

Central Minnesota Audubon
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Green-Backed Gazette

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NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 47

January 2025

President's Note, by Dan Kneip



The Bald Eagle is now officially our National Bird. Many of us were unaware that it was not already our National Bird as it has been on the US seal since 1782. Thanks to all those who participated in the process to have this designation confirmed.

The Bald Eagle is one of the success stories of bird conservation. It was abundant at the time of the nation's founding but was unprotected and suffered both from habitat loss and active attempts at extermination, alleging loss of livestock. By 1963, there were less than 500 nesting pairs of Bald Eagles in the lower 48 states. The first conservation step was taken in 1940 with passage of the Bald Eagle Protection Act. The banning of the sale of DDT in 1972, however, is credited as one of the most important steps in recuperating the eagle population. Today there are an estimated 71,400 nesting pairs in the lower 48 states.

The Bald Eagle was the most numerous raptor listed on our St Cloud/Collegeville Christmas Bird Count this year at a count of 15.

Bald Eagles are protected by federal law. It is illegal to kill, sell, or harm them. Today they are under threat from lead poisoning, bird flu, rodenticides and collisions. Next time you see a Bald Eagle, take time to appreciate this majestic bird which we are so fortunate to have in our area.

Recently, I participated in a webinar with a summary of the work of the National Audubon and its 409 local chapters in 2023. Approximately 34,000 events were programmed by Audubon chapters throughout the year. Most of these events were bird outings, but this also included educational presentations and stewardship opportunities.

The top challenges facing all the chapters can be summarized in two questions: How do you increase the number of members who volunteer for chapter activities and how do you engage and recruit younger members?

I am happy to report that CMAS has had some very active volunteers and most of our outings and presentations have been very well attended. We hope to continue growing this participation in the coming year. We are looking forward to developing our birding packs for children and welcome anyone who is interested in helping implement this project or can offer suggestions on how this should be done

CMAS was awarded a \$1000 Collaborative grant from the National Audubon to help set up our new web page and improve our outreach programs. The web page is a work in progress. Check up on our progress at centralmnaudubon.org

We will have hybrid presentations for our January and February meetings. In January the speaker will be in-person, but you can join either in person or via zoom. The February speaker will present via Zoom and you can either meet at the UUF or join via zoom. To receive a link for the Zoom connection, please send an email to centralmnaudubon@gmail.com by noon on the day of the meeting.

An eagle uses the negative energy of a storm to fly even higher. ~ Eric Thomas



Calendar



January 15, 2025

CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.

Location: Unitarian Universalist Church and Zoom

Speaker: Tom Poser - Natural Resources Technician, Stearns

County Parks Department

Subject: Projects within the County Park System



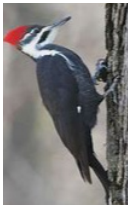
January 25, 2025

8 a.m - 3 p.m

Hardwood Hills Conference

St. John's University - Peter Engle Science Center

CMAS will have a table to showcase upcoming activities and projects. Volunteers are welcome to help at the table.



February 14-17, 2025

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 19, 2025

CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.

Location: Unitarian Universalist Church and Zoom

Speaker: Michael Joyce, Wildlife Ecologist - NRRI - UMD

Subject: Bobcats and Fishers



March 19, 2025

CMAS Meeting 6:30 p.m.

Location: St. Cloud Library, Mississippi Room

Speaker: Todd Burlet - Starry Skies North

Subject: Importance of dark skies to plants and animals

**This is a joint presentation by CMAS, St. Cloud Flower and Garden Club, Central MN Master Naturalists, Wild Ones, and Stearns County Horticultural Club. Each group will have a table. The room will be open by 5:30 p.m.*



Our newsletter has been published eight times a year, seven editions sent by USPS and by email. The summer edition was only sent by email to those who have provided their address either to CMAS directly or to the National Audubon Society. Once the website is up and running, we will be transitioning to only doing electronic newsletters, which we anticipate to be at the end of 2025, but could possibly be sooner. We will announce the final printed version. 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 ahead of the change-over. Please help us by providing your email to centralmnaudubon@gmail.com

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Minnesota Turtle Conservation

Tricia Markle, the MN Zoo Conservation Biologist joined CMAS members remotely by Zoom to discuss the freshwater turtle conservation program. First, she noted that there are nine native species of turtles in Minnesota. She noted familiar species such as painted and snapping turtles, as well as less known spiny and smooth soft-shell turtles and threatened species (Blanding's and Wood turtles).

Tricia noted that Blanding's turtles have a yellow throat and domed shell. They prefer shallow wetlands with mucky bottoms. Wood turtles are Threatened in Minnesota. These turtles are rare but also the most terrestrial, preferring to forage in fields, meadows, and forests. A distinguishing characteristic of wood turtles is concentric rings on their shells. Both Blandings and Wood turtles are being reviewed for Federal listing.

According to Tricia, turtles can be considered janitors of wetlands. She called them ambassadors for conservation and noted they help spread native seeds. Threats to turtles include habitat loss and degradation, both in urban and rural settings, as well as nest predation. She stated that it is estimated that only 5% of eggs make it to hatching. There are simply too many small animals that eat the turtles. Road mortality cannot be overlooked as a threat to turtles. Often, it is the females looking for nest sites or turtles in search of food and water.

Turtles have slow population growth. They can live for decades and don't mature until they're teenagers. With this in mind, they may only have one or two offspring to replace them. Poaching for overseas pet trade has been an issue as well.

