



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Summer 2014

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 8 No. 3

RHWO NEWS

New RHWO Banding Protocols at Cedar Creek

For a brief two-week period in July, we held a moratorium on banding RHWO at Cedar Creek. This was necessary in order to clarify what the project's overall banding goals were. Banding provides us lots of valuable information, but is not essential to this year's research project which focused on using cavity cameras to observe RHWO nesting – counting eggs, hatchlings, and fledglings. The goals of our banding have more to do with nest fidelity, mate fidelity, territory needs, etc. Siah St. Clair, Jim Howitz, and Lance Nelson pulled together solid protocols (look for more details in the Fall issue) for our banding efforts which was approved by our Recovery team members at our July meeting, so banding has resumed.

Looking to the Future -

What do we want to accomplish in the next five years?

As of the spring of 2015, the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Project will be eight years old. Time flies when you are having fun. And, in addition to our hard work, we have had a lot of FUN! The past three years much of our energy has been devoted to research at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR). It has been time well-spent and the results of this research will provide never-before-documented information on the species. We hope for a number of academic and popular magazine articles to come forth.

Our primary goal has always been to reverse the decline and encourage the recovery of RHWO through the **creation, preservations and restoration of habitat**, research and public education. Because so much of our effort has been devoted to research it's time to reconsider what more we can do to **create, preserve and restore habitat**. Most of our efforts in this direction have been to work with land managers at Sherburne NWR, The Belwin Conservancy, Nerstrand Big Woods State Park and The Minnesota River Valley NWR. We have also sought to locate isolated clusters of RHWO throughout the state, and work with land owners to help them understand RHWO habitat needs.

Future (Continued on page 4)

A Note from the Chair

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Summer 2014

We are wrapping up another year of research at Cedar Creek. Brittney and Laura have braved sun, mosquitoes, bull snakes, deer ticks, and other adversities in order to monitor nest trees with our cavity-camera. You can expect a final report on their findings in our next issue of The Red-head.

We are very excited that Brittney will be back with us next year to make this a two-year study and one that U of M faculty member Todd Arnold can use as the foundation for future academic journal articles.

Beginning this fall, Tom Beer will help us re-invigorate our membership base. At our next RHWO meeting we will be exploring how we can better communicate with a wider public regarding the fate of our RHWO friends. We have learned so much during the past seven years at Cedar Creek that we want to get that information out to both the academic and the general public.

We have a lead on one possible popular birding magazines and the potential for more work with the Minnesota Conservation Volunteer (DNR) magazine. Work afield has gone very well with a successful burn at the Belwin Conservancy and the creation of some fantastic oak-savanna habitat at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. If you have a chance please visit the Blue Hill Trail at Sherburne NWR and let us know when you see Red-headed Woodpeckers. They were spotted there earlier this year.

Chet Meyers, Chair

Photo by Brittany Larson



Note From the Editor

The feature topic this month is - "How can you help with the recovery of red-headed woodpeckers?" This has been the key question since the inception of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery. Initially the thought was to build nestboxes and put them in RHWO habitat. Unfortunately, that didn't impress them. We then did a literature search to see if there was research that would help with our question. We found there was not a lot written about them.

We discovered there was a sizeable population of RHWO's at UM's Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve in East Bethel, MN. Why were they there? We contacted the University proposing to study them at Cedar Creek. We have spent the last 7 years studying them. The article in this issue discusses what we have learned that will help with the recovery of red-headed woodpeckers.

Also included in this issue is an interim report from Brittany Larson about the research this year.

- Jerry Bahls, Editor

RHWO Recovery Actions

The literature and our research has confirmed that redheaded woodpeckers (RHWO's) desire an area that has a sparse density of trees that include many large dead trees. They use the dead trees for nest sites, cache sites and as perch areas for searching for insects, both flying and ground based. Red-headed woodpeckers feed on both flying and ground insects. To provide the needed dead trees where there is a dearth of them, trees can be girdled to kill some trees. Because of the threat of emerald ash borer, the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) recommends girdling ash trees.

To facilitate this feeding behavior, they like a very open understory to give them better visibility of the area. RhWR observers noted that they seem to prefer slow flying beetles. They seem to have a favorite perch where they take the insects to remove their wings and tenderize them by smashing the beetles on the perch before eating them or feeding them to their young. To provide this open understory, land owners and managers can burn the area to reduce the brush and small trees, remembering to retain the dead trees. They can

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Membership Dues

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all of its operating revenue from its membership dues. The RhWR dues for new members is \$15. New members will receive a packet, which will include the RhWR button and a sew-on patch as well as the latest "The REDHEAD". Our membership year is July 1 - June 30 (all memberships will expire on June 30 of the year the membership was established). Membership Renewal is \$10/year and will expire on June 30 of the period of renewal. A Lifetime Membership will be awarded for any donation of \$500 or more.

