



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Fall 2010

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

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Note From the Editor

You may have been expecting the feature topic of “*Where do Minnesota red-headed woodpeckers go in the winter?*” in this issue. However it was decided to pre-empt that topic with the exciting news about the numbers of red-headed woodpeckers that were discovered at Camp Ripley. The Editor decided to feature articles that discuss natural resources on the country’s military facilities. In the past this has been a contentious issue. However, in recent times the policy of base commanders has been to nurture the natural resources, while continuing to perform their mission.

A case in point is the help in the recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker that the military is providing in Florida. In an article written and prepared by Jim Swan, for BIO 111 at Albuquerque TVI Community College, he states that the red-cockaded woodpecker is a good example of the effects of forest fragmentation. The preferred pine-wiregrass savannah habitat of the red-cockaded woodpecker was once widely distributed across the southeastern United States. However, fire management, deforestation, forestry practice, and other changes in land use have reduced and fragmented this once common and relatively contiguous ecosystem type. Consequently, remaining populations of the once abundant and widespread red-cockaded woodpecker are fragmented, small, and isolated.

He also commented that the historic distribution of the red-cockaded woodpecker included the southeastern United States. They ranged from Florida north to Virginia and west to eastern Texas and Oklahoma. In Oklahoma, they were restricted to the shortleaf pine area of southeastern Oklahoma. Several of the twenty or so large areas where the woodpeckers can still be found are on military bases, such as Eglin Air Force Base in the Florida panhandle.

The article also said that the top recovery tasks for the red-cockaded woodpecker include continued monitoring of individual populations, protecting and managing woodpecker habitat on public and private land, and continued research of red-cockaded woodpecker ecology.

Finally, the construction of artificial cavities shows promise as a useful management technique for establishing new colonies. The original recovery plan was revised in 1985.

Look for the “*Where do Minnesota red-headed woodpeckers go in the winter?*” feature topic in the Winter issue. Please send your observations or articles to the Editor.

A Note from the Chair

Another data collection season has drawn to a close at Cedar Creek. We ended the year with 23 nest trees and, for the first time we located a nest in an aspen tree. All previous 43 nests have been in either pin oaks or snags that were probably also oak. As previously reported, we know of at least 30 successful fledglings, many of whom are still present at this writing. We are convinced we missed a few nests, some probably on the private property that borders Durant Road on the east edge of Cedar Creek. Next year we will interview a few home owners in the area and try to gather more data. We see birds flying into this residential area every time we do our surveys.

Ari Waldstein, our intern at Cedar Creek, reports that many birds were still present as of November 2nd. This may be due to an abundant acorn crop and the unseasonably warm fall we have experienced. It will be interesting to see how many RHWO turn up on the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBA) in January. In the past, numbers have varied from a low of six to a high of 26.

On behalf of the whole group, I want to thank Ari for her excellent work and her upbeat spirit. Ari’s presence at Cedar Creek has freed others to spend more time surveying throughout Minnesota. She will be with us next year and we look forward to some exciting reports as we begin color leg-banding a few adults to see if some pairs are using the same nest trees in consecutive years.

Finally, we thank you, our members, who are making this project a reality. So far as we know, we are the only red-headed woodpecker recovery group in the country. And much of the data we have collected is new to the world of natural science. Keep reporting whenever you see groups of RHWO, and let’s keep those snags standing. While Cedar Creek is not generally open to the public, stay tuned as we are planning a spring Open House sometime in May when all can visit and tour Cedar Creek.

Chet Meyers

Factoid: Breeds in deciduous woodlands, especially beech or oak, river bottoms, open woods, groves of dead and dying trees, orchards, parks, open country with scattered trees, forest edges, and open wooded swamps with dead trees and stumps. Attracted to burns and recent clearings.

Winters in mature stands of forest, especially those with oaks.

From Cornell Lab of Ornithology “*All about Birds*”

Home, home on the range

by Chet Meyers

After a disappointing spring searching for clusters of red-headed woodpeckers (RHWO) in southeast, southwest, and central Minnesota, three members of our recovery project were in a car headed north on an overcast July day; our destination was Camp Ripley, a multi-faceted training center operated by the Minnesota National Guard. During the long cold winter of 2009-2010, we had been receiving reports from Nancy Dietz, in the Camp Ripley Environmental Office, regarding the presence of "a number" of RHWO in the Camp's environs. The words "a number" caught our attention, as our recovery program's main focus is to locate groups, or *clusters*, of RHWO in Minnesota in order to help protect and improve this species' habitat. At the time of our July trip, the only known cluster with more than 10 active pairs was located at the University of Minnesota's Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve in East Bethel. On the drive up, Mary Miller, our project's *cluster coordinator*, was excited at the prospect of finding *any* RHWO at Ripley, let alone "numbers." My wife Miriam and I were cautiously optimistic.

