

Central Minnesota Audubon  
212 17th Ave. S  
ColdSpring, MN 56320-4700

# Green-Backed Gazette

NON-PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 906  
ST. CLOUD, MN



## NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Meeting Location: Unitarian Universalist Church, 3226 Maine Prairie Road, St. Cloud, MN

### Volume 45

### February 2023



#### President's Letter... by Dan Kneip Where did all the pastures go?

The State of Minnesota had 2,210 operating dairy farms in 2022 as per recent USDA reports. This is a reduction of about one third in the last five years and a far cry from fifty years ago when almost all farmers included a dairy herd in their operations. In the 1970's, the main source of forage for the dairy herd was pasture grass during growing season, and hay and corn silage for the winter months. Present-day dairy operations have changed radically. Pasture plays a much smaller role in feeding cattle, with many large operations not utilizing any pastureland at all.

Audubon's 2019 report on "The State of North American Grasslands and Birds" states that grassland birds have shown the most sustained population declines of any bird group in North America. We have all noted the declines in Bobolinks and Meadowlarks. The Prairie Chicken is now restricted to a few counties in northwestern Minnesota. Grassland Sparrows are fewer, and Bluebirds and Tree Swallows are as likely to be seen on golf courses as in a pasture.

What can we do to change this situation? We may believe we have very little influence on the way that modern agriculture operates, but data does show that we can influence options by choosing the products we buy. What we can do is to support those who are trying to change at least a small part of agriculture practices. We can support the farmers that are paying attention to soil health, planting diverse crops, raising grass fed beef, or producing grass fed milk. We can be willing to pay a little more for our farm fresh eggs. We can support the organizations that are supporting these farmers, like the Land Stewardship Project. (Note the summary of our January speaker, Robin Moore, from LSP later in this newsletter.)

On another note, I want to again thank all Audubon members who have supported our initiatives to increase our communication options by providing an e-mail. We now have thirty-eight members who are receiving their monthly newsletter by e-mail only.

We also thank those who have supported CMAS through sponsorship of the Audubon Adventures program. As of this month, we have ordered nine kits for local area elementary teachers and we will continue to meet with educators in the next few months.

Our support letters for the Minnesota Audubon Lights Out Program have been sent to local city leaders and business organizations. Our next project is to promote healthy lawns and pollinators through a No Mow May Program.

As always, all members are invited to share their suggestions, ideas, and concerns.

#### Central MN Audubon Society Officers

Dan Kneip, President (H) 320-761-8202  
Hank Schreifels, Vice President (H) 320-250-3390  
Open Position: Programs/Publicity  
Linda Peck, Conservation (H) 320-685-3365  
Nicki Blake-Bradley, Newsletter (H) 320-259-5524



Open Position, Membership  
Kathy Doyle, Treasurer  
John Peck, Member At Large  
Brian Jungels, Member At Large  
Audubon MN Office

(H) 320-470-0942  
(H) 320-685-3365  
(H) 320-469-0876  
1-651-739-9332



#### Calendar

February 15, 2023  
CMAS Meeting  
7 p.m.



Location: Unitarian Universalist Church  
Speaker: Angela McDonnell, SCSU

*Genomic Approaches to Plant Conservation: A Case Study in PA and Plans for MN*



March 15, 2023  
CMAS Meeting  
7 p.m.



Location: Unitarian Universalist Church  
Speaker: Matt Julius, SCSU

*Little Rock Lake Research Findings*



April 19, 2023  
CMAS Meeting  
7 p.m.



Location: Unitarian Universalist Church  
Speaker: Brian Dirks, DNR Camp Ripley

*Golden Eagle Project, Red Headed Woodpecker Surveys & Other Studies at Camp Ripley*



\* Possible Spring Outings (any interest?):  
Woodcock Outing (usually near Easter)  
Lake Osakis Grebe/Waterfowl  
St. John's U Birding in early May  
Albany Waste Water Treatment Ponds



Suggestions?

**Spend some time exploring outdoors where you live.  
When you love your home, you'll fight harder to protect it. ~Kira Simpson**

#### Fun fact...

Golden Eye, Mergansers, Buffleheads and Wood Ducks nest in hollow tree openings. Mature trees near water are ideal nesting spots.





## LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT by Robin Moore



Robin began her talk by sharing the mission of the Land Stewardship Project (LSP) is to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland, promote sustainable agriculture, and develop healthy communities. She then described five service programs that LSP runs.

Farm Beginnings focuses on the next generation of farmers; Food Systems deals with all the ways of accessing food; Soil Health speaks for itself, but relates most to birding and habitat; and Land Access/Land Legacy and Farm Transitions/Non-Operating Land Owners finished. Robin noted that most farmers today run corn/soy bean rotations and that elevators have disintegrated. 50% or more farmland is rented today.

Regarding policy work, LSP has collaborated with the MN Department of Agriculture on programs for beginning farmers (tax credit) at the state level. At the federal level, LSP has done a lot of work on the Farm Bill which is reviewed every five years. When the NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) removed caps on EQIP grants a few years ago, the quality of practices dropped as well as the number of farmers getting grants. LSP spoke up and got it changed.

