



Green-Backed Gazette

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 48

March 2026



President's Note, by Dan Kneip

If we have learned one thing from recent events regarding protection of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, it is that the challenges are persistent and never ending. The BWCA or "Boundary Waters" is the most heavily visited wilderness area in the United States. Efforts to preserve the area began in the early 1900's and culminated with creation of the Federal Wilderness Area in 1978 under management of the US Forest Service.

There has been interest in mining in the BWCA and surrounding areas for many years. From an article published by the Wilderness Society in February 2020 we have the following timeline:

1966 - The federal government issued two leases for copper mining in the Superior National Forest surrounding the BWCA.

1978 - With the creation of the Wilderness Area, mining was banned in the BWCA but not in the surrounding area.
2012 - Chilean company Antofagasta purchased old leases with plans to build the Twin Metals mine about five miles outside the boundaries of the BWCA.

2016- The US Forest Service determined that the Twin Metals mine would likely cause irreversible damage to the BWCA. The federal government cancelled the leases and proposed a 20-year mining ban around the Boundary Waters.

2018- The Trump administration resurrected the leases and cancelled the mining ban.

Since that article, the US forest Service again completed an environmental assessment and again concluded that mining in the Rainy River Watershed would be detrimental to the BWCA, proposing cancellation of the leases and a 20-year ban on mining in the affected area. The new ban was enacted in Jan 2023.

Now we are again facing the cancellation of the mining ban by Congress, which if passed, can only be re-enacted by another act of congress. We have many examples of mining waste having detrimental effects downstream.

Listing just a few of the most recent catastrophic ones:

1. Brumadinho Dam collapse in Brazil-2019
2. Kafue River System Contamination in Zambia-2025
3. Laguna Kenko Tailings Failure - Bolivia-2025.

All these cases involved failures of control efforts amplified by unexpected weather events, i.e., Climate Change. (continued at right)



Calendar

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.

Location: Unitarian Universalist Church

Speaker: Dick Doll

Subject: Purple Martins



Wednesday, April 15, 2026

CMAS Meeting 7 p.m.

Location: Unitarian Universalist Church

(watch for additional details)



Friday, April 17, 2026

Woodcock outing at Sand Prairie WMA

(See page 2 for details)



Tuesday, April 21, 2026

CMAS - Joint presentation 6:30 pm

at St Johns Univ- Founders Room, Quad 170

Speaker: John Lattimer- Staff Phenologist at KAXE-Northern Community Radio.



Saturday, April 25, 2026

7-9 am - **Intro to Birding** - First of four Saturday classes offered by the Avon Hills Folk School with Jim Millard (CMAS) as instructor.

PIZZA - PIZZA - PIZZA!



JOIN US... from 5-8 PM on May 11th at Pizza Ranch in Waite Park. 10% of all proceeds from the evening's fundraiser will come to CMAS. We are also encouraged to set up a table [provided by PR] with CMAS info and/or a donation jar and have someone sit at it to answer questions. If you're interested in helping with a table during this time, please let us know! We hope to see you there!!

(President's Note, Continued)

I doubt very much that the mining company will be able to guarantee that we will not suffer extreme weather events in the next twenty-five years, the expected lifetime of the mining operation.

This decision is easy, do not take the risk! Now we just need to convince Congress!

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

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Minnesota Biological Survey Review - Driftless Area

Mike Lee, botanical research scientist with the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS), shared information about his research in the driftless area of southeastern MN. Mike was part of a team that collected data on plant and animal distribution in this area starting in the 1990's. They were also looking for areas with high biodiversity and for rare plant and animal species. The presentation focused on Winona County and the Winona area, but it applies much more broadly than that, largely to the driftless area in southeastern MN. The driftless area is a term used to describe the region that is part of four states that was not under ice during the last glaciation. Mike described the bluffs as a tabletop that's been incised by water from retreating glaciers. He pointed out that the Mississippi River is the backbone of the region, as well as all the drainages that flow into it.