Camp Ripley is located about 40 miles northwest of St. Cloud in Morrison County. It is huge - over 53,000 acres - and serves as a training ground not only for the Minnesota National Guard but for Guards around the country. Most of the area is uninhabited and used for troop training maneuvers and firing range practice, which includes rifles, rockets, and other explosive ordinances. Close to 70% is forested, with about 20% in oak savanna and the remainder in wetlands, small lakes and the Mississippi and Crow Wing rivers which define the camp's eastern and northern boundaries.

Brian Dirks and Nancy Dietz from the Minnesota DNR Non-Game Program serve as the Camp's animal survey team. Ripley is home to two wolf packs, black bears, Blanding's turtles, and a wide variety of other game and non-game species. Early in 2009, Nancy became aware of our recovery program and enlisted Environmental Program staff to record incidental observations of red-headed woodpeckers. Tim Notch from the Nature Conservancy recorded an observation in March of 2009. Then Wade Lund, Central Lakes College (CLC) intern observed birds in January 2010, when most Minnesota RHWO have migrated south to warmer states. The fact that he found birds present in January was very encouraging; but no one had any idea how many birds might be in the Camp's vast acreage. Wade Lund, Beth Walters, and Matt Toenies, CLC interns, started breeding surveys and gathering data in the spring of 2010.

After gaining entrance to the Camp, Mary, Miriam and I met Brian and the three interns at the Camp's Environmental Office. Brian told us that most of the redheaded woodpecker sightings, were in the savanna areas; ironically these areas encompassed the two very large firing ranges or "impact areas." These are burned every year to facilitate maneuvers and target placement. We knew from our research at Cedar Creek that savannas need to be regularly burned in order to attract RHWO. With over ten square miles of savanna at Camp Ripley, the birds seem to be more scattered than tightly grouped as they are at Cedar Creek. As we drove the perimeter of the two firing ranges we were interrupted a couple of times by men on maneuvers and we had to move to another location. As it is not possible to enter the firing range areas due to unexploded munitions, all surveying has to be done at a distance with a scope. As Mary, Miriam, and I drove around the "impact range" areas we came to appreciate how difficult it would be to obtain accurate data on the number of RHWO present.

Wade then directed us to a couple of areas outside the firing range, where they had seen more than one pair of RHWO. The first bird we sighted was a juvenile and then, in quick succession, four adults. As the day wore on it was exciting to see at least five juveniles all in the company of adults. Very little nest verification has been done at Camp Ripley because the project is less than a year old. The three interns, Wade, Beth, and Matt are very upbeat and excited about continuing this study. The interns work under Dr. Bill Faber, who is a professor at Central Lakes College in Brainerd. The project is using the survey formats developed during our study at Cedar Creek to ensure compatibility in data collected at both sites. At the end of our tour, Brian gave us a stack of additional forms completed. So, how many RHWO are there at Camp Ripley? Presently no one knows because no one can enter the impact areas because of safety concerns due to the large number of unexploded ordinances. Through observation from the perimeter road, we can confirm some nesting on the

firing ranges but, for safety reasons, it is impossible to enter the areas and collect comprehensive data. Let's just say there are "a number" of RHWO present at Camp Ripley. Based on our day-long tour, we feel that conservatively there are at least 30 birds present and there may be twice that number.

Camp Ripley is not open to the general public, so birders will have to be content with second-hand reports. But we are encouraged by the enthusiasm of Brian and Nancy and the three interns with the Minnesota DNR Non-Game

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Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

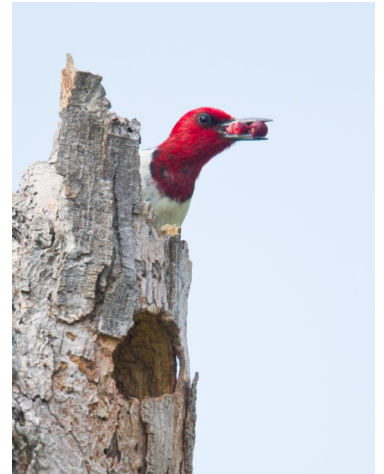
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Program. They will continue to collect data and next year we have arranged for a van-tour of the Camp for all the members of our project's steering committee.

