



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Fall 2016

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

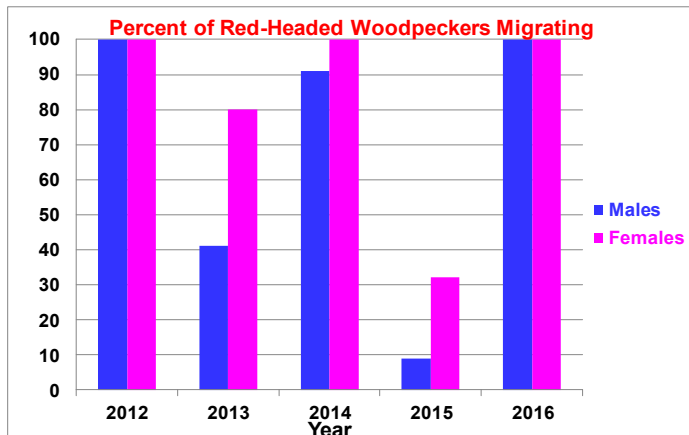
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RHWO NEWS

Summary for 2016

As 2016 began, 72 Red-headed Woodpeckers were present at the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve. This is the highest number of overwintering birds, since we began intensively studying the birds in 2012, and possibly ever. The northern pin oak acorn crop at Cedar Creek in 2015 did not appear impressive, but we saw birds harvesting and storing acorns in late summer and fall. The birds engaged in flycatching whenever the weather allowed insects to be in the air. It appeared that after the temperature dropped below freezing, the birds relied exclusively on stored acorns. The birds presumably benefitted from the strong *El Niño*, with consistently above normal temperatures throughout the fall and winter. About 83% of the birds present in the fall of 2015 were present in the spring of 2016. We were surprised by the number of new birds that showed up in the spring. With the overwintering birds and new birds, we had 54 breeding pairs, up from 35 pairs in 2015. The breeding season felt much like that of 2012 when we had 57 pairs. The 73 fledglings produced were a record. With about 180 adults and fledglings present in the savannah, the birds appeared to be everywhere.

Then, as in 2012, all the birds disappeared in August. In 2016 we noticed almost no acorns. With nothing to eat in winter, the birds presumably have gone to where acorns or other foods are present. So 2016 and 2012 have been similar, with many birds that attempted to overwinter surviving to the breeding season, a high number of breeding pairs, a poor acorn crop, and no birds remaining after late summer. Based on 2012 – 2013, we expect fewer breeding pairs in 2017 than in 2016, but that significant numbers



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A Note from the Chair

Notes from the chair Fall 2016

As I write this, in early October, the fall leaves are only beginning to peak on the North Shore. My fishing-guide buddy says that Lake Minnetonka is at least two to three weeks behind schedule, i.e., warmer than normal. And, after all of us felt we might have an over-wintering flock of red-headed woodpeckers, the birds 'up and left' just a few days before Jim Howitz and I led a bird walk at Cedar Creek. Luckily, Jim found two lingering juveniles, so participants got to study the birds at close range.

With the birds gone we can redirect our attention and energies to planning for next year. We are exploring some exciting research possibilities, including a cooperative effort between the University of Minnesota's Cedar Creek program and the University of Toledo. The study might focus on RHWO as indicators of healthy oak savanna habitat. We are most excited about the prospects of this cooperative research and will keep you updated. Much of our fall and winter activities will focus on defining research goals and raising monies to support them.

In the spring we will continue our regular surveys and bird banding operations and hope to learn more about where 'our' birds overwinter. This will involve the use of some new technology, which we are presently exploring. So, as you begin to snuggle down for the coming winter, think about making an extra Christmas/Hannukah contribution to your favorite RHWO project.

Chet Meyers, Chair



Photo of Sherburne NWR taken by Chet Meyers

Note From the Editor

The Editor apologizes for this being published so late in the fall. Your Editor had a little bout with illness and was unable to finish it on time. I hope you will excuse me.

As I have always pleaded, we can use more of you sending articles to me. You don't have to be an expert only a keen observer or photographer. Nor do they have to be very long. Sometimes the hardest spaces to fill are the smallest. Send them to my RhWR address below. We greatly appreciate everything we get!

I'd like to alert you to an event coming up on December 3rd at the Bell Museum on the University of Minnesota—Minneapolis Campus and that is the annual MOU Paper Session. It starts at 9:00 AM and there is a very modest attendance fee. The RhWR has presented at it a couple of times. While we will not be presenting at it this year, we will be present to answer any of your questions and will be willing to sign you up to become a volunteer next summer.

We are also in the midst of raising funds to help finance the research we will be doing this summer with the collaboration of University of Toledo. If you know of any source for research funds that are available, please let us know.

After many years of being the Editor, I wouldn't mind if someone were willing to take on the task. We currently publish four quarterly issues, so you're only busy for about four weeks in the year. Our deadlines for submission of articles are the 15th of the months of January (Winter), April (Spring), July (Summer) and October (Fall). The publication takes place about two weeks later. The distribution would be handled as currently. Because of electronic communications you can be anywhere in the country to be the Editor. If interested—Contact Chet at chetmeyers@visi.com or 612 374-5581 or me at rhwracm@comcast.net or 763 572-2333.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Membership Dues

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all its operating revenues from membership dues.

