



Green-Backed Gazette

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 48

April 2026



President's Note, by Dan Kneip

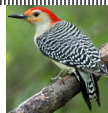
This year CMAS is trying something different. Our annual meeting would normally be held on the third Wednesday of April, however, as we are already meeting on April 21st for a joint presentation, the board has decided to reschedule the annual meeting for May 11th at Pizza Ranch in conjunction with our fundraiser.

The annual meeting will be held at 6pm during the fundraiser and will include a service recognition for John & Linda Peck. Join us for pizza (or fried chicken/salad) and help CMAS raise funds and pay homage to our own.

April and May are the busiest months for CMAS activities. Please check out our calendar on the right and let us celebrate spring with birds.



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!!

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.

Calendar



Friday, April 17th: 6:30 pm Woodcock Outing Sand Prairie WMA (see details at left)

Tuesday, April 21st: 6:30 pm CMAS - Joint presentation at St Johns Univ- Founders Room, Quad 170
Speaker: John Lattimer- Staff Phenologist at KAXE-Northern Community Radio.

Saturday, April 25th: 7-9 am - **Intro to Birding** Avon Hills Folk School with Jim Millard (CMAS) as instructor. Please register if you plan to attend the event. It's free of charge, but limited to 10/session

Saturday April 25th: 9:30 am - 11am Shorebird Outing at Albany WTP- contact Brian Jungels 320-469-0876

Saturday May 2nd: 8:30 - 10am - Shorebird Outing at Albany WTP - contact Brian Jungels.

Monday, May 11th: 5-8 pm CMAS fundraiser at Pizza Ranch

Monday, May 11th: 6pm - CMAS Annual meeting at Pizza Ranch - come celebrate with us!

Saturday, May 16th: 7-9 am - Intro to Birding at Avon Hills Folk School - led by Jim Millard

Saturday, May 16th: 10am - 2pm Kids to Park at Quarry Park - we are again supporting Stearns County Parks for this event and will have a CMAS table and lead bird walks for kids. - contact Dan Kneip 320-761-8202

Saturday, May 23rd : 7-9 am - Intro to Birding - Avon Hills Folk School - led by Jim Millard

Wednesday May 27th : 10am Grebe Outing at Lake Osakis - Register by April 15th with Jean Johnson call or text 612-402-4962 - (\$10 fee) - separate email sent to CMAS members.

Sunday May 31st: 11:30 Picnic at Peck Farm - 12299 Sauk River Road, St Cloud, MN - Bring something to share, plates, silverware, your own drinks and a chair. This picnic is held with UUC Fellowship and all CMAS members are invited. Come enjoy the picnic and take a walk at Rockville County Park or Eagle

Central MN Audubon Society Officers

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Jim Millard, Treasurer
Ellen Heneghan, Secretary
Nicki Blake-Bradley, Newsletter

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Member Spotlight - John and Linda Peck



John and Linda Peck live in a comfortable old farmhouse with two cats and a dog named Wobegon, surrounded by nature. They grew up in New England. Their first introduction to the Audubon Society was through Audubon naturalists who came to primary schools, talked to children, and led them on field trips.

Linda attributes her love of nature and inquisitiveness to her mother. John has a special fondness for turtles and insects while Linda has a special love for snakes, including her Bull snake "Hisser" that she took to local elementary schools.

John and Linda have been involved with Central Minnesota Audubon since its early days. John and/or Linda served as the Conservation Chair for many of the early years and as of the mid-nineties both John and Linda served as President or Vice President or other board officers continuously until 2024. Linda continued to serve as the Conservation Chair through 2024.

CMAS, under the Peck's leadership, engaged in the creation of local natural parks in central Minnesota and was a founding member of the grassroots group, Natural Parks and Trails Coalition. CMAS volunteered with plant and bird surveys for the parks and was awarded an Annual Conservation Award from the Wildlife Society for its work in support of establishing Saint Cloud's Environmentally Sensitive Areas Ordinance.

For many years, the Peck's organized and stored one thousand pounds of sunflower seeds annually as a fundraiser for Audubon. They participated in organizing the first recycling center at Crossroads Shopping Mall. The Buckthorn busting Saturdays with the Pecks at Rockville County Park, was an integral part of the CMAS calendar every fall.

