



# The REDHEAD

## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery



Spring 2024

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

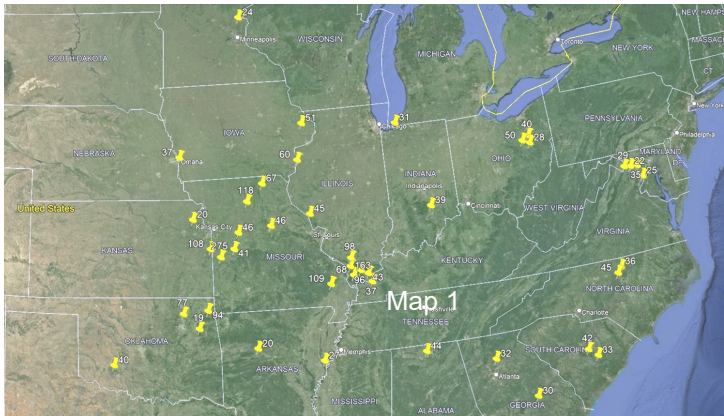
Vol. 18 No. 2

### RHWO NEWS

#### Red-headed Woodpeckers on Christmas Bird Counts

The Red-headed Woodpeckers (RHWO) that spent the winter at Cedar Creek (or anywhere else in Minnesota) did not get to see much of the April 8<sup>th</sup> eclipse. However, plenty of other RHWOs did. Many were in the path of totality.

I looked at the number of RHWOs counted on Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) since 1999, especially those with the highest numbers of RHWOs. Map 1 shows the average number of RHWOs counted from 1999 – 2023 for the CBC reporting the highest numbers of RHWOs. There is a clus-



ter of seven CBCs in southernmost Illinois and adjacent Missouri and Kentucky reporting high numbers of RHWOs and right in the path of totality. Goodly numbers of RHWOs in Arkansas, Indiana, and Ohio should also have been in the path of totality. Few RHWOs would likely have been in the path of totality through Pennsylvania, New York, New England, or Canada.

The CBC reporting by far the most RHWOs over the past 25 or so years is the Horton, MO Count with an astounding average of 275 RHWOs. Most of the really high RHWO CBCs have been in Missouri and adjacent parts of Illinois, Iowa, Oklahoma, and Iowa. Cedar Creek is by far the northernmost CBC to report close to 100 RHWOs on occasion. All the counts shown on Map 1 had significant variability in the number of RHWOs counted from year to year. Of the 48 CBCs with the highest numbers of RHWOs over the past 25 years, the average high RHWO count was 179 and average low count was just 3. This mirrors the Cedar Creek Bog Christmas Bird Count where the highest RHWO count was 98 and the lowest 0.

The variance in number of RHWOs counted from year to

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### A Note from the Chair

Spring 2024

Thanks to everyone for donating and renewing memberships in recent months. We have just recently sent off a large check to cover the wages of several research technicians for the research season which begins in the next couple of weeks at Cedar Creek ESR. The technicians will be placing transmitters on Red-headed Woodpeckers (RHWO) to learn more about their roosting behavior at night. That means the techs get to go out in the middle of the night to listen for, and find, the birds on their beeping transmitters.

Nesting surveys of the RHWOs at Cedar Creek with our volunteers will begin before the beginning of May and be ongoing for several months. We are also interested in keeping track of any RHWOs people see, anywhere, especially if they are nesting. So please let us know if you see any Red-headed Woodpeckers and where you saw them.

Siah St. Clair, Steering Committee Chair

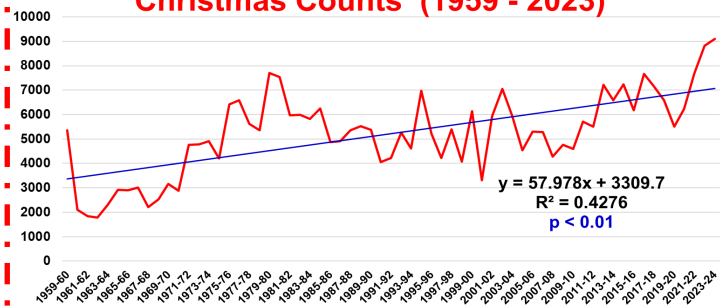
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year is higher in the states in the West and North and lower in the deep South. Presumably this is due in certain years to RHWOs migrating east from the Great Plains states and south from the northern portions of their range. No CBC location south of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi River shows the year-to-year variation that many counts do farther north or west.

