



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Fall 2012

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 6 No. 4

RHWO NEWS

A Note from the Chair

Cluster activity around the state

This year Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery made a conscientious effort to expand our influence and oak savanna advocacy around the state. We have identified seven locations where there are viable groups, or clusters, of RHWO and where we are working with land managers and land owners. We encourage them to work with us to improve woodpecker habitat and also provide resources for getting the word out to others. Below is a summary of some of the work accomplished this spring and summer.

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge - Tom Beer and Rita Doucet met with the manager and the chief biologist to inform them of our project and see how we can help. They were pleased to provide us access to do surveys for RHWO in two likely areas, the Louisville Swamp and the Rapids Lake Unit. Following that meeting Tom contacted Craig Mandell (a volunteer bird guide at MNVNR) who guided us through the two areas which look very promising as future RHWO habitat. We will begin surveys there next spring.

The Belwin Conservancy - Located near Afton, MN, The Belwin Conservancy (TBC) has been doing outdoor education with public school students for over 40 years. Recently we have been working with TBC on a special project to create oak savanna habitat in an area that was previously heavily scrub and woods. Mary Miller arranged for eight members of our steering committee to spend one of those 'hot-July' days hiking around the savanna property, getting to know the staff, and taking a 'buffalo buggy' ride to visit a spring/summer resident herd of bison. It was a great, hot, sweaty day, and thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Nerstrand Big Wood State Park - Chet and Miriam Meyers visited Big Woods for our second annual survey of RHWO. Three pairs were quickly located, all within the confines of the campground. Big Woods has very little true savanna habitat, but the birds have accommodated themselves to the campground and accompanying feeders for a number of years. Later that summer Chet contacted Elaine Feikema, park supervisor, and she agreed to let us erect two of Jack Hauser's nest boxes in the campground, which we will monitor for use and nesting. The boxes will go up in April.

Sherburne NWR - Two nesting RHWO were observed (though not documented) in the area of the Blue Hill trail. This is exciting, as it has been years since RHWO have

Continued on page 3, Clusters

A Note from the Chair

October 2012

Fall is here and, according to our friend "chickadee Jim Howitz," all but a very few of our red-headed woodpecker friends are gone from Cedar Creek. We know it was a bad year for acorns, but it amazes me how the birds must be able to communicate with each other and exit at the same time. There is just so much we don't know about these birds. They continue to baffle us.

We will have our last meeting of the year October 24 and not meet again until January 16th of 2013. In the meantime, we are working on grants for an intern for next year and locating a quality cavity camera so that we can begin our research on brood size and success ratio. We have lost two very valuable members of our steering committee, so if you are interested please contact me at <chetmeyers@visi.com> so we can explore possibilities. Please note that this *is a working committee* and everyone is involved in surveying and other ongoing activities.

Next year our focus for research at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve will continue to be the identification of nest trees. But, in addition, we will focus on ten selected nests in two different areas and weekly monitor nesting activity, from egg laying to fledging. A new cavity camera will be a great help in this regard. This will give us a better idea of how successful our birds are at fledging young from nests that typically average 4 to 5 eggs. We will also work with the Cedar Creek staff as they continue their burning efforts to expand this wonderful oak savanna habitat.

Chet Meyers, Chair

Photo by Paula Perdoni



Note From the Editor

The feature topic this month - "How does modern Agriculture affect the Red-headed Woodpecker?" - is not only pertinent for red-headed woodpeckers, but affects many birds, especially prairie and wetland birds. Many farmers have declared war on the red-winged blackbird in the Dakotas for feeding on their sunflowers. Drainage of wetlands affects ducks, rails and other wetland birds. The recent record prices for corn and soybeans has put increasing demand on marginal farmlands, which often had been put into set aside programs that benefitted birds and other wildlife.

The inclusion of the membership application form in the Summer issue has stimulated a nice increase in renewals. Please keep them coming and let others know about us. New members are welcome as well!

Finally give us your feedback. What should we do? What do you need to help? Continue to send us your RHWO sightings and pictures.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Red-headed Woodpeckers and Modern Agriculture

To look at the effects that modern agriculture has had on the red-headed woodpecker (RHWO), we need to go back before Europeans settled North America. Prior to this settlement, it is assumed that aboriginal peoples had little effect upon bird populations due to the relative low human population. Although it is well understood that aboriginal people used fire very effectively as a tool to harvest animals for food. These fires as well as naturally ignited fires undoubtedly maintained savannas. Probably the greatest effect the early immigrants had on RHWO's is in the midwest where the beech⁴ forests were cleared and plowed. This probably had two effects on the RHWO, one good and the other bad. This opened up these forests and made them much more savanna-like providing more nesting habitat for them. The bad effect was the loss of a vast resource for winter forage⁴.

Continued in next column, Modern Ag

Favorite Feeder Food

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery volunteer banders worked diligently this spring to lure, trap and put leg bands on the Cedar Creek birds. After experimenting with many nuts, the banders stumbled upon a treat that the woodpeckers just couldn't resist. Birds would fly in eagerly for this snack that humans love too. What was it?

