



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Spring 2008

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 2 No. 2

Nestbox Information

A Note from the Chair

Nestboxes Placed at Cedar Creek

Following training for the red-headed woodpecker (RHWO) survey at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve, nestboxes were placed by Nestbox Committee Chair Jack Hauser with the help of Dan Kahl and Earl Gransee. A couple of boxes were placed in undisclosed locations to protect them from being disturbed. The boxes were designed and built by Jack and filled with wood chips. The boxes will be closely monitored over the spring and summer to determine if they will be accepted by RHWO's and to keep starlings out of them. They are being hug by metal hooks to keep raccoons and other predators from getting into them.

This is the first placement of nestboxes by members of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR). It is hoped that additional boxes can be placed in areas where there are known clusters of RHWO's.

If anyone has a desire to place a nestbox, please visit our website at www.RedheadRecovery.org and review the "Red-headed Woodpecker Nestbox Advisory". Then if you place a box, please send the RhWR a message letting us know where it is and then monitor it closely.



Nestbox placed at Cedar Creek

The Latin name for red-headed woodpecker is *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*.

With a little help from our friends

We had an exciting orientation and training program on March 29th at Cedar Creek Ecosystems Science Reserve. It began with a brief history and ecosystem briefing about Cedar Creek by Associate Director Jeffery Corney. This was followed by training on what was expected for the Red-headed Woodpecker (RHWO) survey by Central Region Nongame Wildlife Specialist Liz Harper. She asked us to be on the lookout for other species of concern, which includes avian, reptilian and mammalian species. She also gave us training on the equipment we would be using to collect data about the RHWO. Volunteers were then given their area assignments.

This was especially exciting for me, because fourteen individuals showed up committed to survey the Cedar Creek RHWO population, and collect data on nesting habitat. It's a real joy to work with such enthusiastic birders, all seeking improvements in habitat for this beautiful, and increasingly rare, bird.

In addition to our work at Cedar Creek, we will focus much of this spring and summer trying to locate viable clusters i.e. more than one breeding pair) of RHWO across the state of Minnesota. Our intent, once we locate a cluster, is to work with landowners to preserve this habitat. Often that means simply encouraging folks to not cut down dead trees

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It's Time to Renew

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all of its revenue from its membership dues. After a little over a year of our existence, it is time to renew your membership. The dues remain at \$5/year. Please make check to Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis and send your renewal dues to -

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

Thank you for your continued support.

The following article is reprinted with permission from the Zumbro Valley Audubon Society. The article originally was published in the "2007 Chester Woods Tracker".

Chester Woods Red-Headed Woodpecker Recovery Program

As readers may remember, Red-Headed Woodpeckers used to be quite common throughout Southern Minnesota. They are now a rare sight. Current estimates are that populations have declined by as much as 90% since the 1960's, and that the current population is declining by 5%/year. As reported on the Minnesota Red-Headed Woodpecker Recovery Website: (www.RedheadRecovery.org)

"The top reason for Red-Headed Woodpecker decline is the loss of woodlot habitat. Red-Heads favor woodlots with a significant number of dead snags and trees with dead branches (termed "wildlife trees"). Woodlot management in the last 50 years has encouraged the removal of such wildlife trees."

Friends of Chester Woods have joined with Zumbro Valley Audubon to begin a red-headed woodpecker recovery program within Chester Woods Park. The purpose of this effort is to help re-establish a healthy red-headed woodpecker population in the Park and hopefully, in the future extend this effort to other areas. We also wish to thank the leaders of the Minnesota Red-Headed Woodpecker Recovery Program (www.RedheadRecovery.org) for inspiring and assisting this effort.

Following the advice of Richard King of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (<http://www.wnrmag.com/stories/2005/aug05/red.htm>), and with consent of Chester Woods Park staff, we have selected eight sites within Chester Woods Park that appear to be suitable habitat for red-headed woodpeckers. We have selected groups of 4 to 5 mature poplar/aspen trees (60 to 80 ft tall) and girdled them. Over a period of months the trees will die and provide an excellent opportunity for red-headed woodpeckers and other cavity nesting birds to colonize these dead trees and branches. Most of these habitat trees will not be obvious to park patrons, but if you look closely, you may see a few. Look for signage designating the tree near the beach house. If you find it, keep a close eye out in the future for the bright-colored cheery birds that we hope will find welcoming new homes here.



Photo by Ruthann Yaeger

Making saw cuts.



Photo by Ruthann Yaeger

Removing bark and cambium layer to create girdle.

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Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

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Did you Know?

At one time the Red-headed Woodpecker was targeted by sportsmen because of its brilliant red plumage, as an agricultural pest, and for damage to telephone poles. (from <http://audubon2.org/watchlist/viewSpecies.jsp?id=176>)

They often fly-catch, swooping low across a highway or along the shoulder of a road after flying insects. (from <http://www.enature.com/fieldguides/detail.asp?recnum=BD0430>)

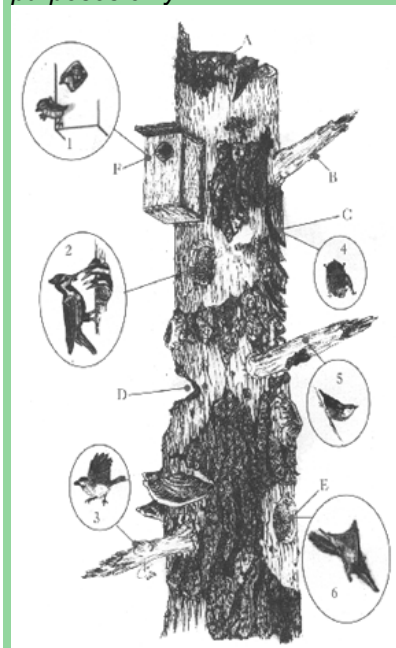
Courtesy of Alyssa DeRubeis

TIPS FOR CREATING SNAGS

Snags may be created from living trees if there is a shortage of safe natural snags. Created snags can be expected to last for a long period of time. Poor quality or deformed trees, such as those with broken tops or large branches, make excellent snags.

