

Central Minnesota Audubon
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NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 45 September 2022



President’s Letter... by Dan Kneip

Nature’s Way

Recently I described to a friend about observing a Chipping Sparrow feeding a young Cowbird in my back yard. I explained to the friend that Cowbirds are brood parasites and lay eggs in host species nests. The Cowbird then relies on the host species to raise their young. Presumably, this parasitism was developed as the Cowbird didn’t establish a nesting area for a long enough period to raise its own young as it followed the buffalo across the prairie. The friend immediately commented that even in birds we find freeloaders.

We tend to attach human values the natural world principally when we perceive an injustice, but that is not always helpful in understanding how nature works. I do not know if the Chipping Sparrow was struggling to feed the Cowbird, but it certainly looked like it was very busy. I also do not know if the Chipping Sparrow was able to raise its own offspring or if they had succumbed to the larger nestmate’s ability to obtain the greater share of the adult’s attention and nourishment brought to the nestlings.

What I do know is that, thankfully, we do see lots of Cowbirds and Chipping Sparrows so at least at present, the system is functioning. I am always skeptical when we decide to interfere in nature to improve something. According to an Audubon newsletter article by Amy Lewis dated June 6, 2018; in Michigan the USFWS traps Cowbirds to protect endangered Kirtland’s Warblers and in California, a cowbird trapping program is credited to a resurgence of Least Bell’s Vireos in the Hendrick Ranch Nature Area. These are examples, at least to our present knowledge, of some benefit being obtained from human interference although it must be stated that both the Kirtland’s Warbler and the Least Bell’s Vireo are endangered in the first place because of the loss of habitat caused by human interference.

Since we seem to be unable to avoid applying human values to other species, maybe what we should be doing is to look at the positive aspect of our observations. The Chipping Sparrow has accomplished the feat of raising a nestling that is much larger than itself, required more nourishment than its own offspring, does not resemble the Chipping Sparrow and when all is said and done, the Cowbird flies off and joins a different flock. Kudos to the Chipping Sparrow for a job well done!

Speaking of applying human traits to other species, what about attributing them to inanimate objects? Last month, when I was learning to use the Mail Chimp application for the e-mail distribution of the (continued on page 2)

Calendar



September 21, 2022
CMAS Meeting
7 p.m.

St. Cloud Library, Bremer Room

Speaker: Michael Rogers

Topic: Stearns County Household Hazardous Waste Facility



October 1, 2022

Saint John’s Saint Ben’s University Conservation Field Day: a field day for anyone interested in woodlands and nature and to inspire landowners in the care of native plant communities. Participate in tours of the Abbey Arboretum and learn practical techniques to improve the land in different habitats.



\$40 registration/\$35 for members



October 1, 2022

Wildlife Festival - Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge
Oak Savannah Learning Center
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.



October 12, 2022

CMAS Meeting
7 p.m.



St. Cloud Library, Bremer Room
Speaker: To Be Determined



October 13, 15, 20, 22, 26 2022

Sandhill Crane Tour - Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge
6:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.



Reservations required (reservations open on September 12 by emailing sherburne@fws.gov, calling 763-389-3323 or at SignUp)

We can sit back, do nothing and watch our planet be destroyed. Or we can take action, become advocates, and start making lifestyle choices which are kinder to people and the planet. ~Kira Simpson

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President’s Letter... Continued

newsletter, I struggled a whole afternoon and was unable to upload a .pdf copy of the application receiving a pop-up that read “file cannot be uploaded”. After the third attempt, I was pretty certain that it was my computer that had a personal grudge against me and was saying “I will not upload YOUR file”.

I finally asked Doris for help, she promptly watched the tutorial and then proceeded to follow the step-by-step process and easily uploaded the necessary file. Whodathunkit! “Watch the tutorial” is the updated version of “read the instructions”.

NOTICE:

The CMAS newsletter will be sent in hardcopy by mail and e-mail to those who have provided e-mail either directly to us (dakneip@yahoo.com) or have included an e-mail to their profile on the National Audubon website. In October, we will provide an option on the e-mail distribution to choose electronic (paperless) newsletter only. This will help us not only to decrease our distribution costs, but also help the environment!

Wildlife Profile: Shrews, Family Soricidae



Shrews look similar to mice, but have several very noticable differences that will help you identify them if you come across one. The easiest distinction is that they have five toes on all four feet (while mice only have four toes on their front feet). Shrews also have a characteristically long and slender (pointed) snout. Another characteristic (for all North American shrews) is teeth with chestnut colored tips.

Shrews have a very high metabolism and are constantly moving around. Due to the high metabolism, they must feed frequently (approximately every three hours around the clock). It is possible for a shrew to eat twice its weight daily! Shrews do not hibernate, but stay acive all year round. Invertebrates make up the bulk of their diet, but shrews will also eat fungi, plants, and small mammals, including their own kind... alive or dead! Surprisingly, some shrews can use super-sonic sounds like echolocation (similar to bats)!

