

Green-Backed Gazette

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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President's Note, by Dan Kneip

The definition of the word Habitat according to Merriam-Webster is "The place or environment where a plant or animal naturally lives and grows." Synonyms of habitat are home and territory. It is therefore extremely important to any species to have its habitat protected!

In July of 2026, The US Interior Department finalized a rule to narrow the definition of "Harm" under the Endangered Species Act. In the Act, "take" is defined as "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct."

This change removes habitat destruction and degradation from the definition of a prohibited "take," meaning industrial activities like mining or drilling can occur in an area as long as they do not directly kill or injure an animal. Reuters reports that an internal U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service memo instructs officials to interpret a prohibited "take" narrowly, indicating that accidental or inadvertent deaths caused by habitat changes (like building a dam or logging) are no longer considered illegal unless the action specifically targets the animal. The argument is that habitat modification should not qualify as a prohibited "take" of a protected species.

Thankfully, twenty-one entities, including the State of Minnesota, filed lawsuits against these rule changes to the Endangered Species Act. Let us hope that our courts understand the meaning of habitat and the harm of habitat destruction.

On a more personal level, there are many programs and resources that a homeowner can utilize to help maintain habitat for birds. National Audubon has an on-line list of subjects under its heading of Protecting Bird Habitats which includes ways to make your yard more inviting for birds, planting native gardens to serve as food and shelter and ways in which to make your home windows safer and more visible to birds and avoid deadly collisions. Other sources of information are Cornell's Gardening for Birds and Home-Grown National Park's initiative to replace traditional lawns with native plants.

Some housekeeping notes for CMAS local chapter members. The board has decided to consider our local memberships to be on a calendar year basis starting in January 2027. This will facilitate administration of the local roster and help the members to avoid confusion as to when fees are due. To clarify, all local membership fees for 2027 will be due as of January 1st, and we will allow 90 days for payment, that is, through the end of March.

Calendar



October 21, 2026 - 7 p.m. UUF (3226 Maine Prairie Road, St. Cloud, MN) CMAS meeting (zoom presentation)
Speaker: Russel Groves - 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

December 19, 2026 - 7 a.m. Christmas Bird Count (See below)

January 20, 2027 - 7 p.m. UUF (3226 Maine Prairie Road, St. Cloud, MN) CMAS meeting (in person presentation, but zoom will be available also)
Speaker: To Be Determined

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





2026 Christmas Bird Count

Join our local Christmas Bird Count team on Saturday December 19th 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 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.

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Cultural Astronomy, Dark Skies, Satellite, Constellations, and the Space Environment

Jessica Heim, a Fellow of the University of Southern Queensland came to speak with CMAS about essentially everything related to dark skies. She began by defining cultural astronomy as the study of humans and their relationship with the sky. She described different culturally significant constellations including dark masses in the southern hemisphere in the shape of an emu and llamas. She noted that indigenous peoples believe we come from the stars; the stars are our relatives.

Dr. Duane Hamacher has been instrumental regardging initiatives in Australia. He believes indigenous astronomy is the first astronomy, because it existed long before the Babylonians, Greeks, etc. Jessica noted his book The First Astronomers offers different perspectives worth considering.

Jessica pointed out that bright satellites are problematic for cultural astronomy. Light pollution in general is bad nearly everywhere. More than 60% of Europeans cannot see the Milky Way. Sky glow (brightening of the night sky), light trespass, and glare are all problems related to light pollution.

Jessica noted that we should want better quality of light at night, not quantity of light at night. With regard to light, spectrum matters. Blue light at night is very bad, resulting in more light pollution and is more difficult to adapt to. Blue light looks brighter to birds than to people, disrupts migration and circadian rhythms (for both animals and people), depresses immune systems, affects courtship, reproduction, and also affects insects and plants negatively! In short, blue light at night inhibits all sorts of ecosystems. White LED lights aren't any better for humans. They are five times more impactful to us. Warm amber lights are better when using LED lights. Erasure of the night sky takes indigenous culture away.

Jessica stated that energy efficient lighting equals more light used. She added that global light pollution averages 9.6% brighter per year.

Jessica discussed the five principles for responsible outdoor lighting. Responsible lighting is useful, targeted, low level, controlled, and warm-colored.

- Use light only if it is *needed*. Consider how the light will affect wildlife and their habitats.

- Direct light so it falls only where it is needed. Aim and shield lights downward and toward the item to be illuminated. Do not allow the light to spill beyond where it's needed.

- Light should be no brighter than necessary. Brighter light is not better light. Use the *lowest* light level required.

- Control the light by only using light for as long as you need it. Leaving lights on all night long is simply a waste of energy and detrimental all around. Use timers or motion detection lights to provide light when it's needed, dimmed whenever possible, and shut off when finished.

- Finally, use warmer color lights wherever possible. Blue to violet (shorter wavelength) lights should be limited as much as possible due to their harmful effects on humans, plants, insects and animals.

Jessica went on to discuss satellites and their effects on astronomy.. She noted that 2019 appeared to be the starting point of collections of large numbers of satellites in the night sky. In 2019, there were approximately

(Cultural Astronomy, etc continued)
2,100 sattelites. By 2026 the number was 16,199! Space X, Starlink, and Amazon want to increase those numbers exponentially. Space X wants to put one million satellites in orbit, Starlink wants 9,000 and Amazon plans to have 7,786. These satellites are designed to be disposable in Earth's atmosphere.

Satellites will have effects on: long exposure times (which alters how far into space astonomers can see), dark matter, faint distant galaxies and Near Earth Object research (detecting asteroids that could impact Earth). The sky is getting less dark. Orbital debris doesn't always burn up in the atmosphere. Crowding materials increases the risk of collision for space craft and a risk of the "Kessler Syndrome" (runaway debris situation).





Free Jeffers Petroglyphs Lichen Walk

Tanner Barnharst, will lead a lichen walk from 1:15 to 3:15 on Saturday, October 17 from the visitors center at Jeffers Petroflyphs. Come early to enjoy an interactive lichen workshop hosted by the Bell Museum and Tanner!
https://www.mnhs.org/events/59730799251
27160 Co Rd 2, Comfrey, MN 56019

Tanner also has a new podcast where he discusses sunburst lichens. He worked with Jennifer McLaughlin of Our Wild Backyard to complete the 20 minute podcast. Find more about her Midwest-nature-centric podcast at her website - https://www.ourwildbackyard.org/ Available on Spotify, Apple Podcast, and YouTube



Buckthorn Bustin' Time!



Join us from 1 - 3:30 p.m. at Rockville County Park (11503 Glacier Road, Rockville) at the picnic shelter on Saturday, October 10th for buckthorn removal. The backup date will be Oct 17)th if the weather doesn't cooperate on the 10th.

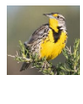
This event is in honor of all the conservation work that John and Linda Peck have done over the years!



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:



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

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.**