

Green-Backed Gazette

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MINNESOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Volume 49 November/December 2026



President's Note, by Dan Kneip



A late Fall and sunny weather for most of the month of October has helped the local farmers complete most of their harvest. It has also allowed for some good birding days.

I hope many of you took the opportunity to view the Sandhill Cranes at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. The programmed tours continue until 6 November, check the website for availability. You can also view the cranes on the Wildlife Drive and from the County Road 70 Parking lot at dawn and dusk. Do not miss this great opportunity in our back yard.

The interest shown in this past summer's Chimney Swift monitoring project has prompted the CMAS board to investigate additional community science (also called citizen science) opportunities. We hope to have additional information on these opportunities soon.

A great opportunity and participatory activity for many birders is Cornell's Feeder Watch program, which is celebrating its fortieth year. I understand that many of you already participate in Feeder Watch which starts on 1 Nov. and continues through April.

The grandfather of all community science projects is the Christmas Bird Count. This year's St. Cloud- Collegeville CBC will be held on Saturday 19 December. If you have never participated in a Christmas Bird Count, please consider doing so. It is a great way to meet local birders and extend your birding season. You can even participate in the CBC by counting your backyard feeder birds if you are within the count area and communicate to the designated compiler beforehand. There are at least seven CBC circles in the CMAS area. Details of the other circles can be found on the MOU website https://moumn.org/CBC/locations_map.php and soon on the National Audubon website https://www.audubon.org/community-science/christmas-bird-count/join-christmas-bird-count (Audubon CBC platform is being updated).

In addition to the CBC, CMAS will again be supporting Stearns County Parks in a Kestrel Box Workshop this coming February and will be holding a Community Outing for the Great Backyard Bird Count on Saturday 13 Feb. Details for both of these events should be forthcoming by January.

The winner of our Hummingbird contest was Jean Johnson who photographed her last hummingbird visitor in her yard on October 4th. She received a bottle of maple syrup as her award!

Calendar

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

November 19, 2026 Give to the Max Day **(see page 2)**

December 5, 2026 9am-12pm Backyard Bird Feeder workshop at Crane Meadows. Build a feeder and learn about feeder styles and placement.
December 5, 2026 MOU Paper session in St Paul
The Minnesota Ornithologists' Union (MOU) annual paper session and business meeting will be at the North Star Ballroom on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus. This year's theme is citizen science with presentations showcasing findings from citizen-science supported research and programs. Registration begins at 8 a.m. with the presentations beginning at 9 a.m. and concluding at 4 p.m. (or register on-line).



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: Dave Hansen Subject: Armed & sometimes dangerous plants with thorns, enticing fruits or toxins



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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Groundwater Contamination Associated with the Use of Neonicitinoids by Dr. Russ Groves

Dr. Graves started his presentation by discussing that neonicitinoids (neonics) are a class 4A group of insecticides originally identified/developed in the 1980s that were developed as a reduced-risk alternative to organophosphates and carbamates. They now account for approximately 29% of the world's pesticide use.

Clothianidin, Imidicloprid, and Thiamethoxam are all brand names of common neonics used as seed coatings for soybeans and corn. They easily dissolve in water.

Neonics began being used frequently in 2006. By 2014, 90% of planted acreage for corn used treated seed and use is expanding. The Data Bridge Market Research estimates that by 2031, global insecticide seed treatment will account for $9.75 billion.

Dr. Graves discussed multiple articles that document impacts of neonics on insect and animal populations. A 2024 article by E. Molenaar, et al. provided a summary of global evidence on avian responses to neonicotinoid exposure, reported by BirdLife International as "reduced orientation, reproductive abnormalities, reduced fecundity, variations in immunological responses, and reduced longevity".

In January, 2024 New York was the first state to enact anti-neonics legislation. Washington, Colorado, and California were all following suit by the end of the year. Wisconsin has considered legislation as well. In Minnesota, HF3704 was introduced during the 2025/2026 session. It proposed a prohibition on the sale and distribution of certain seeds coated with systemic insecticides not authorized by the commissioner of agriculture and "application or treatment of ornamental outdoor plants and turf with neonictinoid insecticides".

In Wisconsin, neonics have been used on specialty agricultural crops of potatoes, sweet corn, snap beans, peas, carrots and onions. Some uses are being reduced, but others are increasing.

Geologically speaking, the area of most concern for groundwater contamination with neonics is in the central sands area where glacial Lake Wisconsin occurred. The area is comprised of fast-draining sandy soils with water table aquifers close to the surface. This makes it easy for groundwater (that can supply water to surface water resources such as lakes and streams) to be contaminated with neonics that aren't taken up by the plants. Neonics have been found in groundwater samples as well as surface waters.

Aquatic macroinvertebrates form the cornerstone of aquatic ecosystems. They are highly sensitive to pesticides and poor water quality. No macroinvertebrates = no fish.

EPA has established acute and chronic exposure thresholds for Clothianidin, Imidacloprid, and Thiamethoxam. To protect human health, drinking water must be filtered to comply with local regulations for both nitrates and pesticides.

(Neonictinoids continued)

Instead of using neonics, there are choices people can make such as using alternative means necessary for acceptable yield and pest control, exploring new reduced-risk pesticide chemistries, and practicing nutrient recovery/microbial remediation.

Understanding the landscape is critical. Some areas are at higher risk for runoff and contamination than others. Restoring wetlands that can naturally clean these contaminants from water would be beneficial as well.

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!



Migration Tidbits

You may be aware of the Arctic Tern's amazing migration story, traveling from one end of the earth to the other, but did you know that there are other major travelers as well?

Both Bobolinks and Swainson's Hawks migrate from North America to South America each year! Ospreys have been seen in the Carribean.

Radar (for example at the Greenville, SC airport) has been used to study birds in migration, with researchers being able to map flocks, their altitudes and approximate flight speeds. Some transoceanic migrators fly as high as 21,000 feet above sea level!

As might be expected, birds often take advantage of cold fronts passing so that they can use the winds to push them along. Many songbirds migrate at night, while waterfowl can go anytime.



Buckthorn Bustin' Update



Eighteen people from various enviornmental groups joined together for buckthorn removal on the 10th of October at Rockville County Park.

Thank you to all that attended! Hank and Lisa Schreifels did a great job of organizing and with the interest of those present may schedule a recurrence next year.

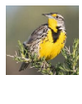
This event was in honor of all the conservation work that John and Linda Peck have done over the years!



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.**