak numbers of diving ducks (e.g. scaup, ringnecks, bufflehead, hooded mergansers)
- Sandhill cranes and Canada geese in refuge fields
- Peak number of bald eagles on Refuge Extension and Phantom Lake
- First hard frost turns prairie golden brown

MID- TO LATE OCTOBER:

- Peak numbers of snow geese, Canada geese and sandhill cranes
- Overall duck numbers decreasing but still many diving ducks
- Eagles still present
- Peak fall colors

EARLY TO MID-NOVEMBER:

- Ducks leave after first hard freeze
- Sandhills and Canada geese still at peak numbers (weather dependent)
- Winter migrants arrive



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Make a date on a river this fall

“Flex Your Mussels on the Lower Chip” with a bike ride along the Chippewa River on Sept. 17.

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Meadows State Wildlife Area, winter also has special offerings. Two state natural areas are located within Crex Meadows — Crex Sand Prairie and Reed Lake Meadow. Check out the schedule of upcoming winter activities at crexmeadows.org or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. You can also learn more about the history of the property and download a map by visiting dnr.wi.gov and searching “Crex Meadows.”

Kristi Pupak and Lauren Finch are wildlife conservation educators at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area.

The River Alliance of Wisconsin continues its “Make a Date on a River” series this fall with a trip along the Fox River to learn how PCBs are being cleaned up and how the work is making a huge difference for fish, wildlife and people. The trip takes place 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Aug. 5 in partnership with the Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway.

On Aug. 11 try “Goin’ Pokin’ in the Token” from 1-5 p.m. Paddle Token Creek on Madison’s north side to the edge of the Cherokee Marsh and back. On Sept. 10 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. join more than 100 other volunteers for the Statewide AIS Bridge Snapshot Day to search for invasive species that threaten recreation and the health of our waters in communities around the state.

On Sept. 17 from 9 a.m. to noon, join “Flex Your Mussels on the Lower Chip” with a leisurely bike ride on the scenic Chippewa River State Trail, paralleling the Chippewa River. Later, meet up with an aquatic ecologist and expert in mussels and take your new identification skills into the river for some “pollywogging.”

The fall events wrap up with the “Heritage Boats and A Wild River Float” from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sept. 24. This event takes place on the Namekagon River and starts at the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum in Spooner. After the tour, join a 12-mile trip on the river.

To learn more about these events — including cost and how to register — go to wisconsinrivers.org/events.

– *Natasha Kassulke*



Pollywogging is on tap Sept. 17, too.

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