In addition to all the time and effort given to the Audubon Chapter, John and Linda did much more. John was on the Stearns County Park Board for 10 years and did a considerable amount of work for the Minnesota Land Trust. Linda served on the Minnesota Board of Nuclear Waste and on Audubon's Council of Environmental Ordinances.

Linda was also our local wildlife re-hab specialist and entertained us with her stories in the newsletter in recent years.

The pair also found time to teach in Zimbabwe, Africa for several months in the early ninety's and hiked the entire Appalachian trail in 1993.

When asked what lights their passion at this time, John said that controlling invasives is high on the list with the preservation of ecosystems. Linda is worried about the fragmentation of habitat and not dividing preserved areas into small lots for house building.

Both Linda and John advise that the most important thing that CMAS can do is to involve children with nature and to help parents to be comfortable with and find ways to involve children with nature. John and Linda have been instrumental in the development and longevity of CMAS, for which we are so grateful!

Member Tributes

When I think of John and Linda Peck, three expressions come to mind.

"Actions speak louder than words";

"Practice what you preach."

"Walk the walk, talk the talk."

I have never met anyone who more clearly personifies these expressions than John and Linda. When I arrived in Saint Cloud in 1981, John and Linda were the mainstay of the environmental community. They were key members of the Environmental Council and Central Minnesota Audubon Society, and over the years were involved with many other groups including John's work with Land Trust.

They selflessly dedicated their lives to improving the environment. Most impressively, John and Linda "practiced what they preached." Their farm in Rockville is a model of sustainability and how to live lightly on the land.

Their "actions spoke louder than words" as they served as important financial donors to many community groups including Quarry Park and donating land for Rockville County Park. Linda's work rehabilitating wildlife and helping the City of St. Cloud develop their Environmentally Sensitive Area Ordinance, shows that she "walks the walk and talks the talk."

Without a doubt, we all owe John and Linda Peck an incredible debt for their many contributions to the environmental community in the St. Cloud. I am honored to call them friends, and so very grateful for their work in the St. Cloud community.

Thank you John and Linda! You have been my role models and heroes for 45 years!

~Steve Saupe

Linda Peck has been a role model and warmly regarded advisor (many times) over the years. I met her as my very first Biology lab instructor (with immense passion) in my first week as a freshman at SCSU. She is likely the reason that I am where I am in my career today.

I had just come from a rather de-spiriting visit to my advisor who didn't think women should be entering the field of science. When I told Linda what he'd said to me, she grabbed me by the shoulders, stared me in the eyes and said forcefully "DO NOT GIVE UP! You have just as much right to be here as anyone else." Those words would keep me going forward to receiving my degree!

I don't recall the exact time that I met John, but I do know that both Linda and John encouraged me to join Central MN Audubon Society more than 25 years ago. They so warmly welcomed me to the club that I immediately felt at home with a new group of friends who had once been my professors. They've set excellent examples!

I fondly recall their excitement when I announced that I was going to have a baby and the intense interest they have always showed in my son's growth and development. They've always been such a positive influence in my life, although I don't know that I've ever thanked them enough for their support. People say that you cannot choose your family, but I've always thought of Linda and John as "adopted" members of mine. Thank you, Linda and John! I love you!! ~Nicki Blake-Bradley

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

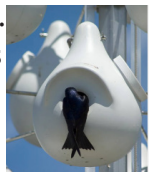


Purple Martins by Dick Doll

Dick Doll is a Stearns County resident with a love for purple martins. He began working toward purple martin conservation in 2002 in Willmar with a 12 hole, Mills Fleet Farm house. He added more (up to 50 T-18s) in 2004. Seven years later, he hosted Martin Fest with the Purple Martin Working Group. In 2012, he worked on installing one of the first geo-locators to help determine where our purple martins go.

Dick noted that purple martins are about seven inches long from beak to tail and they like big rooms for their nesting. If they have large rooms, they will have bigger clutches. At the highest concentration, Dick had 49 nesting pairs... that was until Cooper's Hawks found the site. Afterwards, he would have 30 - 40 pairs. He stated that purple martin houses should be located in open areas away from trees, and close to water if possible. This allows the birds to get away from predators. If a tree could tip over and touch the house, it is located too close.

Regarding house design, wood houses have an insulating effect. White is the best color. Having an eight foot pole (minimum) is necessary. Dick recommended a retractable pole that can winch up and down. He stated that martins do like gourds. A fun fact that Dick shared is that the chicks come about one month after the adult males have darker spots on their chests but otherwise look like females.



