

Central Minnesota Audubon  
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# Green-Backed



## Gazette

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### NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

#### Volume 48

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

August is the month when corn is all around us, in fields as we drive through the countryside, or the sweetcorn being sold at the stands in parking lots. Corn is the second largest agricultural crop in the world, and the USA is the largest producer with about ninety million acres of cropland dedicated to corn production. This amount of cropland utilized for corn production has steadily increased since 2007. The increase varies from 2.8 - 6.9 million acres, depending on which study and year range is cited. Most of this increase was instigated by the Renewable Fuel Standard legislation of 2005/2007 which mandated certain levels of biofuel to be added to gasoline. At first glance, the use of renewable fuel (ethanol) to reduce reliance on non-renewable fuel (gasoline) is laudable. At this point most conservation minded people have come to recognize that the resulting loss of grasslands and wetlands as well as the extreme increase in use of fertilizers with resultant water pollution caused by runoff, are a far greater problem. Even more disappointing is that some studies show that the difference in reducing carbon emissions by using ethanol instead of gasoline is minimal.

A recent book provides a more detailed description of the loss of grasslands in the Midwest and explores the ethanol issue as just one of many challenges facing grasslands. "Sea of Grass," written by Dave Hage & Josephine Marcotty, is a well researched book and easy to read. I would recommend it to anyone interested in the subject.

Loss of grassland habitat is of course the main reason that we are suffering a loss of grassland birds. It has been well-established that the greatest harm to a species is through loss of its habitat. Every year, it is noted by even the casual birder that Meadowlarks, Bobolinks, Dickcissels and the grassland native sparrows are harder to encounter.

CMAS will start its program of monthly meetings with speakers in September. We will be hearing from a representative from the National Loon Center at our September meeting and from the head of the Red-headed Woodpecker project for our October meeting. These meetings will be in person at the UUF, we will not have a zoom option. I look forward to seeing you in person this Fall.

Last year the CMAS board decided to phase out the printed newsletters at the end of 2025. We will be printing and mailing this September Newsletter as well as October and combined Nov/Dec newsletters. Starting in January 2026, we will only be sending the newsletter by email to those who have provided us with an email address. To add your email to the mailing list, send us a note at [centralmnauudubon@gmail.com](mailto:centralmnauudubon@gmail.com). You may also sign up directly to receive your electronic newsletter on our web page; go to <https://centralmnauudubon.org/index.php/newsletter/>.

If you have any issues when receiving the electronic version of the newsletter, let us know by email, by phone or by messaging us through our webpage or Facebook page.

#### September 2025

##### Calendar



September 17, 2025  
CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.



Location: Unitarian Universalist Church

Speaker: Maddi Nistler, from the National Loon Center at Cross lake Minnesota



Saturday, September 20, 2025  
Sherburne Nat'l Wildlife Refuge Bird Walk  
8am -10am Blue Hill Trail



Saturday, Sept 27, 2025  
Sherburne Nat'l Wildlife Refuge Wildlife Festival  
10am- 2pm  
Oak Savannah Learning Center



Saturday Oct 11, 2025  
CMAS Outing - Fall Migration Day  
Time & place to be confirmed



October 15, 2025  
CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.  
Location: Unitarian Universalist Church  
Speaker: Siah St. Clair  
Subject: Red headed woodpecker restoration project



October 19, 2025  
10 a.m - 2 p.m.  
Buckthorn Busting Event (see page 2)



November 19, 2025  
CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.  
Location: Unitarian Universalist Church  
Speaker: Deanna Leigh MN DNR  
Subject: Plant Watch/Citizen science



President's Letter continued...  
The current Newsletter will be available to read on our webpage. The archived. Newsletters from the past three years can also be accessed on the webpage.

