



# Green-Backed Gazette

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 48

Summer 2026



**President’s Note, by Dan Kneip**

The recent tour of the St. Wendel Tamarac Bog SNA provides a great example of the natural treasures that we have all around us. I, for one, was unaware that we could find pitcher plants so near to home and have never seen them in full bloom before.

Minnesotans are blessed with sixty-four state parks, nine state recreation areas, twenty-three state trails and one hundred seventy Scientific and Natural Areas. If you add in all the county and municipal parks, the National Wildlife Refuges, and the State forests, there is no excuse for not spending time and enjoying nature. Our summer months are a time when we really should be taking in as many nature vibes as possible. Each one of these sites has something special; everyone should take the time to explore and find what this special something is!

CMAS has sponsored and participated in a heavy schedule of events in the last few months. I want to thank all the volunteers who made this schedule possible. The CMAS outings committee worked hard to offer both a quantity and variety of outings that attract people of differing physical capabilities as well as at different times or days of the week to accommodate a greater number of members. The Birding 101 at Avon Hills Folk School involved hiking beautiful but unpaved walking paths through the woods. The birds at the Albany water treatment ponds could be seen from the car or by taking a few steps to the side of the road. The Kids to Parks event was oriented towards families. The Grebe outing on Lake Osakis was a leisurely boat ride on a beautiful Thursday morning.

This summer, we are offering opportunities to participate in community science programs. Join us for Chimney Swift monitoring or Bluebird trail monitoring. We will have a Swift Night Out in Cold Spring on the evening of August 13th. See additional details in this newsletter.

Our monthly Fall programs will begin in September. Hank has lined up a great set of speakers for us.

CMAS will have a booth at the Great Outdoor Fair on Saturday, September 19th, sponsored by the City of Buffalo. The fair is a free public event and is held in Sturges Park on Buffalo Lake. The event has a focus on the environment and outdoor activities and provides interactive and educational opportunities to the public. Come join us or volunteer for a few hours at our booth.

In October, we will be providing a service opportunity for buckthorn or other invasive species control.

*Calendar*

**Chimney Swift monitoring** - (more details on page 2)community science project: meet at the Cold Spring Subway-parking lot at 30 minutes prior to sunset on the first and third Tuesdays of the month. Contact Dan Kneip (text to 320-761-8202) for more information. Please advise of any other active roosts in the CMAS area. For example, the St. Cloud City Hall is an active roost!

**Bluebird nest box monitoring** - Kennedy Elementary School - contact Jim Millard for information

**Swift Night Out** - August 13th, 8 p.m. - meet in the Subway parking lot (24 Red River Ave. N, Cold Spring). Bring folding chairs and bug spray. We will watch the Chimney Swifts enter their nightly roost and exchange information on our monitoring efforts.

**September 16, 2026** - 7 p.m. UUF (3226 Maine Prairie Road, St. Cloud, MN) CMAS meeting (in person presentation) Speaker: Jessica Heim Subject: Cultural Astronomy Jessica is a local woman who has participated in international forums on dark skies and cultural astronomy.

**September 19, 2026** - Great Outdoor Fair - Sturges Park (505 2nd Ave S, Buffalo, MN) Come visit the CMAS booth and enjoy the activities (more details to follow)

**October 21, 2026** - 7 p.m. UUF (3226 Maine Prairie Road, St. Cloud, MN) CMAS meeting (zoom presentation) Speaker: Russel Goves - UW Madison Subject: Groundwater contamination(s) associated with the uses of neonicotinoids.

**November 18, 2026** - 7 p.m. UUF (3226 Maine Prairie Road, St. Cloud, MN) CMAS meeting (in person presentation, but zoom will be available also) Speaker: Sarah Hewitt, Senior Conservation Manager for Audubon Upper Mississippi Regional Office. Subject: Audubon Conservation Ranching Program



There must be the generating force of love behind every effort destined to be successful. ~ Henry David Thoreau

President’s note continued...  
Details to follow later. This is part of our tribute to John and Linda Peck.