Shrews are all extremely aggressive. They will defend their territory to the death. It has been said that if shrews were the size of cats, every man, woman and child would have to go around armed to protect themselves. Although cats generally don’t eat them (likely due to musk glands on their flanks), plenty of other predators do, such as snakes, owls, and some mammals like weasels and mink.

Shrews have relatively short life spans (up to 2 years); most don’t live more than one year. Females can have multiple litters per year, with 2 - 10 young per litter. The young are very sensitive to sounds and temperature. If danger is percieved, each unweaned baby will grab the base of the tail if its closest sibling (with one grabbing the mother). The mother can then lead them to safety. As they move, the caravan could be mistaken for a small snake.

Minnesota is home to six species of shrew: Cinerous (masked), Least, Pigmy, Richardson’s (saddle-backed), Short-tailed (mole), and Water shrew.

Cinerous shrews are common, but rarely seen. Least shrews have only been collected in the SE part of MN and are the most social. Pigmy shrews weigh the least of all the shrews (about the weight of a dime). The Water shrew is only found near water and can actually run on top of the water like a water strider! Short-tailed shrews are the largest shrew in North America and found throughout Minnesota. Short-tailed shrews are actually venemous. Though not dangerous to humans, a bite may be painful for days. Short-tailed shrews will sometimes eat mice and other shrews. They will bite their prey in the throat or face, nearly instantly paralyzing it with a poison in its saliva. The Short-tailed shrew can then drag its prey into its nest to eat at its liesure.



Looking for ways to make a difference?

Donations are welcome for our fund to assist with continuing to print the newsletter and quality speakers to the meetings. If you choose to help out, please make out a check to Central MN Audubon Society (CMAS) and send it to our Treasurer, Kathy Doyle. THANK YOU SO MUCH!!



Rehabber Reflections by Linda Peck

Sapsucker Signs and Sustenance

In all the years (32) that I have rehabilitated wild animals, I have only once cared for a yellow-bellied sapsucker (a kind of woodpecker). It was a fledgling so I housed it in a passerine cage where it could fly, land on perches and feed itself. But how to set up a feeding opportunity for this sapsucker? Sapsuckers typically create holes in parallel (horizontal) rows on various tree trunks. Sap collects in the holes which they lap up using their tongues like a paint brush. The sap also attracts insects (ants, and flies) which they eat.

So I placed a log about 4-5 feet long in the cage propped up like a tree trunk. I drilled holes about two inches long in the log diagonally and around the log at various heights. Into each hole I placed a plastic tube to hold the food I was going to provide. Each day, I filled these holes with pure maple syrup, walunt flavored Ensure, and sugar water (hummingbird concentration). Ants and flies came to the holes, and it took no time at all for the sapsucker to land on the side of the log/trunk and gather food. Many times in the hole with sugar water, I placed squished mealworms and squashed berries. After a week, the sapsucker was released in good habitat with other sapsuckers - a woodland with decidous trees rich in aspens and birches near water.

Sapsuckers use drumming versus songs to attract mates. Drumming is accomplished by rapidly tapping the bird’s bill against a hollow tree or other resonant object. Should you visit our yard in Rockville, we have one apple tree with lots of parallel holes around its trunk - a sure sign that sapsuckers are visiting.

Bird Vernacular:

Mobbing - an activity where lots of birds crowd and move around chaotically, making noise, and possibly “attacking” to distract a predator, such as a cat or larger predatory birds. This behavior tends to be exhibited the most strongly during the nesting season and usually makes the predator leave the area.

Crows mob owls and hawks. House Wrens will sound the alarm (quite loudly) and jump right in to lead a mob. If you’re working in the yard or garden and suddenly hear a sharp chattering (as if someone is being scolded), it’s either a wren calling in reinforcements or a squirrel announcing you are there!



Did you know... Cowbirds are members of the blackbird family. Eons of adaptation have led these birds to become parasitic, relying on the female's ability to locate other birds' nests to deposit her eggs one at a time. The female cowbird is not particular when it's time to lay an egg. Any nest or bird species will do. They do not simply stay within “the family”.

Some birds are better able to identify that a strange egg has been added to their nests. Those that do may throw it out or move on to build a new nest, but one bird has developed an interesting answer to the problem. Yellow Warblers will build up the walls of their nest and build a new floor over the cowbird egg even if her own eggs are present. In one instance, a female Yellow Warbler was found to have sealed off five different cowbird eggs in a six story nest!

Local Membership Available: Some CMAS members may wish to only belong to and support our local Audubon Society, without belonging to National Audubon and receiving Audubon magazine. This option is available at only \$20 per year and local members do receive our Green-Backed Gazette. Please let Kathy know if you want this option. Thank you!