

Central Minnesota Audubon  
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# Green-Backed Gazette

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## NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

### Volume 47

November/December 2024

#### President's Note, by Dan Kneip



We always like to think of terrible things happening somewhere else, but then it happens at your house! Yes, a bird struck a window at my house and was stunned. It was a Northern Flicker, and it hit a second story window on a sunny afternoon. Thankfully after a few minutes in a small cardboard box it was ready to fly off, but we will never know of the lasting effects of the collision on this bird.

Many studies have been conducted on why birds fly into windows. The two basic reasons are reflections and “see-through” effects. The reflections can be of clouds in the sky or nearby plants that seem to offer a haven to the birds. Glass can be hard to see. I am sure most of us have experienced walking into a glass door or attempting to reach through a glass counter at some time.

The mortality numbers are significant. A 2014 study estimated that up to one billion birds are killed on an annual basis. We have often heard of the large mortality events happening during migration such as the Chicago Convention Center in October, 2023 when nearly one thousand birds were killed in a single night. It is important to note, however, that the highest number of collisions happen in homes and buildings shorter than four stories tall.

There are many solutions available that help reduce collisions with glass windows in your home. One option is to replace the glass panes with “bird-safe” glass that has spaced markings that make the glass visible to birds. Another option is to utilize a tape or film with dots or lines to allow good visibility from within but alert birds from the outside. Simply closing blinds or curtains during daylight hours will stop reflections. Our regional Audubon website has very good information on making homes safe for birds: <https://umr.audubon.org/conservation/birdsafe-homes>

There are many other actions that can be taken to reduce bird mortality in our homes. Placing your bird feeders either within three feet of windows or thirty feet or more has been shown to reduce bird collisions.

CMAS is currently working on several projects. We plan to provide birding packs for children. Any volunteers, suggestions or donations are wel-

Our newsletter is published eight times a year. Seven editions are sent by USPS and by email. The summer edition is only sent by email to those who have provided their address either to CMAS directly or to the National Audubon Society. Providing your e-mail address helps us to have a backup form of communication for the newsletter and allows us to communicate schedules or changes in activities in a prompt and efficient manner. Please help us by providing your email to [centralmnaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:centralmnaudubon@gmail.com)



### Calendar

**November 20, 2024**  
CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.  
Location: Unitarian Universalist Church  
Speaker: Tricia Markle, MN Zoo Wildlife Conservation Specialist  
Topic: Minnesota Turtle Conservation

**December 14, 2024**  
Christmas Bird Count  
(see page 2)

**January 15, 2025**  
CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.  
Location: Unitarian Universalist Church  
Speaker: Voyageurs NP biologist – Beavers in MN

*The November CMAS meeting will be Hybrid with the speaker joining us by Zoom. CMAS members may attend in person at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at 3226 Main Prairie Road, St. Cloud, or they may attend via Zoom. Please send your request for the Zoom link by Nov 20 10am to [centralmnaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:centralmnaudubon@gmail.com)*

(President's Note continued below)

come on this project which is just beginning. The web-page development is expected to be underway this month. We will need help in writing the history of the chapter, please let us know if interested in volunteering your time.

CMAS and area National Audubon members who have not provided an email are requested to do so. Providing an email address helps us to have a backup form of communication and allows us to communicate changes in schedules or activities in a prompt manner. Provide your email to [centralmnaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:centralmnaudubon@gmail.com). Thank you to all who have already done this!

Audubon Calendars will be available at the November meeting to those who requested as well as additional ones for sale.

Sincere thanks to Dick & Annette Schoenberger and Regina Bircherm for your generous donation to Central MN Audubon Society! Your donations will be put to good use and are truly appreciated!

#### Central MN Audubon Society Officers

- |                                 |                  |                                   |                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
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Eastern Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes  
at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge



Cody Carlstrom, the Wildlife Refuge Biologist for Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge (SNWR), began his presentation by discussing the National Wildlife Refuge System. There are 568 across the United States and Puerto Rico.