Central MN Audubon Society Officers

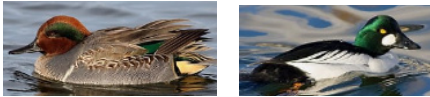
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|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Dan Kneip, President            | (H) 320-761-8202 | Hank Schreifels, Vice President   | (H)320-250-3390  |
| Jim Millard, Treasurer          | (H) 320-774-7051 | Jonathan Fribley, Member At Large | (H) 320-309-9446 |
| Ellen Heneghan, Secretary       | (H) 320-266 1412 | Member At Large , Jean Johnson    | (H) 612-402-4952 |
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St. Wendel Tamarack Bog SNA - Tour led by  
Mike Lee on Saturday, June 20th

Phsically challenging but worth the effort! We learned how to bog-walk. We got wet and dirty and loved every minute of it! The Showy Lady Slippers and the Pitcher Plants were beautiful as were the rare sedges, mosses, tamaracks and other plants. We learned about and experienced the unique habitat of this “spring fen” normally found in peatlands much further north. This was not your everyday outing but it was a memorable experience. This event was organized in conjunction with St. Cloud Wild Ones.

Birding Outings Albany Sewage Ponds



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

CMAS birdwatchers searched for shorebirds and other featured migrants at the Albany Wastewater Treatment Ponds (Pools) on Sat. April 25th and Sat. May 2nd. Ten people attended on the 25th and about half that the next week.

About 25 species of shore birds and waterfowl were identified including the Greater White-fronted Goose and an Eared Grebe. The highlight of the second outing may have been the Eastern Meadowlark that entertained us from the pasture fence on the opposite side of the road.

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.

\*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.



Pizza Ranch Fundraiser and Tribute to John and  
Linda Peck - Monday, May 11th

It was wonderful to see so many people show up on May 11th at our Pizza Ranch fundraiser to help us honor two icons of Central Minnesota Audubon Society (CMAS), and central Minnesota conservation in general: John and Linda Peck. Thanks to all who expressed their heartfelt appreciation to Linda and John and helped us to raise money to continue our education and conservation efforts. Also thank you to Pizza Ranch for creating this fundraising opportunity. In addition to a certificate, CMAS committed to a buckthorn-busting event at Rockville County Park in honor of the Pecks, details to follow.

Kids to Parks - Saturday, May 16th at Quarry  
Park in Waite Park

We had a beautiful day at Stearns County’s Kids to Parks Day. CMAS had a table with information about our organization, a bird coloring table, a Nature BINGO game for kids, and led bird walks for kids and their adults after the two raptor presentations. Jackie Fallon from the Midwest Peregrine Falcon Society brought Echo, the Peregrine Falcon and Juliet, the American Kestrel. She shared fascinating information about raptors. In addition, there were a variety of stations set up throughout the park for exploration and activities.

Annual Picnic at Peck Farm - May 31st - Rock-  
ville



We enjoyed beautiful weather and wonderful conversations as well as food at this year’s annual picnic! This was a joint picnic for CMAS and the St. Cloud Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Children tried out the rope swing in the hayloft and throwing tennis balls down the granary chute. John took a group for a walk to the eagle’s nest, where we saw a juvenile eagle disguising himself as part of the tree trunk. Thanks to Linda and John Peck for hosting this annual gathering for over 30 years!

Here is calm so deep, grasses stop waving... wonderful how completely everything in wild nature fits into us, as if truly part and parent of us. The sun shines not on us, but in us. The rivers flow not past, but through us, thrilling, tingling, vibrating every fiber and cell of the substance of our bodies, making them glide and sing.  
~John Muir



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 Urbon Bird Collective, as well as others. Interested people can participate by signing up for monitoring . Although the study is concentrtated 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 throught August with heaviest traffic during migraton in May and August. . Training and registration is required for participation.

Jim Millard will be participating and leading intersted CMAS members in monthly Swift sits at Lastaedian Manor in Brainerd. More informaiton and dates will be provided (contact Jim by texting 320-774-7051).

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

“Intro to Birding” course at the Avon Hills Folk School (AHFS) led by Jim Millard from CMAS with assistants: Herb Dingmann, Jean Johnson, and Kyle Woitalla

25 April, 16 / 23 / 30 May, 2026



Spring migration brings the largest variety of breeding plumage birds. As we move into late spring/early summer, migrants have moved on and resident breeding populations have paired off for the nesting period. Identification becomes more difficult as foliage often obscures birds visually and behavior changes with the rearing of young.