I used the results from the recently completed 2023-2024 CBCs to update the RHWO totals from the earlier Counts years. Chart 1 shows that from 1959 through 2023 the

Chart 1

#### Red-headed Woodpeckers on U.S. Christmas Counts (1959 - 2023)



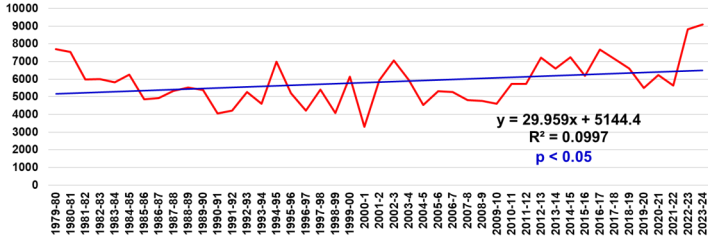
Numbers of Red-headed Woodpeckers recorded on U.S. Christmas Counts have increased significantly from 1959-60 through 2023-24.

*Continued on page 2, North America*

number of RHWOs counted on CBCs in North America has significantly increased. Some of this increase undoubtedly is due to an increased number of Christmas Counts, increased number of observers, and increased skill of observers in finding RHWOs. Chart 2 begins twenty years

Chart 2

Total Number of Red-headed Woodpeckers Counted on Christmas Counts (1979 - 2023)

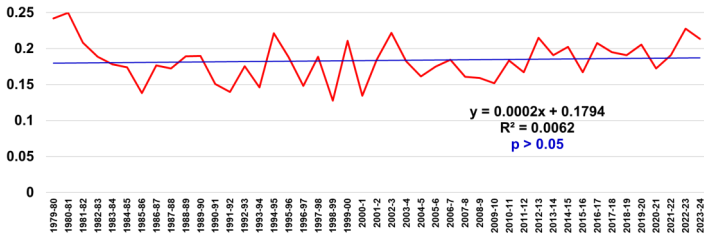


Numbers of Red-headed Woodpeckers recorded on U.S. Christmas Counts have increased significantly from 1979-80 through 2023-24.

later. This also shows an increasing trend, but not as strong a trend as one beginning with 1959. Chart 3 shows RHWOs counted from 1979 per hour. This is one way of

Chart 3

Red-headed Woodpeckers Counted on Christmas Counts in the United States (Number Counted per Hour)



Numbers of Red-headed Woodpeckers recorded on U.S. Christmas Counts per hour have not changed significantly from 1979-80 through 2023-24.

trying to account for effort. Here there is no significant trend, and the trend line is essentially flat. So, on a continent wide basis, I find no evidence of a decrease in RHWO wintering populations as measured by Christmas Counts. How can this not be good news?

Chart 4 shows RHWO numbers counted on Minnesota Christmas Counts. There is no significant trend. However, it is misleading. The occasionally high numbers in the 1970s and 1980s are due to RHWOs found on Christmas

Continued in next column

Note From the Editor

You will notice there is no reference to the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) website in the "RhWR Contact Information" below. That is because the RhWR will be setting up a new website in the very near future. The RhWR thanks the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis for its attempt to get a website up on their platform. The domain name of the new website will be "RedheadWoodpeckerRecovery.org". The RhWR hopes to have a rudimentary site up in about a week. Within a month the completed site will be up and running. With this new site, we would like to have a webmaster to administer the site. Please let me know you would like to help with the website!

You will also notice that Dr. West's blog link isn't there. The University has decided that all University related sites need to conform to their formats and until Dr. West can reformat the blog it will not be available.

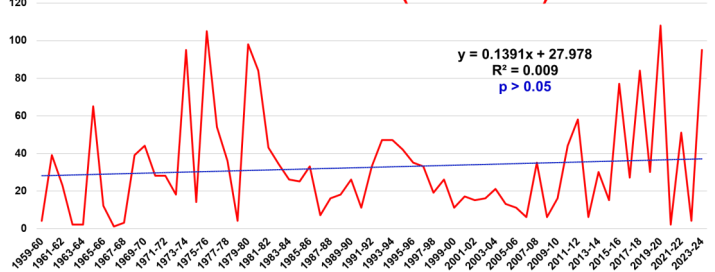
So watch for RHWOs and have a good summer!

Jerry Bahls, Editor

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Chart 4

Red-headed Woodpeckers on Minnesota Christmas Counts (1959 - 2023)



Counts mostly in southern and southeastern Minnesota. These Counts have found few RHWOs after a peak in the early 80s. The Minnesota RHWO Counts since then have been dominated by the birds found on the Cedar Creek Count. Since 1999, 607 RHWOs have been reported on the Cedar Creek Bog Christmas Count and only 184 on all other Minnesota Christmas Counts. This speaks to the importance of wintering habitat for these woodpeckers.