The SNWR was established in 1965. It encompasses 30,700 acres between two flyways. At 48 square miles, it covers 11% of Sherburne County. About 250 homes were removed at the time it was established. The Refuge was established for migratory birds. The St. Francis River flows through the refuge. From March through the end of August, most of the refuge is closed for birds to reproduce.

The SNWR has four natural lakes, and with 23 wetlands restored, has 6-7,000 acres of wetlands available for reproducing waterfowl. The St. Francis provides a very slow, low-gradient system. The annual water management plan allows the refuge staff to have pools from 3-4 feet deep or 1-2 feet deep. They follow a slow transition from high to low. Cody noted that drought has helped with wild rice.

The water control structures were built in the 1960's or 1980's and are now falling apart, so the SNWR has begun replacing the rusting gates. Hybrid cattail has been an issue. They are using drones to provide large scale (aerial) herbicide applications during drawdowns.

Minnesota has thirteen National Wildlife Refuges (NWR). Five wetland management districts (WMD) exist. The smallest NWR is only .57 acres and exists in Mille Lacs Lake. Cody covers Crane Meadows, Oak Savanna, Sherburne, and Rice Lake NWRs.

Rice Lake has a northern hardwood bog within it. This refuge has the record for the most waterfowl at one place at one time. There were 1.4 million ring-necked ducks in one day!

SNWR lies within the Eastern Broadleaf Province, which is the transition from grasslands to forest. Oak Savanna is one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world. It lies within the Anoka Sand Plain (which provides a unique soil type). There are approximately 130 plants and wildlife species that are adapted to fire and well-drained, sandy soil. Pre-settlement conditions were a mosaic of oak savanna, grassland, and marshes. The goal is to restore to the pre-settlement conditions. Bur oak is fire adapted, while red oak is not.

There are 15 species of cranes world-wide. Two are found in North America. There are six sub-species, the Greater, Lesser, Canadian, Florida, Cuban and Mississippi. The latter three are non-migratory.

The red crown on a crane is skin, not feathers. The rusty color on sandhill cranes comes from the cranes preening with iron-rich mud. They stand between 4.5 - 5 feet tall and have a six foot wingspan. Sandhill cranes weigh 10-14 pounds. They can live up to 20 years and have a very distinct call. They will eat a large variety of foods including reptiles, seeds, macroinvertebrates, cultivated seeds, and invertebrates. Sandhill cranes can be found in open sedge meadows, uplands and wetlands. They will mate for life but will find a new partner if one dies. They dance to maintain their pair bond. When nesting in or near wetlands, the female will lay two eggs, but it is rare for both to survive.

Cody noted that cranes are one of the oldest in the fossil record and have remained relatively unchanged in 10 million years! Sandhill cranes can fly 15-50 miles per hour and up to 12,000 feet high, but typically fly at 5,000 feet. When migrating, the birds will fly between 150-400 miles at one time. There is a mid-continental and an eastern population. Minnesota has the eastern range of the mid-continental birds. Some go to Louisiana and some go to Florida when they migrate.

Regarding habitat management, the SNWR relies heavily on prescribed fire to reduce invasive species, such as hybrid cattail. They use herbicide treatments in August and follow that up with prescribed fire the next spring to open up habitat.

In 1975, a single breeding pair was brought to SNWR. In 2015, there were 40-50 breeding pairs and for Fall staging, the peak was 11,331 birds! In 1992, Fall staging totaled 87 birds. Cody noted that the most birds staged in one day was 29,256 (on 11/8/2022). In 2022, there were 84,286 birds moving through SNWR. This was likely because SNWR still had water during the drought. 2023 had just under 63,000 come through. Cody noted that this year, we're already on track to match or exceed 2023's numbers (approximately 44,000 had already moved in/through by the evening's presentation. "Behind the scenes" crane viewing is a new and popular opportunity. Approximately 100,000 people per year visit SNWR (in total).