Birders were guided over a 2-hour walk through a portion of the 65 acres at the Folk School, primarily along trail loops A and B, extending up to the northwest corner of the Folk School. Many different environments are encountered throughout, starting with the Workshop area and clearing extending through the deciduous woods passing the Sugar Shack, crossing Spunk Creek, and up to the NW corner where the Barred Owl likes to hang out. We did not have the fortune to see the owl this year, but he did call to us on several occasions [“who cooks for you, who cooks for you - all”].

Continuing to the northwest there is a ridge with a long cleared area in the woods ideal for various flycatchers including the Least, Great-crested, and Olive-sided. Back down to the creek and across the bridge to the south, we come to the prairie at the southwest corner of the property after the marsh - where we got a surprise view of a Red-eyed Vireo. Students were guided through many of these natural areas at Avon Hills Folk School, and got an intro to bird identification, habitat and activity. Bird identification was via visual and audible means.

Highlights:

- both Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoo [different weekends]
- Blue-winged Warbler on our last weekend
- 76 total different species for the four spring 2026 bird walks.

This was the third year we have held this class and intend to continue into the future. I always enjoy leading the class and have found the students’ enthusiasm and questions inspire my continued learning of our avian friends. ~JM

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

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

Drought...in the midst of rain?

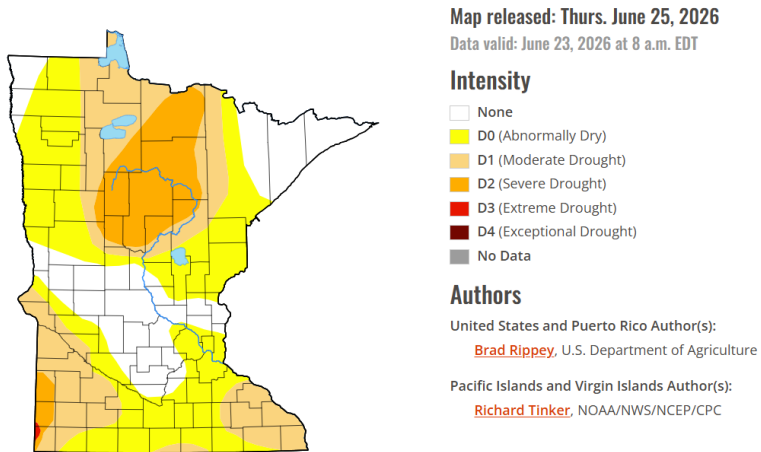
Did you know... that there is a drought monitor map published every week in the United States? Despite all the rain we’ve been seeing in Central Minnesota, there are portions of the state that are still abnormally dry.

The MN DNR monitors the US Drought Monitor map and keeps tabs on the various watersheds that are experiencing differing levels of drought that range from abnormally dry, to moderate, severe, and extreme drought. Depending upon the severity of the drought, surface water suspensions (regarding pumping water from surface waters) may be implemented in watersheds that are reaching critically low flows.

Two terms that describe drought are storage drought and flash drought. Storage drought conditions occur when there is a critical depletion of groundwater and lake levels, as well as soil moisture. The upper reaches of the Mississippi River Headwaters basin in north central Minnesota has been experiencing storage drought conditions over the latest weeks in June. This means that the watershed basin has moved to the “Drought Warning Response Phase” of our drought monitoring plan. Flash drought conditions occur quickly when anomalously high temperatures happen during periods of extended reduced precipitation. Currently, flash drought conditions are being monitored in the southwestern part of the state. The Missouri-Big Sioux basin has also been moved to the Drought Warning Response Phase.

The other ten major watersheds with drought plans are in the Drought Watch Phase. If a watershed reaches the Drought Watch Response Phase, the MN DNR requires public water suppliers to inform customers to reduce water use and employ water efficiency and conservation measures.

During a Drought Warning Response Phase, public water suppliers implement water use reduction measures in a variety of ways with the goal of reducing water use to 50% above January water use levels. Methods of reducing water use can include restrictions of lawn watering or detecting and fixing water supply line leaks.



(continued on the next page)

**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

Central Minnesota Audubon Society (CMAS) partnered with Alexandria's non-profit Let's Go Fishing and Mother Nature to provide a glorious birding outing to Lake Osakis to observe Western Grebes.

Let's Go Fishing provided pon-toons and pilots. Sixteen CMAS members and friends provided bird and photography expertise and Mother Nature did the rest. She brought us a calm lake, a warm and sunny day and Western Grebes nesting and dancing.