- A. Almonds
- B. Hazelnuts
- C. Macadamia nuts
- D. Cashews
- E. Acorns



Answer on page 3.

Modern Ag (Continued from previous column)

Early agricultural practices involved cultivation of crops that primarily fed the farmers livestock. Little surplus was ever produced for sale, until sufficient land was cleared to provide a surplus. European crops were introduced, such as wheat, oats and barley. The new world grain, corn, also was brought into the mix. Its storage for the surplus required a new type of farm building – the corn crib. The traditional granary wasn't adequate to allow the corn cob to dry properly to prevent spoilage. Thus the corn crib was a ubiquitous building on early American farms. Its design was also a storage area for RHWO's. The open areas between the slats provided easy access for them during the fall, winter and spring months. Hence the RHWO became the most common bird in Eastern North America^{1,3}, due to the vast areas that were opened up for nesting and a huge food supply provided by the American farmers. This resulted in many people looking upon them as just another pest you had to shoot².

This began to change as the agricultural practices began to change in the middle part of the 20th century. Fence rows began to change from traditional wood posts to more durable and increasingly cheap iron posts. This allowed farmers to narrow these fence rows by burning them to rid them of trees and brush as well as noxious weeds. A shift away

Continued on page 3, Fence line

RhWR Contact Information

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

President Jim Egge aubullet2@yahoo.com 612 827-7629
Website www.AudubonChapterofMinneapolis.org

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Chair Chet Meyers chetmeyers@visi.com 612 374-5581
Treasurer Jerry Bahls rhwracm@comcast.net 763 572-2333
Recorder <open>
Editor Jerry Bahls rhwracm@comcast.net 763 572-2333
Website www.RedheadRecovery.org or http://rhrp.moumn.org



Clusters (Continued from page 1)

successfully nested at Sheburne NWR. Sue Keator has been in touch with volunteer supervisor Betsy Beneke and we had an information table at the Sherburne NWR Festival on Sep. 29th. There is a new refuge manager and a new biologist, who both seem most positive about working with us. We have heard that they have a grant to control hazel, which would be great in the Blue Hill Trail area where hazel has taken over the understory. Sue will be coordinating spring surveys at Sherburne.

Camp Ripley National Guard Training Facility - Located just south and west of Brainerd, Camp Ripley is over 54,000 acres in size. Two large sections of that are firing ranges for training National Guard. The firing ranges are burned every year to provide visibility to targets, and ... guess what??? The red-headed woodpeckers have adopted the two firing range areas as their home. In 2010 a few of us were given a tour of the Camp where we saw a number of RHWO. The problem was we could not enter the area where they were nesting because of the danger of unexploded armaments. The two primary DNR wildlife staff assigned to Camp Ripley, Brian Dirks and Sally Dierks, are very supportive of our recovery program and we will be spending more time working with them to do the best we can monitoring RHWO. Next to Cedar Creek, Camp Ripley has the largest concentration of RHWO in the state, with perhaps 20, or more, nesting pairs. We are planning a return visit in July of next year.

Golf Courses - Wildlife specialist Judd Brink has been conducting surveys for us the past two years, monitoring courses where we know, or have heard, RHWO are present and nesting. While he has never discovered large numbers of birds, there are a few courses where two or three pairs have been nesting for a number of years. These include Rutger's Bay Lake resort, Izaty's near Mille Lacs Lake, Madden's on Gull Lake and Blackberry Ridge near Sartell, MN.

In addition to these areas, we are monitoring woodpecker activity on three parcels of private property that are not open to the public. We have been pleased by the response of land managers and golf course supervisors who seem genuinely excited about our project. It feels good to be getting out and making more contacts with folks around the state.

Chet Meyers

Fence line (Continued from page 2)

from the multi-animal farm⁵ where cows, pigs, sheep, chickens, ducks and geese were raised to a more specialized farm⁵ where only cows, pigs or chickens were raised in larger numbers. This required fewer varieties of crops resulting in fewer types of grains, allowing more of the surplus to be sold along with the cattle (milk) and hogs, allowing the market to begin specializing in larger production of grain or cattle and hogs. Fence lines were no longer needed to contain the animals and farms began to cultivate from fence line (i.e., property lines) to fence line.

The traditional pasture³, which often was placed on the marginal farm land, became expendable and needed for production. The pastures were often the only remnant of the forest or savanna that had remained on farms through the mid to late 20th century. Their demise was a contributing factor in the habitat loss that began the decline of the RHWO in the mid twentieth century. Dairy farms began to bring the pasture to the cows, whose practice continues today.

Today modern agriculture has evolved into a two crop operation⁵ – corn and soybeans. This has resulted from many improvements in the quality and yield of these two crops. The vast improvement and size of the farm machinery⁶ during this transition to modern agriculture has forced consolidation of many farms resulting in the formation of large single owner or corporation farms. The average farm's size has gone from about 120 acres in the late 19th century to about 300 in the mid 20th century to about 430 at the beginning of the 21st century⁵. The consolidation of the farms has resulted in the loss of many farmsteads and their shelter belts which have been the last haven for many wildlife, including the RHWO.