Tricia discussed the main projects that she has been working on, including tracking and studying wood turtles, ways of boosting populations, and road mortality mitigation. In 2017, they started radio telemetry tracking with six individuals. Now they have 20-25 tracked each year in four sites in southern MN. The radio telemetry uses GPS and VHF transmitters.

Wood turtles are distributed along the eastern edge and southeast part of Minnesota. They have a distribution area that reaches east to the Atlantic. There are a LOT more threats in southeast MN. Wood turtles can be found around 1,000 feet of mid-sized rivers and streams, in forests and fields.

New GPS units are lighter, (30 grams vs 50) better connected (cell reception vs remote download) and cheaper (\$1,200 vs 1,300/unit). They cannot be more than 5% of the turtles weight. By pinging every four hours and tracking where the turtles are/were located, they can determine where the foraging areas are located.

Researchers have been able to determine multiple aspects of wood turtle behavior. For example, females spend an average of 22.3% of their time in water in the summer, as compared to 49.1% for males. The males tend to move along rivers and females move faster. Juvenile wood turtles use the same habitat as adults but stay closer to water.

Wood turtles over six months of age spend the winter under water in deeper pools. Turtles are ectotherms with low metabolic rates, so they can use cool oxygenated water for oxygen. They "breathe" during this time through thin membranes in their butts and mouths.

Wood turtles are limited in nesting sites. Buckthorn and reed canary grass can be problems, growing on sandy spots. Ms. Markle noted that researchers have created predator exclusion electric fences around potential nesting sites with a "dummy" wire at 4" and a hot wire at 8" at a 100' perimeter. In 2019, major flooding events allowed raccoons to access exclosures. Another effort at assisting reproductive success has been to create structures with small openings that can be placed over nest sites.

Neither fencing or structures can protect from flooding though. If eggs are submerged in water for 24 hours, they will die, so an incubation program was initiated. In the first year, 36 nest sites were found and eggs were collected for "head starting". Temperature loggers and water loggers were installed in nest cavities. So far, 271 eggs have been incubated to date with 161 hatchlings being kept as head starts. The MN Zoo has mimicked environmental features and diet as best as possible. At 2-3 years of age, the turtles are released. There were five head starts in 2017. They average 30 per year now. Head starts are released back where the nest had been.

A road mortality reduction study estimates that over 10,000 turtles are killed each year on roadways. Thus, efforts have been made using chain link fence, warning signs, and pipe barriers. 32 sites were included in the four year study with 12 treatment sites. The areas were walked from May - October and all species killed were recorded. Females looking for nest sites were most active in May and June. Chain link fencing 6' tall (because turtles climb) was trenched 1' down with a wrapped end (to send them back toward the wetland they came from). Researchers found a cluster "hot spot" occurs if the fence just ends. Culvert "critter crossings" work if there is a little bit of water but not if they're more than half full. End fence treatments reduced mortality by 60-80% across three sites. They continued to see high juvenile mortality on roads, so in the third year of the study, they retrofit the fencing with fine mesh. After mesh, they saw a 90% reduction in mortality!

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.



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 our November winners of wild rice and jigsaw puzzles... editor's apology (I misplaced the winning names)!



Did you know... there is such a thing as a turtle sniffing dog? Turtle dogs have been used to locate turtles by scent. According to Ms. Markle from the Minnesota Zoo, it works okay to use turtle dogs, and they have had some success!

Muchas gracias... Merci beaucoup... Vielen Dank... in other words... Thank you SO MUCH!!

Sincere thanks go out to John Riebel, Irene Callahan, Mike and Ellen Heneghan, and Mavis Wahlberg for your generous donations to Central MN Audubon Society! Thanks also go out to Sandy and Jon Bot-Miller and Kathryn Hund for donations through GiveMN! Your donations will be put to good use and are truly appreciated!

2024 Christmas Bird Count Recap

Eighteen stalwart individuals participated in the St. Cloud Christmas Bird count on Dec 14th. We did not get slowed by rain, snow or gloom of night. Actually, we were blessed with a fairly agreeable day for mid-December in Minnesota. We were able to count 4373 birds of 44 species on count day and two additional species during the count week. The highlight of the count was the addition of one species to our composite list for this count (Northern mockingbird). Here was our list:

Canada Goose 979	Trumpeter Swan 98
Wood Duck 1	Mallard 1320
Common Goldeneye 6	Cedar Waxwing 8
Common Merganser 4	Wild Turkey 109
Ring-necked Pheasant 6	Rock Pigeon 231
Bald Eagle 15	Sharp-shinned Hawk 1
Red-tailed Hawk 6	Rough-legged Hawk 1
Eastern Screech Owl 1	Great Horned Owl 3
Belted Kingfisher 1	Red-bellied Woodpecker 23
Downy Woodpecker 35	Hairy Woodpecker 15
Pileated Woodpecker 9	Northern Shrike 2
Blue Jay 71	American Crow 179
Common Raven 1	Black-capped Chickadee 194
Red-breasted Nuthatch 6	White-breasted Nuthatch 86
Brown Creeper 5	Golden-crowned Kinglet 4
European Starling 276	Northern Mockingbird 1
American Robin 118	House Sparrow 61
House Finch 72	

The two additional species during count week were a Long-eared Owl and a Northern Flicker.



Looking for ways to make a difference?

Donations are welcome for our fund to assist with continuing to print the newsletter, create birding backpacks and to 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!!