- 1) Basic memberships are \$20.00 for the calendar year.
- 2) Members who contribute more will receive other benefits along with the newsletter. Those contributing \$50.00 will also receive a handsome embroidered patch. Those contributing \$100.00 will receive the newsletter, a patch, and a personal tour of the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve.
- 3) The newsletter will continue to be sent to dues paying members.

Send your membership applications to -

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
RhWR
PO Box 3801
Minneapolis, MN 55403-0801

Thank you for your continued support.

Summary (Continued from page 1)

of birds will be present in fall and winter 2017. But who knows?

The trend of having fewer pairs in the east part of the area and more pairs in the west part continued in 2016. The many prescribed burns have left few live or dead trees along Durant or Fish Lake and there were fewer nests there than in the past. More birds nested west of East Bethel Boulevard than ever, in areas where the prescribed burning was begun just a few years ago. One male moved over a mile from where he nested in 2015 near Fish Lake to just west on East Bethel Boulevard where he nested in 2016. We expect similar movements if the current burning regimen continues. Oak wilt continues to kill northern pin oaks, especially in the unburned woods. As these trees die, they could provide nest sites for the birds for many years. So Cedar Creek should continue to have breeding Red-headed Woodpeckers, though there may not be as many where are used to seeing them.

-Jim Howitz

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More 2017 Volunteers Needed

Because the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery will be expanding and shifting our research efforts in 2017, we will need additional volunteers who will be able to spend more concentrated periods of time at Cedar Creek and possibly other locations to observe red-headed woodpeckers. Please contact Chet Meyers at chetmeyers@visi.com or 612 374-5581 or Jerry Bahls at rhwracm@comcast.net or 763 572-2333.

Good news from Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

by Chet Meyers

Earlier this month, my wife Miriam and I visited Sherburne NWR to touch base with its staff and see how progress was coming on their oak savanna projects. We walked parts of both the Blue Hill Trail and the Mahnomen Trail. Last year, our RHWO project designed, and paid for, two large trail signs, to educate visitors about the importance of savanna habitat. The signs feature photos of RHWO and read, "What's happened to my home?" They then explain the nature, and importance, of oak savanna habitat. Both signs are very attractive and strategically placed along the two trails. It was great to see some of the fruits of our education efforts. Trail visitors are encouraged to report RHWO sightings to the refuge office.

But the icing on the cake was a discussion with Michelle Bengston, Visitor Services Manager, who told us that at least two sightings of RHWO had been reported from the Mahnomen Trail... our first confirmed sightings there in years. You may recall that last year we had documented nesting of RHWO on the Blue Hill Trail. Finally, as Miriam and I ended our visit with a leisurely drive around the 6-mile auto tour road, we encountered Jean Ladd, a volunteer surveyor who drives the road every Wednesday. She reported two verified encounters with RHWO this year on her auto-tour drives. Wow! Looks like Sherburne's efforts to restore oak savanna habitat are really paying off, thanks to the efforts of the NWR staff, especially Tony Hewitt, and some encouragement for our project.



Photo by Chet Meyers



Photo by Chet Meyers

Red-headed Woodpecker Viability Enhanced by Field Research

With an eye to increasing the long-term viability of Minnesota's Red-headed Woodpecker populations, the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Research Team has developed ambitious plans for the coming year. Based on remarkable field work done by Dr. Jim Howitz and numerous volunteers over recent years, the research team—through the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis—has secured funding for a full time summer intern for 2017 and a commitment for part-time interns hired through Cedar Creek Ecology Science Reserve (CCESR). These interns will enhance the work done by our volunteers as we try to answer these questions:

- 1) What factors govern Red-headed Woodpecker (RHWO) nest productivity and survival of juveniles into the next year?
- 2) What "internal" factors (e.g., sex, body condition, immune function) and/or "external" factors (e.g., food availability, weather, population density) drive RHWOs to overwinter at CCESR or migrate?
- 3) Concerning migration, where do CCESR RHWOs go when they migrate, and do they migrate to the same place each year?

In order to answer these questions, we will be conducting surveys of nesting and roosting sites in Cedar Creek's oak

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savannahs, surveying food production (insects & nuts), banding birds so that we can trace birds movement within CCESR and testing geo-locators in order to track their migration, taking blood and tissue samples, and more. In order to conduct this research well, we are developing an exciting collaboration with researchers at the University of Toledo, Ohio, and are exploring having a post-doctoral researcher join our project.

To support these activities, we have launched an aggressive fund-raising initiative, submitting grant requests to numerous area organizations and foundations, with additional efforts being made by our partners in the universities. We are excited about our work taking on greater sophistication as well as increasing volunteer involvement.

Keith Olstad, convener, RHWO Research Team

Fall 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 next RhWR gathering will be on December 21st at 7 PM at 28th St & Hennepin Ave (1425 West 28th St) in the Party room. All are welcome to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website at www.RedheadRecovery.org for current information.

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

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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 \$20/year! Please send my membership information to the address below.

I'd like to renew! Renew my RhWR membership for \$20/year.

Yes, I'd like to join Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis also! Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (\$20) and the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (\$12) at the rate of \$32/year. Please send my membership information and *Kingfisher* to the address on right.

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