A new geo-locator study being conducted by Texas A&M, Columbia University of Manitoba, and the University of Bemidji is in its third year of study. Dick noted that an egg swap was conducted with birds' eggs from Manitoba being introduced to nests in Bemidji and vice versa. Purple martins migrate to the Amazon River basin in South America for the winter. Dick noted that some fledgling purple martins flew from Bemidji to Manitoba before turning around to fly to the Amazon!

When purple martins migrate south, they take a lot of time to get there, zigging and zagging along the way. Dick noted that the rivers of the Amazon basin are becoming very polluted with mercury from mining. Mercury has been found in purple martin feathers. When they decide to move north, it's another story all-together. One bird from Costa Rica flew 3,300 miles in one week!

When banding birds, Dick noted that they measure the wings and tail, collect blood, and put the geo-locator on the bird. They will have to re-collect the geo-locator to get the information. Dick stated that they think the birds choose their nesting spot for the next year during the year before. He credited Michael North (DNR) with starting to band purple martins in 2015 in Brainerd. They band the birds at 10 - 21 days old. In 2011, they banded 2,355 purple martin chicks! They do less now. To date, they have been able to say that purple martins can live to be at least 10 years old...maybe older.

Goals for banding birds are to study fidelity to colonies, determine survival and productivity, as well as dispersal from colonies. Dick noted that unfortunately, someone has been illegally banding purple martins with zip ties. People have to be licensed to band birds.

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(Purple Martins, continued)

Dick bands under the guidance and licensure of Michael North. He uses a spotting scope to read the bands on the birds' legs. Michael (who was attending the meeting virtually) commented that Dick was the first person to suggest colored bands for the purple martin banding operation (and thanked him). Michael noted that the change greatly increased data collection!

When Dick started reading bands south of Willmar, he found a fantastic place next to a turkey barn. Unfortunately, it was near a busy roadway so many birds were being killed by auto collisions. He worked toward getting the County to put up signs that say "Caution - Purple Martin Staging Area". It took a while, but he succeeded and the signs helped reduce purple martin deaths!

If a person reads a leg band and submits the information about location, etc. they can receive a certificate of appreciation for a valid sighting. Dick noted that South Dakota birds have yellow bands. Minnesota bands were red, now orange, and have an Alphabetical letter with four numbers on one line and five on a second line (stacked). Canadian bands are purple and have all nine numbers in a single row.

Dick said that purple martin parents are not disturbed by people looking at their babies. When checking a nest, if green leaves are in the nest cavity, the female will be laying eggs shortly.

Dick cautioned that wet nests lead to mite problems. If an adult purple martin is sitting with drooping wings and not eating for 3-5 days, it is super-stressed. He recommends changing out the nest materials when banding the chicks with white pine needles to reduce the potential for mite infestations. He noted that he sprays and wipes down the nest cavity with rubbing alcohol first to get rid of mites before putting in the new white pine needles.



Dick noted that purple martins do not eat mosquitoes in quantity; they feed mosquitoes (or fire ants) to their very new babies. Purple martins quickly move to feeding their young bigger bugs including but not limited to butterflies, damselflies, and dragonflies. He jokingly noted they feed a lot of mosquitoes to their babies through dragonfly stomachs.

When staging for migration, purple martins roost in large communal groups... large enough that they can be picked up by Doppler radar! Large communal roosts have been seen near Big Swan Lake (near Grey Eagle) and Upper Spunk Lake (near Avon). A large communal roost found in a cornfield was found to have approximately 10,000 birds!

Challenges to purple martin colonies include weather (cold, windy weather that affects insect availability), predators (primarily Cooper's Hawks, raccoons, and owls), and nesting site competition (with starlings and English sparrows). If you put up a purple martin house, please consider managing the starling and English sparrows (they're not protected like all other migratory birds) and put a baffle on the pole to keep raccoons away.

Dick offered to take people out band reading at any time during the entire month of August. He can be reached at (320) 894-4095. His address is 8104 245th Street, St. Cloud, MN.

Come forth into the light of things. Let Nature be your teacher. ~William Wordsworth

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.

Bird Outing - Western Grebes at Lake Osakis

If you would like to see Western Grebes dance (see video [BBC Life: The Grebes](#)) now is your chance. Central Minnesota Audubon Society (CMAS) is partnering with Lets Go Fishing to offer an outing to Lake Osakis to observe Western Grebes.