- **Snags can be dangerous.** Locate them well away from trails, roads, buildings, and other structures.
- **Select conifers for snag creation** as they normally last longer than deciduous trees. Snag trees should be at least 14" in diameter.
- **Top or girdle trees at or above the first whorl of branches**, but at least 14 feet high (ideally, much higher). Smaller trees may be useful for some cavity nesters, as are stumps which are at least 3 feet high.
- **A jagged top (A) will decay faster** and supply more habitat than a smooth-topped tree.
- **Large branches (B)**, extending at least 2 feet out from the trunk, can be cut to create foraging habitat on live trees not intended to be used as snags.
- **Roosting slits (C) and cavity starts (D)** may be added to created snags at the time of topping or girdling. However, do not put these features, or bird boxes, on existing snags.
- **Roosting slits may be used by most bats (4) and some birds**, such as brown creepers. The slits should be at least 8" deep and 2" wide, and angled sharply upward into the cambium layer.
- **Cavity starts allow decay** causing fungus to enter the tree wound. These cavities may be used by flying squirrels, swallows, kestrels and smaller owls. They should be at least 6" deep and 4" high. In time, as rot progresses, these cavities may be used by a large variety of cavity nesters, such as Pileated woodpeckers (2), nuthatches (5), chickadees (3) and flying squirrels (6). Over 66 varieties of birds and animals in the pacific northwest use snag tree cavities (E) for nesting or foraging.
- **Bird boxes (F)** of varying sizes will host many species, such as wood ducks (1) and swallows. They can be erected in most forest stands depending on target species and stand characteristics. Bird boxes, however, do not replace the need for snags.

Dead or dying trees, called snags, provide habitat for many forest species. This illustration shows how some practices can be used on live trees to create snags. Not all practices or wildlife shown here should be on the same tree. They are shown together for demonstration purposes only.



- Reprinted from Washington State Department of Natural Resources

Stories with the Red-headed Woodpecker

Years ago when my wife was in a parochial grade school, she remembers reading a story about an old woman wearing a red scarf, black dress and a white apron. This old woman performed some kind of bad deed and was turned into a red-headed woodpecker. Upon searching the internet I came across four stories that deal with red-headed woodpeckers. The story by Phoebe Cary [Adapted] entitled "*The Old Woman Who became a Woodpecker*" comes closest to what she described. Read it at www.mainlesson.com/display.php?author=olcott&book=holidays&story=woodpecker. She also has a poem that is even closer which you can read at www.foundationwebsite.org/TheLegendOfTheWoodpecker.htm. Another poem which has the same theme was written by Alice E. Ball and published with a series of other poems about birds. These are very interesting and bears a look at www.kellscraft.com/yearwithbirds2.html#rwoodpecker. However I suspect that all of these stories are based on Native American legends similar to the one published by Simon Otto. The legend tells of Nanaboozhoo taking the form of an old man who is hungry and appears to be starving. He comes upon an old woman who is baking cakes and asks for some. The old woman initially agrees to make him one, but it turns out so big that she decides to make another one for him and saves the first one. However this one turns out to be bigger than the first one. She then decides that the old man doesn't deserve any cakes and sends him away. This angers him and he turns her into a red-headed woodpecker reflecting her attire, as in the other stories. This story can be read at <http://homepage.mac.com/dmeredith13/story.htm>.

The final story which deals with red-headed woodpeckers was related by H. R. Schoolcraft. As you may remember from your elementary school days, Schoolcraft was the first European to discover the source of the Mississippi River. Again it is a Native American legend. You can read it at www.rickwalton.com/folktale/junior06.htm. I hope you enjoy these stories.

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or snags. The one thing we have learned over the past year is how important snags are for RHWO nesting and food caching activities.

Anyone can help in this effort. So, as you venture forth on spring birding trips, keep an eye out for Red-headed Woodpeckers. And, if you find a couple of nesting pairs within close proximity (say ¼ mile), fill out and return our Cluster Documentation Form. Just visit our web site <www.RedheadRecovery.org> and click on the "Red Head Info." heading and scroll down to "Location." At the bottom of that page you will find a place to click on for a Cluster Documentation Form. And remember to "Save that snag!"

- Chet Meyers

Note from the Editor -

As you can see "The REDHEAD" has expanded to four pages. The red-headed woodpecker on the front page has been changed to a cropped photo by Jim Williams. Some of the standard pieces of information have been moved. In order to continue publishing a four page version, articles from the membership would be a tremendous help. Thanks!!

- The Editor

Next RhWR Meeting

The RhWR meets on the 2nd Wednesday each month at (7:00 pm) at the Lund's Store 1 block west of 50th & France in Edina. The next meeting is will on May 14, 2008. All are welcomed and encouraged to attend. Check our website for current information.

Save that Snag!

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

Place
Stamp
Here



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Program Membership Application

Yes, I'd like to join! Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery at the rate of \$5/year! Please send my membership information to the address below.

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 \$13/year. Please send my membership information and *Kingfisher* to the address below.

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