

Central Minnesota Audubon
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Gazette

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NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 48

President's Note, by Dan Kneip

 World Migratory Bird Day is celebrated twice each year, with Saturday October 11, 2025, chosen for the Fall date. The conservation theme for this year is: "Shared Spaces- Creating Bird-Friendly Cities and Communities. The Fish and Wildlife Service advises bird-friendly practices include creating healthy habitats and food sources with native plant species, reducing bird collisions with buildings and glass, and reducing light pollution.

Birders are very enthusiastic about migration. It allows us to see many birds that would not normally live in our area. Minnesota is blessed with many opportunities to witness the thrills of migration. Hawk Ridge in Duluth is renowned for its raptor migrations starting in mid-August and continuing through December. Sherburne Wildlife Refuge is home to one of the largest concentrations of Sandhill Cranes starting in late September and continuing through early November. Weaver Bottoms Marshes near Altura (Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge), provides an opportunity to witness an impressive number of Tundra Swans from mid-October through mid-November.

You need not travel far to witness bird migration. We were able to observe the gathering of Chimney Swifts into communal roosts in Cold Spring starting in late July and continuing through early September. Swallows start to gather in late summer and can be seen on transmission wires along the roads throughout central Minnesota. Many local birders registered significant numbers of Night-Hawk migrations in early September. Your back yard can be an ideal location to witness bird migration. For the last several weeks I have been spending time in the morning and evening watching birds in the trees and shrubs from my patio. I have registered warblers, kinglets, native sparrows, and finches in my back yard. Help us celebrate one of nature's greatest events by taking note of our migrating birds.

Audubon local chapters are integral to the work of the Audubon organization. CMAS supports the initiatives of the National Audubon Society. We have signed letters in support of maintaining the Roadless Rule for protection of large parts of our national forests, and a letter in opposition to rescinding the "Management and Protection of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska" final rule.

Our October and November speakers will be presenting in person at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, but we will also provide a Zoom link for those who cannot attend our presentation in person. Contact centralmnaudubon@gmail.com to receive the link for the presentation.

Check out our new website at <https://centralmnaudubon.org/>. Keep up to date on our events schedule or read current and back copies of the newsletter or Board minutes. Do not wait for the last minute, sign up for the digital newsletter by providing us with a valid email address. As of January 2026, we will not be mailing any newsletters via postal service.

October 2025

Calendar

October 15, 2025

CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.

Location: Unitarian Universalist Church

Speaker: Siah St. Clair



Subject: Red headed woodpecker restoration project

October 18, 2025

10 a.m - 2 p.m.

Buckthorn Busting Event (see below)

November 19, 2025

CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.

Location: Unitarian Universalist Church

Speaker: Deanna Leigh MN DNR

Subject: Plant Watch/Citizen science



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 18 from 10-2 pm**. Note that preregistration is requested, including the watching of a video on stump pretreat-ment. The link to the event is: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/events/event.htm>



*Follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/centralminnaudubonchapter/> · Check out our new webpage: <https://centralmnaudubon.org/> · Email: centralmnaudubon@gmail.com

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National Loon Center (NLC)

Maddi Nistler came to speak to our club about the National Loon Center, located in Cross Lake, MN about a half hour north of Brainerd.

The NLC was chartered in 2017, presented a physical presence in 2021 and plans to open a new 19,000 square foot, three story building in May, 2027. Hours in the summer are Tuesday - Saturday, 4 - 10 p.m. but in the winter they work Monday - Friday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. (approximately).

The NLC focuses on research, education, and conservation of loons and freshwater ecosystems. They collaborate with the University of MN and the MN DNR for lab work. As part of their work, they have a 31' long pontoon that they take people out on (for free) to show them loons, nesting sites, do rake throws and check water quality. Public tours are held on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays.

Maddi noted that she mainly does education events such as water fests, the State Fair, meetings, etc. and in June, she participates in the Loons and Lakes Festival at Cross Lake.

Loons are also called the Great Northern Diver and have one of the oldest living lineages (56 million years)! There are just five species, the Pacific, Common, Red-throated, Arctic, and Yellow-billed). All but the Common Loon are very far north during the breeding season.

Minnesota is home to approximately 12,000 Common loons (just 2% of the entire breeding population in North America). There are approximately 250,000 breeding pairs in lower North America. Maddi noted that it's getting too warm for them, and they have been moving north; most loons are in Canada and Alaska.

During migration, loons will follow all four migration routes (Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific). Some of the MN loons go to the east coast and Florida, but they mostly follow the Mississippi River south. At Lake Jocassee, SC (a 7,500+ acre, man-made reservoir in SC), about 150 loons winter there. Maddi noted that a fun fact is that loons have a saltwater gland behind their noses that they can turn on and off!

Loons make four common calls, the hoot, wail, tremolo and yodel. The hoot is used to locate family members over short distances, while the wail is used for the same purpose but over long distance. The tremolo is an alarm call for other loons. The yodel is used by the males (only) as a defense call. Each male is distinct and a deeper call may mean it's a bigger male making the call. Maddi noted that it's a myth that loons don't call during the winter... they just don't have as much reason to call.

Male loons will return in April - May after ice out to claim a territory between 60 - 120 acres. They are very territorial and pick the nest spot. Maddi noted that not having enough natural shorelines affects loon numbers. Nesting happens from May - September in a quiet, protected area preferably on a large, clear, and deep lake. Incubation of two eggs lasts 28 days. Loon chicks will ride a parent's back for a couple of weeks. Young loons are considered fledged once they leave the lake (State). They take three to four years to fully mature and stay south that entire time. A loon's life span can be 20 - 30 years if nothing interferes.

If you see a loon leaning over in what is called

(NLC article continued...)

a hangover position, you are too close! Loons will do a "penguin dance" when they're threatened or as a territorial display. If a yodel accompanies the move, they're feeling threatened. Occasionally, loons will do a foot waggle for thermal regulation. Peering under the water could be for food or looking for other loons.

Loons gather (pre-migration) in groups of 5 - 150 birds. Cross Lake has had up to 80 - 90 birds at one time. Parents leave early. They will molt between September to November. Molting starts around their bills and looks a bit like a 5:00 shadow. They will lose their flight feathers and their red eyes will turn brown during the winter.

Loons are visual, opportunistic hunters. Cisco are a key species (so clear, cold water lakes are vital for loons) but they will catch whatever is available. They can spend up to five minutes under water and dive as deep as 250 feet! They can also fly 70 mph!

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



Join our local Christmas Bird Count team on Saturday, December 20th 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 Bran Jungels at jungelsb09@gmail.com or by phone at 320-469-0876 with questions. Be careful of the spelling on the e-mail address. People wishing to count birds at their feeders need to be within the count circle. We also count bird species three days prior and three days after our count date. These tallies are for rarer birds which may not be found on count day. ~Brian

Learn to pause - or nothing worthwhile can catch up to you.
- Dorothy Ballard



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!!