Robin noted that LSP has the “Ear to the Ground” podcast as well as a Land Stewardship Letter. They do bioblitzes for prairies. She stated that LSP is an intersection between places we live, prairies, and agriculture. LSP has approximately 4,500 members. Robin proudly stated that they don’t lobby, they organize... and have for the last 40 years!

LSP has offices in Dawson, Montevideo, Lewiston, and Minneapolis with 30 people on staff. Funding comes from members (15 - 25% of the budget), federal funding, grants, and a lot of private organization funding (for example, Patagonia and Bremer). A typical membership is \$35 annually for a household.

Some problems that Robin noted farmers face today include grain storage, meat storage, and grain grinding. Small grain storage elevators are just gone. She commented that we need more diverse crop rotation. Not many elevators take anything more than corn and soy beans today. Food Systems staff are working with local government, but this hasn’t been cohesive or coordinated. LSP acts as a resource for resources to help with problems like logistics or contacts. For example, the Farmland Clearinghouse is an on-line advertising site for land sales or finding land.

Robin works to help people network to help each other through options. She noted that we cannot make things happen, people have to do the work.

LSP has a Long Range Plan that was developed with a lot of member leaders (farmers) and is reviewed every five years. It: addresses causes and effects of the economic crisis in agriculture; increases land access and secure land tenure for small to mid-sized farms and emerging farmers; builds local food systems and infrastructure; has a focus on climate change solutions; works to deepen our understanding and support economic, racial and gender justice; and works to expand LSP’s base, supporters, and partners.

Robin noted “it’s not the cow, it’s the how” and encouraged members to look for grass-based beef, free range chickens, and pasture raised hogs. She covered soil health and the importance of cover crops and highlighted a few examples of success stories.

Thank You’s go out to Joel and Judy Ampe as well as Merle Sykora for newsletter donations! Thank you to Deborah Jude for sponsoring Audubon Adventures kits and our rehabber (Linda Peck) with a donation! Thanks also to board members who have sponsored Audubon Adventures kits! Every donation counts!! We SO appreciate you!



### 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!!**

Did you know... birds evolved approximately 200 million years ago! Ancient, egg-laying relatives include: Pterodactyls (“wing finger”); Ornithostoma (“bird mouth”); Archeopteryx (“ancient wing”; Ordontotormae (“toothed bird”); Ichthyornis (“fish bird”); Hesperornis (“western bird”); and Ornitholestes (“bird robber”). Pterodactyls and Archeopteryx are famous, but Ornithostomas deserve attention too! They were born with a 10 foot wingspan, 20 feet at adulthood. They had wings with skin (like bats) and a three foot long beak that had to be counterbalanced by a large bony head (like the Pterodactyls). Odontotormae and Ichthyornis were much more bird-like (and about the size of gulls).



## Rehabber Reflections by Linda Peck



### The Learning Process at Owl School

Luck was with me that year. I had already received an adult great horned owl blind in one eye when I got three young great horned owls (eyes open). Young owls imprint sometime after their eyes open and I didn’t want them to imprint on me. So I designed a makeshift nest for the youngsters on a shelf in the room with the adult. Mice for all the owls were placed on a stump in the room and I left as quickly as possible. The adult adopted the youngsters and readily brought them mice. After about a week, the owlets hissed at me when I entered the room - a good sign as I was now viewed as an enemy and imprinting with the adult owl had occurred.

Once the youngsters gained enough flight feathers to flutter, I removed the makeshift nest forcing them to use perches. They quickly demonstrated being adept at flying from the ground up to the perches and from one perch to another. The next crucial step in their schooling was to learn how to kill mice. All four owls were transferred to my largest flight room. Several stumps were placed at various points away from the perches. Again the adult retrieved the dead mice from the stumps and fed the youngsters. This flight room is equipped with a door and three holes in it to enable me to watch what is happening in the room. The fledglings did not retrieve mice from the stumps. They were content to let the adult do the work - where was the incentive? So the time had come to force the issue.

The adult owl was returned to the smaller flight room leaving the youngsters without their food provider. Three LIVE mice were deposited on one of the stumps and I watched through the holes in the door. I was privileged to observe an amazing learning process.

The owls could see the mice moving and appeared curious. One flew over the stump, then back to the perch. Eventually the mice went down the stump onto the floor. The owls were attracted to this additional movement. One landed on a stump and watched a mouse travel around it. Once the mouse furthered away from the stump, the owl followed it on foot occasionally trying to stop it. It seemed obvious that this was food. Now each owl was following a mouse. Two successfully caught a mouse under their claws but then let it go. It wasn’t until blood came out of the mouse that an owl picked it up. Goodness - this moving object was pretty tasty! Eventually all three were successfully catching mice and consuming them. Each day I released six live mice, three to four times each day, into the room. Many of the mice went under the leaves on the floor challenging the owls. Detecting and catching prey on the ground underfoot is crucial for the owls success once released. Also provided were dead squirrels, chipmunks, and striped gophers. The day these owls were released, I opened a rectangle window of slats from the west wall of the flight room. They were free to go whenever they chose. After several days all were gone - none ever returned to the flight room.

The adult owl was also released. Wildlife researchers in California had validated that great horned owls blind in one eye had demonstrated good survival rates partly attributed to their amazing hearing. This foster parent owl deserved a chance at freedom. It had done a good job.

**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!