



# The REDHEAD



## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Summer 2015

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 9 No. 3

### RHWO NEWS

#### VISIT TO NECEDAH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

in  
CENTRAL WISCONSIN

By Mary Miller

The Red-Headed Woodpecker Recovery has been aware of the efforts of Necedah NWR over many years to restore oak savannas on their 44,000 acre refuge. Established in 1939, the land is a mosaic of forested uplands, wetlands and oak savanna which, along with an adjacent state wildlife area, provides nearly 100,000 acres of high quality habitat for a great many native plants and animals. In addition to more abundant species, it provides important habitat for several endangered species such as whooping cranes, Karner blue butterflies and timber wolves --- and is playing an important role in stemming the decline of the red-headed woodpecker.

Carol Carter and I visited Necedah on June 21, 22 and 23. We arrived on a sunny, calm Sunday evening and drove around a small portion of the refuge near the visitor center, a beautiful building erected in 2011. The next morning we arose to thunderstorms and the worry that we might miss out on seeing much of the refuge and its inhabitants. We arrived at the center in a downpour and explained the reason for our visit: to see first hand the oak savannas and whether red-headed woodpeckers were still breeding there as they had when Rich King was involved in savanna restoration eight years ago. To our surprise, Doug Staller, the refuge manager, came out to meet us and within ten minutes we were in his vehicle touring the refuge. Doug, who came to Necedah several years ago from Kenai NWR in Alaska, gave us a tour which included most of the six oak savanna areas. He explained the various stages of restoration based on different fire regimes, primarily on how often controlled burns were undertaken. He particularly stressed the need to make certain that savanna habit would be available far into the future, not only for the woodpeckers but the many other species that live in grasslands.

In addition to the savannas, Doug showed us sundews (a bog plant) that were flowering not far distant from cactus, illustrating the remarkable diversity of this beautiful landscape. He also spoke to us about their programs to help

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### A Note from the Chair

Notes from the chair

Summer 2015

Lots of good news on many fronts. The Brittnay's have identified 31 with 2 second brood nests and had some excitement with losing a camera in one of the cavities. Mary Miller and Carol Carter had a great visit at Necedah NWR (see attached article) and discovered that there are still plenty of RHWO present and that the staff is still monitoring them. This is great news, as we feared with the departure of Rich King from Necedah that the project had fallen on hard times. Such is not the case. We will be staying in much closer contact with the Necedah folks.

In late June, Mary Miller and I had a good visit and survey with Lynnette Anderson at the Belwin Conservancy, near Afton, MN and hopefully provided her some ideas on improving the habitat for RHWO. There is a lot of beautiful savanna-type land, and they did have a successful burn this year, but we felt there are not enough dead trees. As much as she hates to kill oak trees, Lynette is preparing to tackle that problem.

Keith Olstad visited and helped arrange a survey of Big Marine Park in Washington County where a cluster of RHWO had been report three years ago. He found a few birds, but no evidence of a healthy colony of birds. We received reports, and are awaiting verification of a healthy cluster of six RHWO at Double Eagle golf course, that is not presently on our watch list. And finally, I met with Kris Spaeth a staff member at Sherburne, and we completed our third annual survey there. We identified 63 species of birds and verified a RHWO nest on the newly renovated Blue Hill Trail. There have also been reports, from reliable sources, of RHWO sightings on Sherburne's Manomen Trail. This is very exciting, as for the ten years, between 2002 and 2012, we had no verified nesting of RHWO within Sherburne's boundaries. Now we have three years in a row with birds nesting in the NWR. We also continued to monitor a small group of RHWO in a suburban development just outside Sherburne's northern boundary.

In summary, our research within Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve continues, but so does our advocacy work outside of Cedar Creek in greater Minnesota, and that is important.

Chet Meyers RhWR

## Note From the Editor

Brittney Larson and Brittany Turner with the help of Jim Howitz and the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery are in the last stages of data collection of the nest sites on Cedar Creek Ecosystems Science Reserve (CCESR). It looks like more adults (76) have returned to Cedar Creek this year over 2014. This year the volunteers concentrated on finding nest sites or potential nest site so that the "Brittney's" (sic) could observe egg laying activity.

"The REDHEAD" this quarter contains a narrative of Mary Miller's visit to Necedah NWR to see if the RHWO's are still nesting there. See the initial report of RHWO's at Necedah NWR in the Summer 2007 issue. See her report for the answer and view a couple of Carol Carter's photos.

The RhWR has made an effort to accurately document the locations of the RHWO's nests in Cedar Creek. See the article on Nest Site Map to get more information on how to access this map and the data.

Finally I have added an appeal for help with our website. Carol Carter, who has ably performed this function can no longer do it. Either contact Chet Meyers or myself if you are interested. You don't need to live in the metro area and attend any meeting (although both would be desirable). We have a good website, we don't want to see it deteriorate.

Thanks for all your help!!!

Jerry Bahls, Editor

## Redheads Return

Only two Red-headed Woodpeckers overwintered this year at the Cedar Creek Ecology Science Reserve. The first of the woodpeckers that spent the winter elsewhere returned by May 1. However, we kept noticing "new" birds throughout. Only two Red-headed Woodpeckers overwintered this year at the Cedar Creek Ecology Science Reserve. The first of the woodpeckers that spent

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## Nest Site Map

In 2008, the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) began its study of red-headed woodpeckers in the Cedar Creek Ecosystems Science Reserve (CCESR). With the help of about 20 volunteers, red-headed woodpecker nesting sites were located. At each of the nest sites (trees), data was recorded on Tree Location (GPS coordinates), Tree Status (Alive or Dead), Tree Species, Tree Height, Tree Diameter (DBH [diameter at breast height]), Nest Cavity Height, Diameter at Cavity Height (DCH), Cavity Location, Cavity Orientation, Nearest Tree and Nature of Understory. Most of this data was collected each year through 2014. Since little has changed over these years, not all of this data will be collected in 2015.

