

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



The importance of citizen science and public data collection in the field of bird conservation cannot be overstated. Next month we have a chance to participate in the 126th Christmas Bird Count (CBC). The CBC is the longest-running citizen science program in the USA. The data collected over more than a century provides information to researchers interested in early winter populations of birds across North America. The data is also used by wildlife agencies to study the status of bird populations and provides a snapshot of how bird populations have changed over time and over different areas.

CMAS sponsors the St Cloud/Collegeville count circle since 1980. The compiler is Brian Jungels who has more than thirty years of experience in organizing this event. Brian is aided by an avid group of Stearns County birders, but newcomers and birders of all ages and skills are welcome. The date will be Saturday December 20th, 2025 - see more details in this newsletter or on our website events page. <https://centralmnaudubon.org/>

CBC count circles are fixed, and the count date must fall between December 14th and January 5th. If December 20th does not work for you, there are many other Christmas Bird Count's being conducted in our area. You can read about the history and find current information on the CBC or MOU websites.

This will be our last printed newsletter. Starting in January 2026, we will be sending the newsletter in digital format only. To add your email to the mailing list, send a note to [centralmnaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:centralmnaudubon@gmail.com) or sign up directly on the website at: <https://centralmnaudubon.org/newsletter/>. The monthly newsletter is also available on the website and can be accessed on the website or via Facebook.

We utilize the distribution platform Mailchimp to securely send the newsletter. If you have signed up and are not receiving the newsletter, check your Spam folder or notify us.

Thank you to all those who have attended our speaker programs in the last few months. For those of you who prefer not to drive in the dark, we also offer Zoom access to the presentations. Contact us by email for the Zoom link which will be made available a few days prior to the presentation.

One final note: The National Audubon Society is preparing a survey to be administered by all chapters to all Audubon members. The objective of the survey is to measure participation and discover what would spark an increase in involvement. This survey will be coming out by the end of 2025. Details to follow.

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

#### November/December 2025



##### Calendar

###### November 15, 2025

Citizen's Climate Lobby



1:30 p.m. Mississippi Room at Great River Library -  
1300 West St. Germain, St. Cloud

Guest Speaker: J Drake Hamilton - Managing Director of  
Science Policy at Fresh Energy  
Topic: Meeting Minnesota energy goals in face of current  
challenges.



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###### November 19, 2025

CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.



Location: Unitarian Universalist Church

Speaker: Deanna Leigh MN DNR

Subject: Plant Watch/Citizen science



###### November 20, 2025

Give to the MAX Day!



Please consider making a donation to CMAS through GiveMN.org toward a Kestrel box building project in coordination with Stearns County Parks Department. Donations can be made any time during the month of November!



###### December 20, 2025

Christmas Bird Count (see page 2)



###### January 21, 2026

CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.

Location: Unitarian Universalist Church

Speaker: Tanner Barnharst

Subject: Lichens in Minnesota



To experience and understand the world around us, it's essential that we focus our minds. For only by listening deeply, with a quiet mind, can we ever fully experience nature. ~Joseph Cornell

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## Red-headed Woodpecker Restoration

Red-headed Woodpeckers (RHWOs) have not only declined by 95% during the last 60 years, but are now listed as a species of greatest conservation need in MN, according to Siah St. Clair, Chair of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) project. Habitat and Biomass loss (fewer insects to eat and feed to young) are just two reasons for the decline, observed St. Clair.

Siah spoke to CMAS at our October meeting. During his engaging and impassioned presentation, he outlined the mission of his organization, awed us with his impressive photography, described RhWR volunteers' observations of RHWO habits, quirks and behaviors and briefly outlined the activities the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery project is pursuing to accomplish its mission.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) is an independent, non-profit organization whose sole mission is to reverse the decline and promote the recovery of RHWOs. To fund that mission, it has raised over \$450,000, logged 10,000 volunteer hours and partnered with large institutions and private landowners to study and observe RHWO habitat needs, nesting requirements, etc. Specifically, they have funded salaries for researchers; purchased and gave pole cameras and transmitters for studies; and mounted, maintained and reviewed 500,000+ photos and videos from nest cameras. Last but not least, Dr. Jim Howitz, an RhWR volunteer, created and has maintained a color banding system for tracking RHWOs. Over 530 RHWOs have been banded to date.

Adult RHWOs are red, white and black. Juveniles are grey/brown/black and white. Gender can only be conclusively identified by DNA, not by physical differences. That said. It is sometimes possible to identify RHWO gender through behavior. For example, The male RHWO, alone, fiercely guards the nest entrance during the night. The female has not been observed performing this activity.

Like most woodpeckers, RHWOs are cavity nesters. To resist predators, nests are 7- 8.5 inches deep and 4.5 - 5 inches wide. Nest Predators, documented by nest cameras, include raccoons, bull snakes (who says bull snakes can't climb), fishers, flying squirrels and others. (Insert photo.)

Nesting sites are chosen with fairly specific requirements in mind: trees with soft heart wood for excavating nests and roosts, access to abundant invertebrates (insects and spiders,) live trees nearby for new fledgling protection, open canopies and open understory for easy access to invertebrates as well as access to water. Tree species does not seem to be of primary importance. Adult RHWOs frequently return to the same territory, same nest tree and sometimes will even reuse the same cavity for nesting.

RHWOs are facultative migrants. Which means they sometimes stay the winter in MN and they sometimes migrate. Per RhWR volunteer observations, there is a direct correlation between the number of tree acorns produced/collected and the number of RHWOs that overwinter in MN. Interestingly, at Cedar Creek Eco System Science Reserve(CCES) the birds only eat and cache one species of acorn: pin oak. Theoretically, this may be due to the high acid content of pin oak acorns. The acidity may prevent rotting

(Red-headed Woodpeckers continued...)

during the winter. Further study must be done to observe RHWO behaviors in other parts of the state to verify these observations.

In addition to acorns (primarily during fall and winter,) the birds have been observed feeding on insects, spiders, and fruit during the warmer months. Unlike most woodpeckers' feeding behavior, RHWOs seem to prefer fly catching insects rather than drilling holes in trees. Other observed feeding methods are gleaning food from trees and bushes and simply flying to the ground to scoop up a tasty morsel, per St. Clair.

When feeding insects to their young, the RHWOs do not dismember the food for the nestlings. Instead, they match the size of the insect to the size of the young. It has been observed that as the nestlings grow, so does the size of their food. By the time the nestlings are ready to fledge, they are eating grasshoppers, dragonflies and other large invertebrates. **FUN FACT:** You can attract redheads to your bird feeders with peanuts and even sunflower seeds. Peanuts in tray feeders were successfully used to attract RHWOs for banding.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery project is now expanding its habitat partner program statewide. They are actively looking for habitat partners and volunteers, to help them confirm RHWO nesting sites. This organization has funds available to aid habitat partners in identifying/confirming nesting sites. Camp Ripley has already requested volunteers to help study RHWOs on their site. If you are interested in helping out, contact Siah: [stclairs@comcast.com](mailto:stclairs@comcast.com)



## 2025 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 welcome! Participants will be given a map and instructions on how to perform the count. Much of the count, but not all, will be done using vehicles. We will pair people up to cover our count circle. Dress appropriately; there may be some walking involved. Some binoculars available. Meet at Kay's Kitchen in St. Joseph at 1:00 P.M. to tally results. Contact Brian Jungels at [jungelsb09@gmail.com](mailto:jungelsb09@gmail.com) or call 320-469-0876 with questions. 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 for rarer birds not 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, 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!!*