If you have been hesitant to participate in one of our outings due to mobility issues? Please consider this outing.

We will be on pontoons with very experienced pilots. Boarding is from an accessible dock with smooth transition from dock to pontoon. The pontoons provide shade, are quite stable and can accommodate wheel chairs and walkers. On board staff have over 30 years experience helping people enjoy their time on the lake.

PLEASE NOTE: We cannot guarantee that the Grebes will dance. However, 49 bird species have been documented including Black and Forster's Terns, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and Red-necked Grebes.

REGISTRATION DETAILS:

Date: Wednesday, MAY 27

Start Time: 10am

End Time: Between 11:30 and 12 pm.

Rain Date: Friday, May 29.

Your Cost; \$10.00. Note: We cannot process credit cards.

Send checks to mailing address below.



Refunds: No refunds will be given. CMAS will donate your registration fee to Lets Go Fishing, which is entirely supported by donations.

Cancellations: In case of inclement weather, you will be notified of cancellation the night before the outing and the alternate date of Friday May 29th will be set.

Transportation: On your own or carpool. You will receive the address once you are registered.

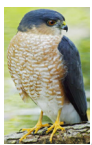
To Register: Please text or call Jean Johnson at 612/402/4962. She will respond by the above phone number. If you do not receive a response within two days, please call again. Optionally send an email to connect@centralmnaudubon.org

Seats are limited. Registration will close when all spots are taken or by **April 15**.

ADDITIONAL INFO:

Western Grebes nest on Lake Osakis during the summer. As part of their mating ritual, they dance. This occurs during a very limited time period in May and occasionally during the beginning of June.

As the "dancing" takes place far away from shore, the best way to see the Grebes is by water. Hence the pontoons.



Looking for ways to make a difference?

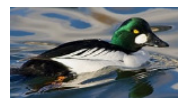
Donations are welcome for our fund to assist with continuing to operate the website, create birding backpacks and to bring quality speakers to the meetings. If you choose to help out, please make out a check to Central MN Audubon Society (CMAS) and send it to our President, Dan Kneip. THANK YOU SO MUCH!!

CMAS is now registered to receive donations via GiveMN:



Birding Outings Albany Sewage Ponds

Sat. April 25th at 9:30 AM and Sat. May 2nd at 8:30 AM



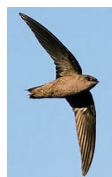
Believe it or not, wastewater treatment ponds are excellent places to view a variety of migratory birds!

Join fellow birdwatchers as we search for shorebirds and other featured migrants at the Albany Wastewater Treatment Ponds (Pools). Besides shorebirds, we should expect to find a plethora of waterfowl, gulls, and waterbirds. We may also visit Getchell Lake which is only a few minutes drive away. A few pairs of binoculars will be available to borrow if you have a need. A spotting scope will also be available for use.

The Albany sewage ponds are located south of I-94 near Albany. If traveling on I-94, exit the freeway at Albany. Go south from the stop sign (left if coming from the east [Avon] or right if coming from the west [Freeport]). The town of Albany, at this point, is to the north. Take a left onto Hwy 41 at the next stop sign. Take a right onto the first dirt road off of Hwy 41. This road runs right along the sewage ponds. We will scan the sewage ponds from the road.

*Accessibility concerns-There are no bathrooms at this site for use. The road along the pools is a hard gravel road. The pools can mostly be observed from a car or a chair.

Migratory birds connect people, ecosystems, and nations. They are symbols of peace and of an interconnected planet. ~Antonio Guterres



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. Although the study is concentrated in the Metro area and Duluth, we have been able to include the Wenner Hardware Store site in Cold Spring in the study, contact Dan Kneip if interested in participating in the Cold Spring monitoring. We will hold a Swift sit in Cold Spring on the evening of **August 13, 2026** for those who prefer to join us for a one time event.

The study group is also interested in identifying additional communal roost sites in Minnesota, If you know of any and can confirm that the location is in use, please advise. Communal roosts can be identified by watching a location from 30 minutes prior to sunset to 30 minutes after sunset. Communal roosts are utilized from May through August with heaviest traffic during migration in May and August. Training and registration is required for participation.

Jim Millard will be participating and leading interested CMAS members in monthly Swift sits at Lastaedian Manor in Brainerd, more information and dates will be provided in May along with a full schedule of CMAS summer outings.