



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Fall 2015

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

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RHWO NEWS

Good News for Red-headed Woodpeckers at Sherburne NWR

by Chet Meyers

Red-headed woodpeckers are beautiful, lively, and charismatic birds and we want more of them in our region. For those of you familiar with Sherburne NWR (about 40 miles north of the Twin Cities), extensive work has been done on the Blue Hill Trail to convert it from a mixed-woody habitat to a more open oak savanna, which RHWO prefer. Tony Hewitt, head biologist, reports work on this project began in the winter of 2013-2014. First efforts included a fairly intensive thinning of trees and brush, then chemical treatment to eliminate invasives, next seeding with native prairie plants, and finally controlled burning. Presently 150 acres have been restored, and results have been rather dramatic. Another 150 acres have been thinned and will be further developed in the near future.

My wife and I regularly visit the refuge for birding and the pure enjoyment of the environment. I also help conduct bird surveys each spring and, with the help of refuge staff, we keep a sharp eye peeled for RHWO. Seasoned birders report that about 10 years ago a small cluster of RHWO inhabited the area of the Manomen Trail. But, when a wind storm took down a number of nesting trees, that group disappeared. In the last three years of our spring surveys, we always encounter two or three pairs of RHWO on private land, on the very north edge of the refuge, but we could never confirm nesting in the refuge itself. Last year birders reported seeing one bird hanging out on the Blue Hill Trail about ¼ mile from the trail's main entrance. And there were reports of a RHWO along the Manomen Trail.

This year, on June 22nd, while hiking the newly developed Blue Hill Trail area, I observed a red-headed woodpecker entering and leaving a cavity at the top of a tall, bare tree trunk (or 'snag'), five times in about 20 minutes. This is a sure sign of nest activity: either a male feeding a female on the nest, or feeding babies. I could not hear young calling and, since it appeared to be the same bird each time, it's safe to assume it was a male feeding its mate. I had to restrain myself from whooping with joy. Only one year after the creation of this new savanna area, our first documented RHWO nesting in Sherburne in over 10 years.

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A Note from the Chair

Notes from the chair

Fall 2015

In late September I met with our faculty consultant Todd Arnold and with Forest Isbell, the associate director of Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve, at Todd's office on the U. of M. St. Paul campus to discuss future research at Cedar Creek. The day before we met, Mary Spivey, education coordinator at Cedar Creek, informed us of her resignation. Mary and her husband are moving south to be closer to their aging parents. We will miss her solely. Mary has provided us with so much energy and creativity the past four years. Mary may not be replaced until April.

My meeting with Todd and Forest was very positive. Todd agreed that, even though our present research on brood success is about finished, we should continue to do our spring nest surveys and gather data, as well as our work banding RHWO. We are considering work with geo locators, which may help us discover where our RHWO are over-wintering, but much legwork has to be done exploring the cost of both the geo locators and the process of data collection.

Forest Isbell is very supportive of our recovery project and will be opening new doors at Cedar Creek for research. He talked about changing the burn regime at Cedar Creek, by introducing bison on some of the burn units and burning less frequently. Forest is aware of the difficulty recruiting new oak trees and wants to address this. The present burning regime leaves little in the way of new young oak trees. He has been in touch with Belwin Conservancy, which uses both bison and burning, and they are advising him in this matter. One issue is how often to burn and what impact bison and burning will have on the land. Our project will be involved in a new committee that will focus on these issues. We will also continue to offer the Red-headed Woodpecker "Open House" in June, when birders can have a full day to explore the Cedar Creek area. Spring training for nest surveys will occur in early May.

This winter we will be working on grants to support our work with geo locators, our continuing nest surveys, and our advocacy work with Sherburne NWR, the Minnesota River Valley NWR, the Belwin Conservancy, Nerstrand Big Woods State Park, and other partners in RHWO recovery. You can help by renewing your membership for 2016.

Chet Meyers RhWR

Note From the Editor

An article in this issue reminds you to renew your membership. As you can see by the article on the last page, the RhWR is investigating more exciting research that may require commitment of more funds. If we embark on this research, we will need to have a healthy treasury balance. One thought related to this new research is to have an administrator handle most of the needed communications and paper work that will be needed to get a credible researcher to head the project.

I would like to echo Chet's comments about Mary Spivey leaving Cedar Creek. She will be missed by all of us who monitored nests at Cedar Creek. If we needed something she was always there to help out. Her training sessions were always helpful and informative while protecting activities at Cedar Creek.

The news from Sherburne NWR is exciting. Hopefully in a few years we will have another area that has as many red-headed woodpeckers as Cedar Creek. Our efforts at education is slowly paying off around the state and Midwest.

If you are interested in participating in our organization by helping us monitor nests at Cedar Creek or possibly being our webmaster, contact Chet at chetmeyers@visi.com or 612 374-5581 or contact me at rhwracm@comcast.net or 763 572-2333.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Sherburne, Continued from page 1

Hats off to Tony Hewitt and all the staff and crew that helped recreate this beautiful area of oak savanna. Let's hope some young did fledge and that they return and continue to repopulate the refuge.