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.

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also reduce the brush by removing it mechanically, but it may not be as effective as burning it, which also exposes the soil surface allowing the RHWO's to forage on the bare soil.

During the late summer, RHWO's switch to a more mast based diet. At Cedar Creek this is provided primarily by pin and burr oaks. Although last year, a reduced crop of pin oak acorns, forced the RHWO's to utilize the good crop of hazelnuts. Thus a good supply of mast, like acorns, is very desirable to attract RHWO's to an area. Planting mast trees like oaks, hickory and their historical favorite beechnut will be part of the mix needed to attract RHWO's. Hazelnut are not recommended due to their tendency to fill the open understory very rapidly.

All of the clusters of RHWO's are in areas that have very few starlings and may be a factor in attracting RHWO's to an area. Reducing conditions that attract starlings should be a primary incentive for any potential RHWO site.

While feeding RHWO's will probably not attract them to an area if all the other necessary conditions are not present, it may be a contributing factor if everything else is present. They like peanuts, sunflower seeds and corn. Other mast can be offered if available.

Finally, patience will be a necessary element in getting RHWO's to your site. They tend to return to the same area to nest each year and young appear to also return to the area they were fledged.

Jerry Bahls

Interim Report on This Season's Studies

My favorite part about field research is not knowing what I will encounter on a given day of work. My natural curiosity goes wild every time I see a hole in a tree. Looking inside those unassuming holes is like playing "Let's Make a Deal." I investigate each hole with great anticipation for what it hides. An old, dry snag looks so barren from the outside, but can cradle so much life inside its hollow trunk. This summer my field assistant, Laura Jaskiewicz, and I have been exploring the nest cavities of Red-headed Woodpeckers living at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve in East Bethel, MN. Under the direction of Dr. Todd Arnold and Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery, we are using a color camera mounted on telescoping pole to monitor over 30 nests and are archiving photos and video of each stage of the nest process. From mid-May through the end of July we have already taken over 3,200 photos of over 60 cavities in trees (some belonging to critters other than Red-headed Woodpeckers). Three days a week we peer into each Red-headed Woodpecker nest cavity to see how each brood is progressing, monitoring changes and recording success rates. Although the nesting season is still active, our early observations from the 2014 season show that about 85% of the nests have fledged at least one juvenile. This is a slightly higher success rate than in 2012 and 2013, which were closer to 80%.

Previous research had indicated a typical Red-headed Woodpecker pair has fewer babies fledge from the nest than they originally laid eggs. My research has been partially focused on gathering evidence pointing to brood reduction, and observing possible causes. Of the 15 nests we monitored from egg laying through successful fledging, all of them lost at least one egg or nestling in the nest. Although many pairs laid five or even eight eggs, a month and a half later at the time of fledging only two or three nestlings remained alive in the crowded cavity. We continue to pursue the cause of this brood reduction. Many hypotheses remain, including infertile eggs, sibling competition, and parasitism. By simply taking the time to look inside the nests each week we have already seen things we did not expect, including eggs not hatching, a nestling seemingly bleeding from insect bites, and nestlings that are considerably less developed than their siblings. Most photos we take lead us to ask more questions about brood reduction, and occasionally suggest an answer. My hope for this and next summer is that by observing the often hidden nest habits of these birds with our nest camera we can learn more about brood reduction. This will provide the key to understanding why their population is in decline.

-Brittney Larson



Future (Continued from page 1)

- * Is there more we could be doing to create/preserve habitat?
- * Despite our wonderful web site, we have kept a pretty low profile. What could we do to get the word out to more people?
- * Should we be communicating more with other regions of the country where RHWOs are, or have been, present?
- * What about holding a national RHWO festival at Cedar Creek?
- * Should we be more visible and vocal in advocating the creation of oak savanna habitat?

Please take time to consider where you would like to see the RHWO Recovery Project in 2020. We will be discussing all of this at our August 20th meeting. Send your ideas/feedback to me at chetmeyers@visi.com.

Chet Meyers, Chair

Summer Issue Feature Topic

The Fall issue's topic will be - "Why have a banding protocol?" Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by October 15th. 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 August 20, 2014. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website at 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 \$10/year.

Yes, I'd like to join Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis also! Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (\$15) and the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (\$12) at the rate of \$27/year. Please send my membership information and *Kingfisher* to the address below.

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