"Technological developments in agriculture have been particularly influential in driving change in the farm sector. Following World War II, technological developments occurred at an extraordinarily rapid pace. Advances in mechanization and increasing availability of chemical inputs led to ever-increasing economies of scale that spurred rapid growth in average farm size, accompanied by an equally rapid decline in the number of farms and in the farm and rural populations. From complete reliance on animal power in 1900, farmers rapidly embraced mechanical power. Tractors had essentially replaced animal power by 1970, and mechanical harvesting of crops (sugar beets, cotton, and tomatoes, for example) became routine by the late 1960s. Advances in plant and animal breeding throughout the century facilitated mechanization and increased yields and quality, enhanced by the rapid development of inexpensive chemical fertilizers and pesticides since 1945. As a result of these advances, growth in agricultural productivity averaged 1.9 percent annually between 1948 and 1999."⁶ This quote helps explain much of the change seen in the late 20th century. The huge increase in

Continued on page 4, **Tech Development**

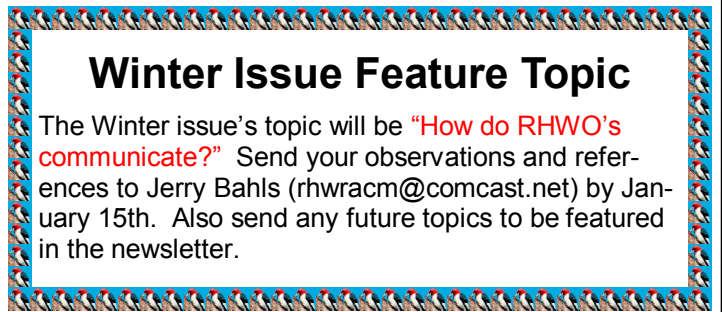


Answer to quiz on page 2 : C. Macadamia nuts. Of course, at \$30 per pound, we're not expecting to see these goodies at the seed supply stores anytime soon!

pesticides undoubtedly has had some effect on RHWO if no other than the reduction of insects. Conquering of the locust in North America reduced a much prized food source for the RHWO. This says nothing about the pesticides themselves on the health of red-headed woodpeckers.

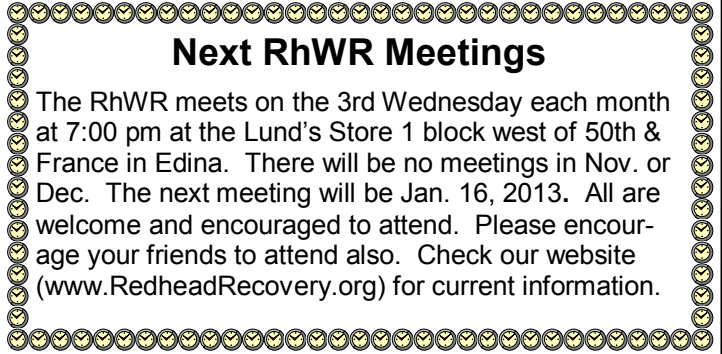
In conclusion, the modernization of agriculture has had a huge indirect effect.

1. Conserve Wildlife Foundation (CWF) of New Jersey
2. <http://www.getridofwoodpeckers.com/red-headed-woodpecker.html>
3. King, R.S., and W.P. Mueller. 2005. The return of the loud redheads. *Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine*.
4. Smith, K. G., J. H. Withgott, and P. G. Rodewald. 2000. Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 518 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America Online, Ithaca, New York.
5. Bill Ganzel, the Ganzel Group. "Shrinking Farm Numbers" First published in 2007; http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe50s/life_11.html
6. Carolyn Dimitri, Anne Efland and Neilson Conklin, "The 20th Century Transformation of U.S. Agriculture and Farm Policy", United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Economic Information Bulletin Number 3.



Winter Issue Feature Topic

The Winter issue's topic will be "How do RHWO's communicate?" Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by January 15th. Also send any future topics to be featured in the newsletter.



Next RhWR Meetings

The RhWR meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7:00 pm at the Lund's Store 1 block west of 50th & France in Edina. There will be no meetings in Nov. or Dec. The next meeting will be Jan. 16, 2013. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website (www.RedheadRecovery.org) for current information.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
PO Box 3801
Minneapolis MN 55403-0801

Save that Snag!

Place
Stamp
Here



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Program Membership Application

I'd like to join! Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) at the rate of \$10/year! Please send my membership information to the address below.

I'd like to renew! Renew my RhWR membership for \$5/year.

Yes, I'd like to join Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis also! Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (\$10) and the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (\$12) at the rate of \$22/year. Please send my membership information and *Kingfisher* to the address below.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

E-MAIL _____

Send this application and make check payable to:
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
RhWR
PO Box 3801
Minneapolis, MN 55403-0801