Mike explained that the Ecological Classification System (ECS) is a way the DNR and other agencies organize different parts of the state based on similarities. In Minnesota, the highest level includes the Laurentian Mixed Forest, Eastern Broadleaf Forest, and Prairie Parkland. There is also a small area of Aspen Parkland, which is prairie with a lot of Aspen in it. In southeastern MN, the next division down is the Paleozoic Plateau, which is further divided into the hilly terrain of the bluffs, and parts of the plateau that weren't carved out, which is the Rochester Plateau.

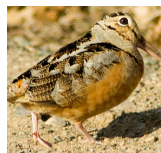
The presentation was focused on the bluffs. Mike noted that topography defines this area, and our image of the bluffs as steep slope country. That's a big reason why it's so important for biodiversity today: it was too steep to plow. The carving of the plateau has left behind many ecosystems, including Mesic Prairie, and Mesic Oak Savanna on the ridge tops; Dry-mesic and Mesic Oak Forest, Dry-mesic Oak Woodland, White Pine Forest, Algific Talus Slope and Maderate Cliff (both are unique safe havens for boreal species), Shady Mesic Moist Cliffs, Dry Cliffs, and Bedrock Bluff Prairie on the slopes, Sugar Maple-Basswood Forest on the Narrow Bottomlands; Dry Sand Prairie on the Terraces and Dune Fields, Black Oak and Jack Pine Barrens on the Terraces, and Springs and Seeps, Seepage Swamps, Seepage Meadows and Fens, Floodplain Forest, Riverbanks, Emergent and Floating-Leaved Marsh, and the Mississippi River on the Bottomlands. Mike pointed out rare species found in these ecosystems.

Lastly, Mike explained threats to this biodiverse area, as well as positive steps being taken to preserve it. Thanks, Mike for displaying a biodiverse region of our ecologically diverse state.

Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) Update



Saturday, February 14th was a lovely day for a bird outing, and 13 people participated in CMAS's group for the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). We were one of 435 community bird events worldwide. We met at the Beaver Island Trail, for a chance to see waterfowl on the river as well as songbirds along the wooded trail. A total of 18 bird species were sighted.



Woodcock Outing- Sand Prairie Wildlife Management Area

Join fellow birders on a trip to Sand Prairie Wildlife Management Area the evening of Friday, April 17th. Plan on meeting at 6:30 PM at the kiosk near Hwy 10. We will walk to the observation deck overlooking the marsh. As we walk to the marsh we can look for early spring migrants like meadowlarks and fox sparrows on the extensive prairie and tree line. At the marsh, we should expect to see an assortment of waterfowl (teal, wigeons, hooded mergansers, wood ducks, ring-necked ducks and other marsh dwellers like northern harriers and sandhill cranes. If you wish to stay until dark we will hopefully see the courtship display of the American woodcock.

The walk to the marsh is about 1.5 miles round trip. Even if it seems warm, consider wearing layered warm clothing. The observation deck can be surprisingly cold in mid-April. Bring binoculars. If you do not own any binoculars, we have several you can borrow.

Sand Prairie WMA is located south of St. Cloud on Hwy. 10 across from the Reformatory. Look for the brown signs on Hwy 10.



Kestrel Box Building Event Update

The Stearns County Parks Department and Central Minnesota Audubon Society (CMAS) held a Kestrel box building workshop on Saturday, February 21st at Warner Park Nature Center. Approximately 20 Attendees learned about Warner Lake County Park, were given fun facts about the American Kestrel, and were able to build a Kestrel nest box and take it home with instructions on how to place it in a location that will maximize nesting success!

Thanks go out to the members that attended to make the workshop a success!



The environment is where we all meet; where all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share.

~Lady Bird Johnson



Looking for ways to make a difference?

Donations are welcome for our fund to assist with continuing to operate the website, 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:



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. Membership is \$15 annually.

Did you know...

Neonics were once called neonicotinoids? Neonics are neurotoxic pesticides, that have been used extensively to coat the seeds of fruits, vegetables, cereal and oil crops. Approximately 44-50% of soy beans and more than 90% of corn seeds are coated with the toxins. In Minnesota, more than **11 million acres** are affected each year by neonics, because farmers cannot save their own seed from year to year to plant. Seed that is purchased for planting comes with the chemicals.