The eastern population had 14,385 individuals in 1979 and was up to 106,981 in 2022. Because of the low numbers, there is no hunting season on the eastern population but the mid-continental population (approximately 400,000 individuals) has been deemed able to sustain some hunting pressure. Cody noted they're referred to as the "ribeye of the sky". Regarding other predators, sandhill cranes are prey to coyotes, wolves, and raccoons (eggs).



Did you know... **Lawns to Legumes** is still taking applications for cost-share grants of up to \$400 to create pollinator habitat! November 30th is the deadline for applying for a grant through **Blue Thumb** at <https://bluethumb.org/lawns-to-legumes/about/>. The program is funded by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and administered through the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).

Bird Profile: Northern Shrike (Lanius sp.)

Also known as the Great Northern Shrike or Butcher-bird (Lanius is Latin for butcher), this 10 inch long bird weighs only 2.4 ounces, yet hunts and kills birds larger than itself. Northern shrikes also eat small mammals and birds by biting through their necks to sever the spinal cord. Northern shrikes will also eat grasshoppers, beetles, dragonflies, bumblebees, crickets, lizards, snakes, and carrion. A strange habit of Northern shrikes is their preference for impaling their prey with heads up upon sharp items such as barbed wire, sharp twig, or long thorns. This may be for storage as a food cache.

Northern shrikes are bluish-gray, black and white birds, about the size of a Robin. They have a black stripe through and behind their eye and a stout, toothed beak with a hook on the end (like a raptor).

They're normally solitary birds that sit at the top of trees to watch for prey. Females will lay 2-9 eggs (usually 4-6) sometime in May - June in bulky, loose twig nests built in spruce, willow, or bushes 5-20 ft high. Young will fledge at 20 days and continue to be fed for another ten days.

St. Cloud-St. John's Christmas Bird Count

Join our local Christmas Bird Count team on Saturday, December 14th by meeting at the St. Cloud Unitarian Fellowship (3226 Maine Prairie Rd., St. Cloud) at 7:00 A.M. New participants of all birding skills are surely welcome! Our count circle is 15 miles across, with a center located between Waite Park and St. Joseph. All participants will be supplied with a map and instructions on how to perform the count. Much of the count, but not all, will be done using vehicles. We usually pair people up to efficiently and accurately cover our count circle. Dress appropriately; there may be some walking involved. I do have several sets of good binoculars I can borrow out. Plan to meet at Kay's Kitchen in St. Joseph at 1:00 P.M. to tally results and share stories. After lunch, some counters will head out to cover territories that may not have been covered in the morning.

Contact Brian Jungels at [jungelsb09@gmail.com](mailto:jungelsb09@gmail.com) or by phone at 320-469-0876 with questions. People wishing to count birds at their feeders need to be within the count circle. We also can count species three days prior and after our count date. These tallies are for rarer birds that may not be found on count day.



*Looking for ways to make a difference?*

*Donations are welcome for our fund to assist with continuing to print the newsletter and bring 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 President, Dan Kneip. THANK YOU SO MUCH!!*

CMAS is now registered to receive donations via GiveMN: <https://www.givemn.org/>



To find us, type in - Central Minnesota Audubon Society  
*Thank you for your support!!*

**Bird vernacular: Tomial Tooth** - A toothlike projection on the cutting edge of upper mandible (bill) of a falcon or shrike. The tomial tooth is thought to be crucial in helping quickly kill prey by severing the spinal column.



Door Prizes

Door prizes at the meetings may be books, puzzles, bird feeders, food items, or "other". Participation is voluntary, but winners must be present to win! Congratulations to Ellen H. for winning the Cornell Birds of the Eastern U.S. (jigsaw puzzle) and to Annette S. for winning A Supremely Bad Idea-Three Mad Birders and Their Quest to See It All by Luke Dempsey.

**Local Membership:** Some CMAS members may wish to only belong and support our local Chapter, without belonging to National Audubon and receiving the Audubon magazine. Local members do receive our Green-Backed Gazette. Membership cost is \$20 annual or \$15 annual if you choose to receive the newsletter electronically only (paperless). Please contact a board member if interested in this option.