Using the free ArcGIS software of ESRI, the RhWR has been able to create a map that very accurately shows the location of each nest site. If you scroll in on the map, you can actually see some of the nest trees. The nest sites are shown for each year from 2008 through 2014. Year 2015 will be added when the information is available. In addition to the nest location, most of the data (as noted above) collected can be seen simply by clicking on the nest site icon. A box will pop up showing the data.

If you would like to view the map, go to <http://audubon.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=e48f6e48884c4297ac3ce776fb7ec8b1>. This is all one "word", ignore line breaks and the <> symbols. This URL will be on our web page and linked, if you have trouble accessing the website. When you get to the website, it will show a map of CCESR. To show the nest sites, click on the middle icon above the word "Legend" in the left column. When you hover over the icon, it will display "Show Contents of Map". After you click on the icon the Contents of the map will appear. Click on any or all of the boxes next to a year and the nest sites will appear. Go to the site often to view data updates.

Jerry Bahls

## RhWR Contact Information

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The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery is looking for someone to be our Webmaster for our website. Knowledge about websites is desirable, but not essential. Our current need is maintenance of the site and an ability to keep it up-to-date by uploading current information for our members and the public. If you can help, contact Chet Meyers or Jerry Bahls. See inset at left for contact info.

several endangered species and even managed to find a whooper for us to see (my first!). Carol and I learned much not only about Necedah NWF, but also about the intricacies of maintaining a diversity of habitats on this large and varied landscape. We are very indebted to Doug for his hospitality and for his taking time out of his busy schedule to show us the savannas and talk to us about the important conservation work being done on the refuge. By the time we arrived back at the visitor center, the sun was starting to make an appearance so Carol and I ate our picnic lunch and headed out to the nearest savanna.

To our complete delight we located eight pairs of red-heads and two nest cavities. Our search was made easier by the fact that the adults were in constant quest for food for their nestlings. One of the best attributes of oak savannas for bird watchers is the ease of finding birds and even nest cavities in an open grassland setting. Carol found a nest of eastern kingbirds as well and if we had spent more time, I am sure we would have found more red-heads as well as other species. However, Carol wanted to photograph the pair of red-heads that were nesting in front of the visitor center while I wanted to walk a short trail through an open woodland that displayed red-headed woodpeckers on the trailhead kiosk. We were both successful; Carol took many pictures of the adults at their nest and I found two pairs (one at their nest cavity) in the woodland. A great bonus at the end of my trail was a wildlife viewing tower which overlooked a large wetland complex. At the top of the tower, I was rewarded with not only a beautiful panorama, but a pair of whooping cranes with a colt.

Carol and I were heading home the next day, but decided to stay for a guided bird walk scheduled for Tuesday morning. An eager group met at the visitor center and we birded in the nearby forested area and adjacent wetlands. Many warblers



Photo by Carol Carter

**Necedah RHWO's Feeding**

and vireos were observed and heard, one of the most common being the yellow-throated vireo, which our guide said was found in unusually large numbers in Necedah. Sparrows, buntings, flycatchers, orioles and others also showed up. Before we left, I had a chance to speak with Brad Strobel, the Wildlife Biologist on the refuge. I asked if there were any numbers for red-headed woodpeckers breeding in the savanna areas; he said they have not done surveys of the species for several years. I would suspect based on the 11 breeding pairs that Carol and I found in half a day, there is quite a large and healthy breeding population. It will be very interesting as research continues on maintaining oak savannas to know which of the transitional savannas the woodpeckers prefer and how to plan for the future.

As we headed back to Minnesota, we decided to drive north through the refuge. The road went through magnificent deciduous forestland and we were further rewarded with four scarlet tanagers singing. We stopped several times but only caught a glimpse of two as the forest was so dense and we were on a deadline. But our mission to find out if red-heads are still nesting at Necedah NWR has met with a resounding "yes."



**Necedah Savannah**

Photo by Carol Carter



Photo by Carol Carter

**Necedah Sandhills**

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the winter elsewhere returned by May 1. However, we kept noticing "new" birds throughout June and into July. These birds appeared in areas where we were sure no Redheads were present earlier in the season. So our initial nest surveys underestimated the eventual size of the breeding population. This is the first year when we have been convinced that new birds arrived weeks after the beginning of the breeding season. The newly arrived birds generally were SY birds (birds in their second calendar year and first breeding season). They may have failed to find a mate someplace else or been unable to find a suitable territory. At least five of these birds found a mate at Cedar Creek and began a nest. It appears that Red-headed Woodpeckers in their first breeding season may still be seeking a territory and mate while other Redheads have nestlings or fledglings. Since Redheads can still have active nests in September, these latecomers should have time to nest successfully.

- Jim Howitz

## Fall Issue Topics?

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. Have you been experimenting trying to attract RHWO's? Let us know about your work!

## Next RhWR Meeting

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 meetings will be August 19th and September 16th. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website at [www.RedheadRecovery.org](http://www.RedheadRecovery.org) for current information.

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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 \$20/year! Please send my membership information to the address below.

*I'd like to renew!* Renew my RhWR membership for \$20/year.

*Yes, I'd like to join Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis also!* Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (\$20) and the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (\$12) at the rate of \$32/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  
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PO Box 3801  
Minneapolis, MN 55403-0801