It was an exciting day and I, for one, felt better than ever before about paying my Federal taxes. Through a program called Partners in Flight, the U.S. Defense Department (DOD) is coordinating a number of environmental programs, including preserving the largest existing colonies of red-cockaded woodpeckers at Eglin Air Force Base in the panhandle of Florida. (search Internet <red-cockaded woodpecker Eglin AFB>. Perhaps, in the future, the DOD will assist Camp Ripley's red-headed woodpeckers through the Partner's in Flight Program. In the mean time, we will keep you informed. about the Camp Ripley RHWOs in future issues of *The Redhead*.



Note: Republished with permission. Copyright 2010 E&E Publishing, LLC, February 18, 2010, Edited to fit space. <<http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2010/02/18/18greenwire-pentagon-making-room-for-wildlife-at-military-29358.html>>

Pentagon Making Room for Wildlife at Military Bases

By DINA FINE MARON of Greenwire Published: February 18, 2010

As residential development sprawls toward once-isolated military bases, the Pentagon finds itself managing mini-refuges for threatened and endangered animals and plants.

Consider Fort Benning, Ga., where the appearance of a state-protected gopher tortoise in the path of troops and tanks has been known to halt training exercises. It's Army policy to steer clear of the base's 3,000 or so tortoises and keep track of their burrows, said John Brent, the base's chief of environmental management.

So DOD has formed odd-bedfellow alliances with environmentalists to protect habitat in hopes of keeping wildlife off the endangered species list by keeping development away from military bases.

"The military has a tremendous interest in keeping candidate species off the list and helping endangered species recover and get taken off the list," said Bob Barnes, the nonprofit Nature Conservancy's DOD liaison. The presence of listed species, he said, restricts what the military can do on its land.

The Pentagon protects its interests through the 2003 Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI), which authorizes the services to partner with local governments or private groups to buy land or easements to serve as undeveloped buffers around bases.

Buffers tamp down competition with residential areas near bases for air space, radio frequencies and water supplies. They also provide habitat that might help wildlife avoid being listed as endangered or threatened. Moreover, program boosters say, nobody can argue that REPI is a Pentagon land grab, since local government, nonprofits or private owners usually hold the deeds to buffer areas.

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"Over the next 10 years, the program will probably be one of the most important programs within the Army for preserving land we have available for training and for other purposes," said Tad Davis, the Army's deputy assistant secretary for environment, safety and occupational health.

Fort Benning, where Davis once served, for example, has acquired more than 10,000 acres through easements, outright purchases and donations. Next month, the base plans to transfer about 150 gopher tortoises to the buffer lands ahead of planned construction on the base....

Red-cockaded woodpecker

The catalyst for the REPI program was the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, which roosts in longleaf pine trees in the Southeast and once halted training exercises at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Conservation efforts for the longleaf pine ecosystem, including purchases of about 15,000 acres around Fort Bragg over the last 15 years, allowed the woodpecker to rebound and pass its recovery goal (*E&ENews PM*, June 6, 2007).

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That program served as the pilot and model for REPI.

The Nature Conservancy helped facilitate the latest purchase of longleaf pine territory near Fort Bragg for the state of North Carolina and the Army last fall. The 1,200 acres cost \$11.3 million and will eventually be added to a local park.

The base's buffer lands have allowed the base to scrape away some of the white stripes that marked the bird's presence on tree trunks and remove about half of the signs warning soldiers not to disturb the birds, said Mike Lynch, Fort Bragg's director of plans, training and mobilization. Soldiers now train as needed at the base without worrying about harming the birds, he said.

But the Army isn't letting down its guard, he said.

"Even though we have recovered the woodpeckers," Lynch said, "at the end of the day, a single species threatened to shut us down. If we stop that management, we could slip back, and there are dozens of other species that could just as easily be impacted and put us back in those conditions."

Winter Issue Feature Topic

The Winter issue's topic will be "Where do Minnesota red-headed woodpeckers go in the winter?" Send your observations and references 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.

Next RhWR Meetings

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 on **Nov. 17th**. No December meeting. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website (www.RedheadRecovery.org) for current information.

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Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Program Membership Application

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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.

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