



# The REDHEAD



## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Fall 2017

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 11 No. 4

### RHWO NEWS

### A Note from the Chair

#### Cedar Creek Research Update

The Red-headed Woodpecker Project 2017 breeding season is soon coming to an end. Our project goals for this season have been to 1) find and monitor active red-headed woodpecker nests, 2) build port holes to extract nestlings from nest cavities, 3) capture adults and nestlings for banding, body measurements, blood sampling, and attachment of geolocator backpacks, 4) track backpacked fledgling movement using radio telemetry, and 5) recapture backpacked adults to retrieve movement data from geolocator chips.

While the first 3 goals were more heavily focused on throughout the first half of the season, our efforts shifted more on the last 2 goals during August and September. To quickly recap the numbers for this season, we have so far captured 66 individual birds, with 50 being adults and 16 being hatch-years. We attached geolocator backpacks on the first 20 adults, and radio-transmitter backpacks on 15 of the 16 hatch-years. After attaching the radio-transmitter units, we have been going out at least 3 to 4 times a week to track hatch-year movements and habitat use post-fledge. We are currently tracking only 4 of these 15 birds. For the 11 other birds, 3 were confirmed as being predated (we found piles of feathers surrounding the transmitter units), 2 of the backpacks fell off post-fledge, which no longer allowed us to track, and 6 birds mysteriously went missing (we haven't been able to pick up any signals on the receivers we use for tracking).

Goal 5, recapturing the geolocator backpacked adults, has proven to be a larger challenge than we originally expected. Earlier in the summer, we were effectively using potter traps baited with peanuts for trapping birds. We assumed that this method would be just as effective when recaptures started in August. However, once we began the recapture attempts, the birds seemed to have lost all interest in the peanuts and no longer fly into the traps. Thus, we switched to using mist nets for recapture efforts, which has been working out better, but we still have only captured 8 of the 20 backpacked adults. We think that some of the birds may have already begun migration, or shifted to a different area, for we haven't been able to find them for quite some time. However, we still have another 2 weeks left of the research season and hope to capture at

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Fall 2017

Well, another summer and fall season draws to a close. One expects Cedar Creek to be quiet, but not this year. According to Jim Howitz, there are still plenty of Red-headed Woodpeckers (RHWO) on the property and they are busy caching acorns. And this means that they are "planning" to overwinter. I say "planning" because if we have learned anything the past nine years (Yes... it's been nine years), it's that RHWO can do strange things. We will keep you up to date, but chances are good that you will be able to drive Durran Road, on the east side of Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve, and see RHWOs this winter.

Late this summer we made two visits to St. Croix State Park, which is located about 20 mile east of Hinckley. The park had a straight-line wind blow-down in 2011 and the new manager wisely decided to turn the resulting chaos into savanna. That includes a good portion of the 13,000 acres affected by the blow-down. We have already planned to do surveys this spring as we know there are some RHWO already present. If you live north of the Twin Cities and are interested in helping with spring surveys at St. Croix State Park please contact me at <chetmeyers.visi.com>.

Finally, I hope some of you will be able to attend the Minnesota Ornithological Union (MOU) conference (or "Paper Session") that will be held Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the University of Minnesota Arboretum in Chaska. Our main researcher, Elena West will be presenting on this year's research findings which are quite exciting.

Chet Meyers, Chair



Candace Stenzel searching for juvenile RHWOs

## Note From the Editor

This newsletter completes the story of our first year putting radio backpacks on the juveniles and gps units on the adults. The story is still incomplete because the juveniles need to be refound in the spring to see if they survived and to see where the adults went (it looks like they are staying put since Jim Howitz estimates there are still well over 70 adults at Cedar Creek and there may be as many as 100). The story line also continues because the RhWR will need to raise another \$10,000 in order to hire another pair of Ornithological Research Technicians to look for those juveniles and to recapture the adults to download their location data. The good news is our main researcher, Elena West, will be with us through about June 2018 and we hope beyond if more funding can be found for her. Because of these funding obligations it is very important that the RhWR be able to identify funding sources. If you know of any, please contact Jim Stengel, Chet or myself.

The other story that is completed is Sheila Ward's tragic, but well written, story of her redheads. We have all been there, watching helplessly trying an impossible fix that we know is doomed. I would love to have such a story in every edition of this newsletter. Please send me your story along with pictures.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Captured (Continued from page 1)

least 2-4 more. For the 8 birds that we have recaptured, we have been hooking their backpack units up to a laptop to obtain movement data, and then transferring the data onto GIS for spatial analyses. We hope that come spring time, the project will be able to recover the additional birds that we were not able to capture this season.

While we are sad that this research season is soon coming to an end, we are nonetheless pleased to have been a part of such an incredible project. We greatly appreciate all of the support and encouragement everyone has given us, and we hope that we have effectively laid out the ground work for all future efforts.