Jim Howitz

**Factoid:** "Red-headed woodpeckers are one of the most omnivorous woodpecker species. Their diet includes a wide variety of insects, spiders, earthworms, nuts, seeds, berries, wild and cultivated fruit and occasionally small mammals. These woodpeckers are also known to eat young or eggs from the nests of bluebirds, house sparrows and chickadees. Occasionally, they can also be seen eating bark."

Source: Myers, P., R. Espinosa, C. S. Parr, T. Jones, G. S. Hammond, and T. A. Dewey. 2024. The Animal Diversity Web (online). <https://animaldiversity.org>. University of Michigan

RhWR Contact Information

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## New Discoveries, Triumphs, and Tragedy at a RHWO Nest



Red-headed Woodpeckers (RHWO) have many challenges to successfully raise young from eggs to fledglings. Sometimes first nests fail and the adults have to try again. Few nests, however, have the triumphs and tragedies that RHWO parents, Tomek and Izza, had at their 2021 nest, all within 35 days. Tomek and Izza had been successful nesters before at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve.

The first challenge was a fairly regular one at RHWO nests. A Southern Flying Squirrel wanted the cavity. Male RHWOs guard their nests from intruders at night, and from June 7 to June 28, Tomek had 25 "encounters" with a flying squirrel. Four of the encounters required Tomek to "poke" the flying squirrel with its beak when it became aggressive about getting into the cavity. Tomek was a good guardian and successfully repulsed these usurpation attempts. Triumph #1.



On June 16, at 1:10 AM, a Fisher climbed the tree and attempted predation on Tomek and the nestlings inside the nest cavity. They would have made a tasty meal. But Tomek knew to lie at the very bottom of the nest cavity protecting the nestlings, and the Fisher was not able to reach into the nest far enough to get at the woodpeckers. Triumph # 2.

On June 24, both a tragedy and triumph occurred. At 1:54 AM the entire nest tree fell down. A serious tragedy. The tree fell flat on the ground, but



with the nest hole facing up. A triumph. Amazingly the camera and its frame were not damaged, and the camera was still aimed at the nest and functioning. At 6:09 AM Tomek finds the nest on the ground by the sound of the nestlings begging for food. It was amazing and a triumph that the nestlings did not die when the tree hit the ground and that the parents found them in this new and strange location. At 6:11 both



Tomek and Izza were feeding the nestlings. Finding and feeding RHWO nestlings in a new location on the ground had never been recorded before.

At 12:28 PM 2 members of the research team discovered that the tree had fallen, that the nestlings were alive, and the parents upset and nearby. They discovered that the tree, on impact, had broken into several sections. After consideration, they dug a deep hole and "re-planted" the section of the tree containing the nest. At 1:11 PM, 43 minutes after discovering the nest was down, they left with the nest in its new upright location.

At 1:15 PM Tomek is at the nest in its new location, and at 1:29 PM he is



*Continued on page 4, Bull Snake*

feeding the nestlings. At 1:44 PM Izza is feeding the nestlings also. In all, Tomek and Izza fed the nestlings 103 times during this very strange day for them. That is about 2/3 the normal daily feedings.

All goes well for the next week, and then tragedy strikes again on July 2. At 8:10 PM a Bull Snake is recorded at and in the nest and the nestlings are eaten. See picture on previous page. As sad as this is, life does go on. RHWOs know how to deal with nest failure. Tomek and Izza returned the next year and nested successfully in a nearby tree.

Siah St. Clair

**Summer Newsletter:**

In the Summer issue of "The REDHEAD" Jim Howitz will review the populations of Red-headed Woodpeckers during the summer by analyzing the data of the Breeding Bird Surveys across the country and specifically in the Upper Midwest and Minnesota.

**Next RhWR Steering Committee**

The RhWR Steering Committee usually meets on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm every 3 months. The next *virtual* meeting will be on May 15, 2024 at 7:00 pm. If you would like to participate, please contact Siah St. Clair to be added to the call list. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage friends to attend also.

**Important Dates**

Steering Committee May 15, 2024  
ACM Board Meeting May 20, 2024  
ALL meetings are *virtual* until further notice.

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

**Save that Snag!**

Place  
Stamp  
Here



**Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery 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 (\$50 is suggested rate)! Please send my membership information to the address at right.

*I'd like to renew!* Renew my RhWR membership for \$20/year (\$50 is suggested rate).

*Yes, I'd like to join Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis also!* Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (\$20, \$50 suggested) and the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (\$20) at the rate of \$40/year. Please send my membership information to the address at right.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Memo line: Redhead Woodpecker Recovery or RhWR