Not only did we see the Grebes dance, we also saw them nesting and even saw one of them lay an egg. We counted 7+ nesters among the reeds. "Where's Waldo" comes to mind. How many slate/black and white necks could we spy among the reeds?

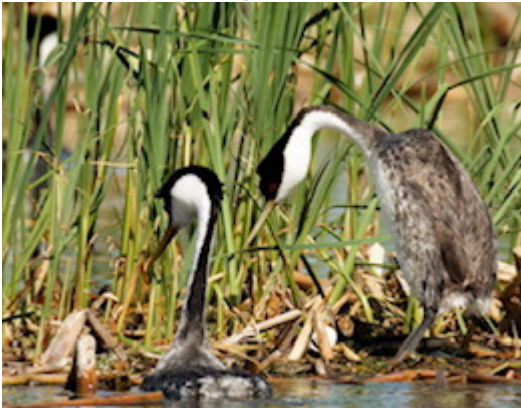
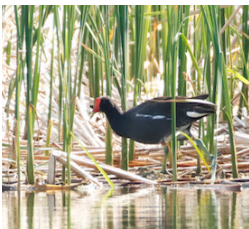
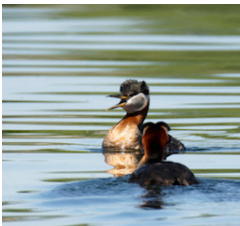


Photo credits:  
Kyle Woitalla



In addition to the Western Grebes, our 16 CMAS members identified 19 other bird species. The included Red-necked Grebes, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and a Common Gallinule. A big "thank you" to Kyle Woitalla for help identifying bird species and his photography.

Did you know... there are a multitude of names for groups of birds? See if you can identify the type of bird that fits the bill for the following terms (some terms may have more than one answer):

|                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Band _____         | Possible Answers:   |
| Bevy _____         | Geese in flight     |
| Brood _____        | Larks               |
| Chattering _____   | Jays                |
| Colony _____       | Partridge           |
| Company _____      | Doves               |
| Congregation _____ | Turkey              |
| Congress _____     | Swans               |
| Convocation _____  | Eagles              |
| Covey _____        | Owls                |
| Exaltation _____   | Sparrows            |
| Flight _____       | Chickens            |
| Gaggle _____       | Crows               |
| Lamentation _____  | Peacocks            |
| Murder _____       | Geese on the ground |
| Murmuration _____  | Starlings           |
| Ostentation _____  | Penguins            |
| Parliament _____   | Cockatoos           |
| Rafter _____       | Plovers             |
| Skein _____        | Parrots             |
|                    | Quail               |

Drought in the midst of rain? Continued...

Examples of historically observed impacts for each category:

D0: Fire danger increases; lake and river levels decline and water temperatures rise; pastures and row crops are stressed as soil moisture is low; weather is good for construction

D1: River and lake levels are lower than normal; during winter, snow events are canceled

D2: Fish kills occur, trout runs are hampered, bears search for food; burning permits are required, fire danger is high; crop yields are low, ground is hard, seed corn is short and feed is expensive; leaves change early and landscaping is stressed; well levels decrease, snowpack is significantly lower, and river flows are very low

D3: Surface waters are near record lows; wildfires are widespread, and crops are harvested early, emergency haying and grazing are authorized.

During drought conditions, people with private wells may experience an "out of water" situation which could be called a well interference. This could be because the well has failed or it could be because other water users in the area may have drawn the source aquifer down past the level of the pump. If the out of water situation is reported to the DNR, an investigation into the matter will occur (once a complaint form has been submitted to the local Area Hydrologist). A new on-line complaint form has been developed to assist with expedience of communicating with the DNR.

A well inspection by a certified well driller is part of the investigative process. If it is found to be a valid well interference, the responsible party(ies) have to correct the problem for the affected party. This could mean making a change to an existing permit, adding drop pipe to lower a well pump, or in rare instances, a new well may need to be drilled. So far this year, the MN DNR has received six complaints regarding well interference with one complaint currently being investigated.

The DNR also has a Low Flow Management Plan for the Mississippi River. This Low Flow Management Plan was implemented on June 2nd of this year. The plan is intended to preserve drinking water supplies for the Cities of St. Cloud, St. Paul and Minneapolis as well as protecting the resource for fish and wildlife and lastly recreation. A weekly Stream Flow report is produced for the watersheds of the state which shows the current conditions of the watersheds as well as a map of the week before, for comparing conditions.



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:

