



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Fall 2009

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 3 No. 4

Note From the Editor

The RhWR thanks our readers for sending us a couple of great observations for our issue's topic. Please note next Winter's topic and send me your observations and/or references to research papers. Remember the deadline for the Winter issue is January 15th. Also please send me any future topics you'd like explored (rhwracm@comcast.net).

As stated in an earlier column, I am always interested in receiving articles that are related to red-headed woodpeckers and their habitat.

With that please have a good holiday season and remember to participate in the Christmas Bird Count. Also sign up to help with the Minnesota Breeding Bird Survey (contact Bonnie Sample at bsample@audubon.org). This helps us monitor the red-headed woodpecker's health and distribution.

Jerry Bahls, *Editor*

Verified RHWO Clusters

Last year at this time the RhWR had verified two red-headed woodpecker clusters (two or more breeding pair within about a quarter mile of each other) in Minnesota. Another verified cluster is at the Necedah NWR in Wisconsin. The RhWR also had 2 more unverified clusters.

One of the goals this season was to verify as many of the reported sites as possible. Mary Miller is leading the effort to check out the sites and to maintain a database of the sites.

This past summer our 11 surveyors visited 20 sites in 11 Minnesota counties. Fourteen of the sites had red-headed woodpeckers. Eight sites had at least 2 pair and three sites had 2 or more pair documented (all birds may not have been found at these sites). Watch our website for an updated Google™ map showing these sites.

We would like to thank those who visited the various sites to look for the reported pairs of RHWO's. One thing that was learned is that this confirmation process needs to be completed before fledging occurs. The best surveying dates are about June 1st to about July 15th. Please keep your cluster observations coming. Send them to Mary Miller at marygram@aol.com.

A Note from the Chair

Late fall and early winter bring some exciting migrants to Minnesota, but they also see the departure of some of our favorite red-headed woodpeckers. We don't know how many birds over-winter in the state but will report back to you when the Christmas Bird Count at Cedar Creek is completed in late December. In 2007 there were 26 Red-headed woodpeckers over wintering, while last winter (2008) only about a half a dozen.

November, may seem early to be gearing up for the next birding year, but all of us at the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) are really excited about the coming year. Mark Saturday, May 8 on your calendar for a training session for those who will be doing surveys at Cedar Creek this coming spring. That day (in the afternoon) Cedar Creek will also open its doors (rather its gates) to the public for special birding tours. In addition to RHWO we expect to see lark sparrows, eastern meadowlarks, blue-birds, sandhill cranes and an abundance of oak savanna wildflowers. Stay tuned to future newsletters for specific information.

Other dates to remember, we will have a table at the Minnesota statewide Audubon meeting on Saturday November 14. and we will be a featured presenter at this year's Minnesota Ornithologist Union (MOU) Paper Session at the James Ford Bell Museum on Saturday, December 5th.

More good news includes the possibility of a grant for an intern to work at Cedar Creek monitoring RHWO and nesting results. And finally we have discovered two more viable clusters of RHWO (three or more nesting pairs) and are now up to seven statewide. See our website for details.

- Chet Meyers, Chair RhWR

Avian Car Collision Info

From an article in USDA Forest Service Gen. Tech. Rep. PSW-GTR-191. 2005 by W. Erickson, G. Johnson, and D. Young Jr. In Illinois, Decker¹ (1987) estimated mortality along a 4.4-mile road stretch at 33 birds/mi/yr and in Ontario near wetlands, Ashley and Robinson² (1996) calculated that along a 2.2 mile stretch 223 birds were killed/mi/yr. Most of those killed were passerines. Car collisions is a cause for the RHWO decline.

1. Decker, D. 1987. Illinois Birds and Birding 3: 63-4. 2. Ashley, E. P. and J. T. Robinson. 1996. Canadian Field-Naturalist 110: 403-412.

Membership Dues

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all of its revenue from its membership dues. The RhWR dues are \$10/yr. New members will receive a packet, which will include the new RhWR button and sew-on patch as well as the latest "The REDHEAD". Because we have decided to establish our membership year as July 1 - June 30 (all memberships will expire on June 30 of the year the membership was established). Renewals will remain at \$5/year, but will expire on June 30 of the period of renewal. Look for future announcements regarding lifetime memberships and renewal dues.

New memberships and renewals can be made by sending your name, address and e-mail address or fill in the membership application form on the last page of this newsletter to the address below. Please make check payable to Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis RhWR.

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

Thank you for your continued support.

Observations of RHWO & RBWO in Illinois and SE Missouri

I spent the summer in Illinois and SE Missouri along the Illinois River and Mississippi River valleys--and everywhere we stayed was thick with red-headed woodpeckers (RHWO) and less commonly with red-bellied woodpeckers (RBWO).

Red-headed woodpeckers were very common in nearly all the campgrounds where we stayed. The campgrounds were typically open park-like settings with small open grassy areas (for RVs or tents) and evenly-spaced oak trees, either as a fragmented site near agricultural land or within a larger forested park tract.

There were also red-bellied woodpeckers in the same areas. I saw both red-bellied and red-headed woodpeckers breeding and with young juveniles in the same areas.

It was quite typical to *hear* both species at the same time. But the red-headed woodpeckers tended to frequent the more open campground oak tree area, whereas the red-bellied woodpeckers tended to be seen more along a forested edge, venturing now-and-then into the more open campground areas.

All these areas that were busy with red-headed woodpeckers were rich with a variety of mast-producing trees. As oak-hickory woods, even a little park had several species of oak and several species of hickory! I didn't notice a particularly high number of snags overall in these areas, but past bad flood years would kill the large oak trees that were close to the river (leaving the more flood-tolerant cottonwoods and silver maples growing amidst the oak skeletons).

I was also surprised to see red-headed woodpeckers in many unlikely settings--including utility poles in the small towns or at large industrial sites along the rivers! At one large commercial tug facility I watched a red-headed woodpecker hammer away at a heavy wooden timber at the top of the industrial crane apparatus!

Diana Doyle

2009 Nestbox Results

In 2009 no RHWO nested in our test boxes at Cedar Creek. Again bluebirds and tree swallows took advantage of our boxes. Below are the 2009 results.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Eggs/chicks</u>	<u>Date</u>
413	No activity	-	5/16/2009
414	Eastern Bluebird	5 chicks	5/16/2009
	Eastern Bluebird	5 eggs	6/30/2009
499	Eastern Bluebird	5 chicks	6/30/2009
565?	Tree Swallow	1 seen fledging	6/11/2009
566	Eastern Bluebird	2 eggs	6/30/2009
570	Eastern Bluebird	5 eggs	5/16/2009
	Eastern Bluebird	6 eggs	6/30/2009
649	Eastern Bluebird	5 eggs	6/30/2009

The total bluebirds fledged was about 33 and at least one tree swallow.

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Speciman for Mounting

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery is still looking for a RHWO specimen that it can mount to use at displays and events. If you should happen upon such a specimen that is in good condition, please place it in a freezer and immediately contact someone who is authorized to have migratory birds in their possession. Then contact us and let us know who has it so we can contact them and arrange to have it mounted.

RHWO Nesting Behavior and Species Interactions

As luck would have it, I've not only had the opportunity to watch these beautiful birds come and go at my feeders, but I've also been able to observe them quite closely during their courtship and nest attempts over the past 5 years.

They can be quite noisy birds especially in the early spring and their distinct call is easily recognized. However, not only are they good at making their presence known, but they can also be very aggressive toward other species of woodpeckers when claiming a territory.

During courtship and right before copulating, they would both give a very distinct call and actually seemed to prefer using one of two particular dead branches to carry out this ritual. These horizontal branches were also common areas where each bird would drum during the spring.

As the red-bellied woodpecker has expanded its range northward over the years, there has been debate on whether this is having a direct effect on the population of the red-headed woodpeckers within these areas. Contrary to these assumptions, my close personal observations have been quite the opposite. I have yet to see the red-headed woodpecker back down from *any* species of woodpecker and they seem to be particularly aggressive to both hairy and red-bellied woodpeckers and occasionally sapsuckers.

On three separate occasions now, I have witnessed red-bellied woodpeckers excavate a nest hole on my property only to be chased off by the red-headed woodpeckers which then took over the cavity and in two of the three cases used the cavity for nesting. So you could almost say that nesting in areas with other species of woodpeckers including the red-bellied woodpecker has been "beneficial" to the red-headed woodpecker. I have yet to see any obvious negative effect the red-bellied woodpecker is having on them in the area.

Even when red-bellied woodpeckers have tried to roost in nearby cavities at dusk, they would be chased off. This has been especially true early in the nesting season, but as the red-headed woodpeckers start to incubate this aggressiveness seems to lessen somewhat unless other species venture to close to the nest site.

Interesting is the fact that during the incubation period the male red-headed woodpecker has been the primary incubator of the nest. He has been sole incubator at night and for much of the time during the day as well. This particular pair is easy to recognize and separate the sexes apart with the female having more distinct black markings around her eyes and neck-line.

For approximately the first 10 days after the young hatched both parents actively fed them insects which were "hawked" from high in the air. Since then I also now offer them Superworms which are a large type of beetle larvae which can be purchased in most pet stores or off the internet. I place these in a dish similar to how you would offer mealworms to bluebirds and I truly believe this is the new red-headed woodpecker "candy" of the area during the summer. They simply devour them! This new delicacy of the sort is being very aggressively defended by both the male and female which now bring them back to the nest cavity to feed the young. When the young have had their fill they simply haul them off and wedge them in tree crevices and behind bark. As in the past when the young get closer to fledging, the parents will also start to feed them corn, peanuts, and shelled sunflower seeds.



It also seems that once the young have fledged, there is very little interaction with other woodpecker species in the area at all.

In closing, I'd like to add that although there are several natural food sources in the area, I would not consider my property to be prime red-headed woodpecker habitat. I reiterate to all the importance of leaving dead trees and snags in place. By doing so I've created an environment which sustains greater biodiversity, one in which this beautiful bird has obviously found a niche!

Rick Pertile
Minneapolis, MN & Birchwood, WI



Photo by Ed Stone

Winter Issue Feature Topic

The 2010 Winter issue's topic will be **Does the interaction between RHWO's and "telephone" poles effect the future of RHWO's?** Send your observations and references to scientific papers to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by January 15th. Please send observations only - no opinions! Also send any future topics to be featured in the newsletter. Thank you.

Next RhWR Meetings

The RhWR usually meets on a Wednesday each month at 7:00 pm at the Lund's Store 1 block west of 50th & France in Edina. The next meetings will be on **Nov. 18 and Jan. 20**. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to attend also. Check our website (www.RedheadRecovery.org) for current information.

"Thanks for providing food for me." Comment from young RHWO during the October snow storm in SW Minnesota.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
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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 \$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 and the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis at the rate of \$18/year. Please send my membership information and *Kingfisher* to the address below.

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