Chet Meyers is chair of the statewide Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery, a Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Do Redheads Live Here?

"That looks like a perfect Red-headed Woodpecker tree." I announce this to my field assistant often. As a brazen researcher I sometimes fancy myself qualified to know what Red-heads prefer for nest locale. My pride is put in check when I put the nest camera into a hole in a tree expecting to see eggs but instead finding an empty cavity. Although there are patterns in nest tree characteristics, in the past two years of working with Red-headed Woodpeckers I have discovered that they have as individualized preferences about their nests as humans do about their homes. I have documented nests in dead trees and living trees, trees with many limbs and trees with none, cavities in limbs and trunks. They nest in Oaks, Elms and Ashes. The bottoms of their cavities are sometimes round, sometimes jagged. Sometimes they excavate their own nests, sometimes they take over an old cavity. Perhaps one of the most striking differences between nests is the height. One of the tallest nests was 42 feet off the ground, the shortest was only 5 feet off the ground!

Because males will sometimes change nest trees or territories between years, seemingly in favor of something more preferable, it is unlikely that they are ambivalent to tree characteristics. One study found that the features of the "nest tree has a greater influence in nest site selection than does surrounding vegetation" when it comes to Red-headed Woodpecker nest sites (Adkins Giese and Cuthbert 2003). This is significant to conservation. There might not be a one-size-fits-all type of tree that is preferable to all Red-headed Woodpeckers. This suggests that a variety of trees might be even more important than the habitat's other vegetation. Any plans for maintaining Red-headed Woodpecker habitat ought to respect that the species seems to need a variety of nest trees to suit the apparently different strategies each pair takes for brood rearing.

Adkins Giese, Collette, and Francesca Cuthbert. "Influence of surrounding vegetation on woodpecker nest tree selection in oak forests of the Upper Midwest, USA." *Forest Ecology and Management* 179 (2003): 523-534.

Written by Brittney Yohannes

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The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery is looking for someone to be our Webmaster for our website. Knowledge about websites is desirable, but not essential. Our current need is maintenance of the site and an ability to keep it up-to-date by uploading current information for our members and the public. If you can help, contact Chet Meyers or Jerry Bahls. See inset at left for contact info.

Please Renew Your Membership by December 31, 2015



In our quarterly newsletter, **The REDHEAD**, you've read about some of last year's successes:

- * first documented nesting of RHWO in 10 years at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, on a new oak savanna that we helped encourage,
- * breakthrough research at Cedar Creek on RHWO nesting success and banded woodpeckers returning to same geographic area (site fidelity),
- * 60 folks attended our June "Red-headed Woodpecker Days" at Cedar Creek and over 70 different bird species sighted,
- * 32 nests this year, with 47 juvenile RHWO successfully on the wing.

We could never have done this without your financial and volunteer support. This year we want to continue research into RHWO migration patterns and to use action-triggered trail cameras to better understand what natural predators are killing our birds.



Bring it on!



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Program Membership Renewal Form

___ I'd like to renew for next year at the \$20/year rate. NAME _____

___ I'd like to renew for multiple years at the \$20/year rate ADDRESS _____

___ I'd like to renew for 2016 at the \$100 and receive a guided tour of Cedar Creek CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Send this application and make check payable to:

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis RhWR
P.O. Box 3801
Minneapolis, MN 55403-0801

All contributions tax-deductible

Juvenile RHWO Beginning to Change



Photo by Siah St. Clair

Winter Issue Topics?

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. Have you been experimenting trying to attract RHWO's? Let us know about your work!

Next RhWR Meeting

The RhWR usually meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7:00 pm at the Lund's Store 1 block west of 50th & France in Edina. The next meeting will be November 18th. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website at www.RedheadRecovery.org for current information.

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Save that Snag!

Place
Stamp
Here

Future Research for RhWR

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) is looking at starting research into where the red-headed woodpeckers go when they leave Minnesota for the winter. While all do not always leave, some do each year. Presently we do not know where they go and why they go there. We are in the process of looking at the use of geolocators to answer this question. Many research papers have been written about the use of geolocators. To date the closest research done using geolocators was done by Elizabeth Gow, who investigated the migration of northern flickers from Canada using geolocators. As with bird banding, not just anyone can attach geolocators to birds. Each research projects using geolocators requires a master bander to obtain special permission from the Bird Banding Laboratory. Also a researcher with the necessary credentials to perform this type of research is needed. Therefore the RhWR needs to find such a researcher. In addition to the researcher the researcher or a sponsor must have sufficient funds to carry out the work needed. Currently this is about \$30,000/year. Consequently the RhWR is investigating potential credible researchers who will be able to help the RhWR perform this important study about red-headed woodpecker's migration patterns. We will be looking for help in this project and may be looking to compensate someone to administer this project. Let us know if you can help.