Why should we care?

Only a small percentage of neonics actually get into the plants they're intended to protect. The vast majority (as much as 95%) end up in the environment where they can be transported through the water cycle (or irrigation) and persist for years.

Neonics could be the single most toxic set of chemicals that affect pollinators and other beneficial insects. They aren't specific to negative insects. Pollinators help supply us with over 100 different crops in the United States alone. Honey from around the world has been found to contain neonics.

Wild, ground nesting bees exposed to neonics (studied in 2021 and reported through a publication) were found to collect five times less pollen, initiated 85% less nests and produced 89% fewer young.

Neonics move up the food chain...

Besides bees, other creatures (including our threatened Monarch Butterfly, birds, fish, and even white-tailed deer) have been negatively affected by neonics.

Several neonics, including thiamethoxam, imidacloprid, and clothianidin were found in 100% of drinking water samples after water treatment (during distribution) in a recent study in Iowa. The study didn't acknowledge whether the drinking water was from a surface water source or groundwater. The important fact seems to be that they aren't removed during treatment (most likely because they aren't tested for in the first place).

Blood tests have found neonics in 95% of pregnant women in the United States! How can a neurotoxin affect a developing fetus? Neonics have been linked to cognitive impairments and increased risk regarding birth defects. Regarding investigations with female rats in a laboratory setting, it was found to have "significant reproductive toxicity".

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), imidacloprid can act as an endocrine disruptor. It has been linked to over 1,600 poisoning cases in the United States within the last 10 years. This may be due, in part, to the fact that it is used in pest control products like flea treatments and bed bug sprays. Symptoms were wide spread, ranging from muscle tremors and skin rashes to vomiting, difficulty breathing (and wheezing), memory loss, renal failure, and even lockjaw.

New York became the first state to ban neonicotinoid-treated seeds in 2023. Illinois and Vermont are considering similar bans. Could Minnesota be next? Only time will tell. What will you do if Minnesota doesn't take a stand against neonics?



Neonics Bill Introduced

CMAS signed on to the coalition letter supporting bills to rein in unnecessary uses of neonic pesticides in Minnesota. Information listed below was supplied by Lucas Rhoads of the NRDC Action Fund:

The 2026 bill has now been introduced: H.F. 3704 (Pursell) / S.F. 4052 (Kunesh). The text can be found here: [H.F. 3704 \(Pursell\)](#).

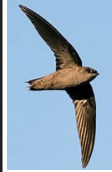
Chair Rick Hansen, who also serves as a co-author of the bill in the House, is planning to hold a hearing in the House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee on the bill at **1pm on March 11th**.

If you are able, please plan to attend the hearing in support of the bill!

Please submit written testimony supporting the bill by 1pm on Tuesday, March 10th. Even a very short letter is impactful!

H.F. 3704 (Pursell) / SF 4052 (Kunesh) would adopt proven, common-sense solutions to tackle needless neonic use by (1) creating a verification of need program for insecticide-treated seeds—like the one successfully implemented in Quebec, Canada and being adopted in New York and Vermont and (2) prohibiting lawn and garden neonic uses that needlessly contaminate places where Minnesotans live, work, and play. They would eliminate more than 90% of neonic contamination statewide.

Citizen Science - Chimney Swift Study



There is an on-going Chimney Swift study sponsored by a group headed by DNR non-game, US Fish & Wildlife and Urban Bird Collective, as well as others. Interested people can participate by signing up for monitoring training.

President Dan K, asked that the Wenner Hardware Store site in Cold Spring be included in the study. Monica Bryand of the Urban Bird Collective reported that she added the Cold Spring location to their list. She noted that when you sign-up for a location as part of the study, you will just grab that one.

The Chimney Swift Project info sessions may have already happened, but training sessions are still available in March. Commitment is 2-4 hours a month (May-Sept). Here is the [link](#) to sign-up for one of the training sessions, and the info session [video](#).



Most people look, but they don't see. ~George Washington Carver