-Jesse Beck and Candace Stenzel

## 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 and renewals to -

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

Thank you for your continued support.



Photo by Sheila Ward

## RhWR Contact Information

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## Fund Raiser

The Redheaded Woodpecker Recovery now has a fund raiser to help us get the money we need to continue our research efforts. His name is **Jim Stengel** and he can be contacted by email at **stheidiss@yahoo.com** or by phone at **612 721-9083**. If you know of an organization that will donate money for research, please give him a call.

Editors Note: Due to the length of this article, it is continued from the Summer 2017 "The REDHEAD". All pictures in this article were taken by Sheila Ward.

## RHWO - The Heartbreak

### Tragedy Strikes!

On the morning of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, my first day of a one week vacation/staycation, I looked at the cottonwood tree and couldn't believe what I was seeing. Their branch, *their nesting branch*, was broken! I was stunned, a previous storm had not been severe, but I guess it was severe enough. I tried to judge where the branch had broken in relation to the hole, but I already knew – it had broken at the nest site. I compared before and after pictures and determined that the branch had broken roughly 4-5 inches below the opening. I was horrified and certain that the babies were dead.



The adult RHWOs were still around in the yard, but I was so sad about the babies. I felt helpless. I had read that RHWOs often have a second brood, and I went online to look at options. I wanted to do something, *anything*. So we built a birdhouse supposedly geared toward red-headed woodpeckers. The first prerequisite for this project was blind faith, and the second was an accommodating husband with great tool skills and no fear of heights. The house plan sounded great on paper: a red cedar box, interior dimensions of 6x6x14, 2-inch diameter hole placed 11 inches above the floor, filled completely with wood shavings, facing SW. It was a fun project and took my mind off of the sad situation. We were going to place the nest box 25 feet high on the top of a telephone pole in the yard, with the appropriate predator guard. When we finished the box, we reached out to the Redheaded Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) for further direction on its placement. I was so hopeful and serious in my task, and Jerry was so tactful and sweet in his response, "Providing them with a potential nest site is nice, but

they are perfectly capable of making their own." I knew the plan was unlikely to work, but there was nothing to lose and **everything** to gain! I so desperately wanted them to stay and to be successful.

After the nest box was installed on top of the telephone pole where the RHWOs frequently sat (**and of course never visited again!**), I became obsessed with watching the cottonwood tree. Every ½-hour I had the binoculars or camera on the branch, it was a burdensome surveillance. Three days after the disaster, however, I saw two naked/blind baby birds in the break. The parent birds were attentive, good at feeding the babies, but as expected, not as good at sitting on them. I so wanted to install a sun-shield of some sort, but the nest was 50-60 feet high and unreachable. There was no access for a bucket truck and a climber couldn't safely reach the site.



Sadly, 6 days after the tragic break, the nesting efforts failed. Three days of unbroken, unrelenting sun were just too much. One RHW visited the tree for a few days, but not the nest. At one point, the RHW seemed to be pecking another branch on the same tree, but that didn't continue. Soon downy woodpeckers, red-bellied woodpeckers, and northern flickers were hanging in the tree along with the RHW, further evidence that it was over. Previously, these visitors were not tolerated.



Although I am heartbroken by the turn of events, I need to dwell on how lucky we were to have them so close, every day, in our yard for nearly 6 weeks. It was commonplace to be sitting outside on the patio, and have one boldly come to the orange,

Continued on page 4, Patio

a mere 15 feet away. We always stopped what we were doing to watch and cherish them, but I wish that we were more prepared with the camera. Shortly after this event, I heard their undeniable, loud BREEEP and saw THREE adult RHWOs near the tree, but I haven't seen (or heard) them for a while now. I am hoping that a pair will start a new nest in the immediate area. There are several similar dead trees fairly close.

I am so happy to have met Chet and Jerry at RhWR, and appreciate their feedback and support. Our relationship will continue since I have joined their wonderful organization. I understand that Cedar Creek has around 50 nesting pairs. Wow – heaven on earth! I can see a road trip in the future!

Oh, one final note – that beautiful cedar house is now occupied... by a house wren. It is a true mansion for them, like the Clampetts moving to Beverly Hills!

Sheila Ward (avid birder)

## Winter Issue Topic?

Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by January 15th. Also send any photos or information to be featured in the newsletter. Have you been experimenting trying to attract red-headed woodpeckers? Let us know about your work!

## Next RhWR Meetings

The RhWR meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7:00 pm. The next meeting will be **November 15th** at Kenwood Isles Condominium, 1425 West 28th St. in Minneapolis. 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

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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 below.

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**Send this application and make check payable to:**

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis  
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PO Box 3801  
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