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## Bird Spotlight: Eastern (*Sturnella magna*) and Western (*Sturnella neglecta*) Meadowlarks



Meadowlarks are 8 - 10 inch (20-27 cm) long, "stocky" looking birds with a black "V" bib splitting a bright yellow throat, chest, and belly that is bordered by brown spots on a white or cream background (under the wings and undertail coverts). They have a brown streak that runs through the eye to the beak. The birds are streaked brown on their backs. Meadowlarks have approximately 4,600 feathers covering their bodies! The two species look a lot alike, but the Western Meadowlark has more yellow on his throat, up under his chin to the back of his jaw, while the Eastern's yellow coloring stops at his throat. Lewis and Clark first noticed the differences between the two species during their historic adventure (probably due to the difference in their songs).

Western Meadowlarks have a bubbling, flute-like song (as compared to an Eastern Meadowlark's simple, slurred, melancholy whistle). They feed on insects and seeds on the ground. Grasshoppers, spiders, and other small invertebrates are eaten when available. Seeds are a primary winter food.

Both Meadowlarks nest on the ground and they're primarily grassland species (although they will nest in roadside areas, fallow fields, and croplands as well). Males will often perch on fenceposts to claim their seven acre territory and will take up to three female mates. Because of this, the males don't do much in regard to the nest building or incubating, but they may help feed the young.

The females build a dome over the nest by weaving grasses together. Often times, there will be some sort of entrance to the nest, either a circular area or a four to five inch lane about a foot long. Four to five brown and lavender speckled (at the wide end) white eggs are laid and incubation lasts two weeks. It takes six weeks for the young to fledge. The females may have a second clutch.

Like most grassland species, Meadowlark populations have experienced a severe decline in Minnesota since 1967. The decline has been linked to habitat loss. Disturbances to nesting areas during the crucial months (May - July) have significantly affected recruitment. In fact, mowing roadsides during the May - July nesting period destroys 40 - 70% of the nests in those areas. About 90% of eggs have hatched by August 1st. Delaying mowing would help many other species as well as Meadowlarks, such as several species of ducks, Vesper and Song Sparrows, Dickcissel, American Goldfinch, Common Yellowthroat, Mourning Dove, Wild Turkey, Bobwhite Quail, Hungarian Partridge, Ring-necked Pheasant, and Red-winged Blackbirds.

By law, road authorities cannot mow roadsides before August 1st, with a few exceptions. They can mow the first eight feet and intersection corners for safety. Precision mowing for weed removal is allowed as well. Farmers and landowners can help ground nesting grassland species by not mowing before August 1st as well.

One reason that birds matter - ought to matter - is that they are our last, best connection to a natural world that is otherwise receding. ~Johnathan Franzen



## Bike and Bird at BOHO Update

On Jul 12, 2025 five enthusiastic birding bikers faced poor air quality, deer flies, and mosquitoes on an otherwise beautiful day for our "Bike & Bird at Boho" event in Holdingford. We saw or heard a total of 22 bird species, including a green heron that gave us several different poses in the flooded creek below the covered bridge. The Scarlet Tanager, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, and an Indigo Bunting, all serenaded us as we passed through the wooded areas on the trail. All enjoyed refreshments at Boho Cafe after the ride.



## Chimney Swift Outing Update

A group of 10 birders participated in our annual Chimney Swift Sit /Swift Night Out in Cold Spring on August 7, 2025. We were rewarded with a cooperative group of Chimney Swifts that utilize the chimney on the Wenner hardware store as a communal roost.

Sunset was at 8:37pm. The First bird dropped into the chimney at 8:52 and the last we counted dropped in at 9:08pm. We counted a total of 94 birds using the roost. Local Patrol Officer Jessica Schnell joined us again this year for the final moments, and quite a few people passing by stopped to enquire on what we were doing, and learned a bit about Chimney Swifts.

## Avon Hills SNA Buckthorn Busting Event

There will be a Buckthorn bust on the north unit of the Avon hills Scientific and Natural Area (SNA). Unlike many buckthorn wars, this one is winnable! It is scheduled for **Saturday, October 19 from 10-2 pm**. Note that preregistration is requested, including the watching of a video on stump pretreatment. The link to the event is: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/events/event>



\*Follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/centralminnaudubonchapter/> · Check out our new webpage: <https://centralmnnaudubon.org/> · Email: [centralmnnaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:centralmnnaudubon@gmail.com)



## 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!!*

