



# The REDHEAD



## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Summer 2016

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 10 No. 3

### RHWO NEWS

#### Volunteers confirm need for further research

Early this summer, several volunteers spent two hour blocks of time observing behavior of Red-headed Woodpecker parents at nests with hatchlings present. Maintaining a respectful distance from the nest and using only binoculars or scopes, volunteers recorded how frequently parents visited the nest, whether the bird was male or female (based on the presence or absence of leg bands), whether it carried food into the nest and if so what kind of food, and whether it carried fecal sacs out of the nest. In part we are trying to determine whether volunteers trained to do this kind of observation are able to determine these questions using only optics, or whether we need to move to more sophisticated technologies to get more complete and accurate information.

The results from this summer's pilot project confirm conclusively that we don't yet know the answer! In the course of eight hours of observations by four observers, parents were observed visiting the nest 107 times, but for fifteen of those visits (14%) the observer was not able to establish the identity of the bird. A number of factors could lower that percentage, but a number of factors could also raise the percentage. At the same time, we are exploring a variety of technologies that could more accurately determine the identity of parents visiting the nest, but we have not yet found a device that resolves our concerns or provides the information we are seeking. We will continue to explore

*Continued on page 4, Research*



### A Note from the Chair

#### Notes from the chair Summer 2016

With a new Associate Director, Forest Isbell, and a new Education and Outreach coordinator, Caitlin Potter, we are adjusting to a new environment at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR). Our relationship is still very positive and both Forest and Caitlin energetically support our work, but we needed to renew our four-year agreement and the format has changed quite a bit. Suffice to say our new agreement has been approved and we are hopeful that we can begin banding birds renewing our efforts to understand site fidelity, mate fidelity, and cavity use.

Meanwhile, our work at our other RHWO sites continues. Chet and Miriam helped Tony Hewitt with our annual spring bird survey of Sherburne NWR. We found no RHWO within the refuge, but did see birds in their traditional location in a neighborhood right outside the refuge. Our two savanna-education signs are being installed as I write this report. Tom Beer, Rita Doucet, and Jim Stengel completed our annual survey of selected spots in the Minnesota River Valley NWR. They report plans are underway to expand savanna habitat in a couple of locations in that vast NWR area. Mary Miller and Chet Meyers did our annual survey at the Belwin Conservancy, which is not so much about tallying birds, as it is advising the staff how they can improve their developing savanna habitat. Both Mary and Chet were encouraged by how much land was being returned to savanna. Our hope is "If you build it, they will come!" Sue Keator reports that despite her best efforts, once again, we will not be able to visit Camp Ripley National Reserve training grounds. They need 90 days advanced notice and some emergency always comes up.

Our research team of Jim Howitiz, Jerry Bahls, Keith Olstad, and Siah St. Clair have been busy drawing up plans for our continued research at Cedar Creek.

Finally, we had a great turn out at the Cedar Creek Open house which featured not only RHWO tours, but tours of CCESR environmental projects, and the very popular "Cedar Bog Lake walk." Caitlin Potter did an excellent job organizing the day in which 117 folks participated and we tallied 65 species of bird.

Chet Meyers, Chair

## Note From the Editor

Read the great news at the end of RHWO NEWS column! Now we may be able to track some of the estimated 40 new RHWO's that showed up this spring and summer at Cedar Creek. It was a banner year, probably exceeding the summer of 2012. More on that in the next issue of "The REDHEAD".

After you read the RHWO NEWS column you'll see why we are very excited about next year. We will be doing more research and different research. Hence the call for more volunteers (page 2).

This issue contains two articles from readers about their red-headed woodpecker experiences. One contains pictures and the other doesn't. We'll take either, but very much desire to have more like these. I look forward to the day I have to lay one or two aside for the next issue because we don't have enough room in the current issue. Don't hesitate to give us your feedback.

I have also noted that some of you are now using the "Contact Us" on the website. It appears to be working well. I only get the legitimate inquiries from our readers, not like previously. You can use this method to send us your red-headed woodpecker stories and other information.

After many years of being the Editor, I wouldn't mind if someone were willing to take on the task. We currently publish four quarterly issues, so you're only busy for about four weeks in the year. Our deadlines for submission of articles are the 15th of the months of January (Winter), April (Spring), July (Summer) and October (Fall). The publication takes place about two weeks later. The distribution would be handled as currently. Because of electronic communications you can be anywhere in the country to be the Editor. If interested—Contact Chet at [chetmeyers@visi.com](mailto:chetmeyers@visi.com) or 612 374-5581 or me at [rhwracm@comcast.net](mailto:rhwracm@comcast.net) or 763 572-2333.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

## RHWO Visit

I am a novice bird watcher. One of the benefits of retirement has been the discovery that so many beautiful birds share our farmstead. There is a new addition to "my" woodpecker family. I don't know if the parents typically bring their young to feeders, but this youngster is making himself right at home. The pictures below are of the juvenile and one of the adults who frequent my feeder. We live in southern Faribault County near Bricelyn. We have several old oak trees but I am not sure if they nest here, or at the river half a mile from our home.

Deb Bergsather



## RhWR Contact Information

### Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

President	Jerry Bahls	<a href="mailto:jobaud@comcast.net">jobaud@comcast.net</a>	763 572-2333
Website	<a href="http://www.AudubonChapterofMinneapolis.org">www.AudubonChapterofMinneapolis.org</a>		

### Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Chair	Chet Meyers	<a href="mailto:chetmeyers@visi.com">chetmeyers@visi.com</a>	612 374-5581
Treasurer	Jerry Bahls	<a href="mailto:rhwracm@comcast.net">rhwracm@comcast.net</a>	763 572-2333
Recorder	<open>		
Editor	Jerry Bahls	<a href="mailto:rhwracm@comcast.net">rhwracm@comcast.net</a>	763 572-2333
Website	<a href="http://www.RedheadRecovery.org">www.RedheadRecovery.org</a>		

## More 2017 Volunteers Needed

Because the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery will be expanding and shifting our research efforts in 2017, we will need additional volunteers who will be able to spend more concentrated periods of time at Cedar Creek and possibly other locations to observe red-headed woodpeckers. Please contact Chet Meyers at [chetmeyers@visi.com](mailto:chetmeyers@visi.com) or 612 374-5581 or Jerry Bahls at [rhwracm@comcast.net](mailto:rhwracm@comcast.net) or 763 572-2333.

## Nest Cavity Sanitation

One of the questions the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) has been asking since our research has started at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR) - "Has anyone observed parents removing fecal sacs from the nest cavity?" Until recently no one has. Red-headed woodpeckers (RHWO) nest sanitation has been suspect. The RhWR has documented RHWO's laying eggs in their cavity on top of a newly deceased adult RHWO and successfully raising young in the nest. We have also documented another nest that fledged two young from a nest that had a 1/2 grown baby RHWO dead in the bottom of the cavity. The parents in these cavities did not seem to mind the decomposing bodies or the carrion insects that arrived to eat them, but successfully raised their young immediately on top of the decaying birds. Some or most RHWOs seem not to mind the messy, fecal material saturating the floor of their nest cavities.

Until recently this appeared to be the norm, but this summer Siah St. Clair observed this (picture below) parent bird taking food in to the babies, then going completely into the nest for 30 seconds or so and then coming out with a mouthful of wood flakes and stuff from the bottom of the nest. The adult did this 3 times while he was watching over a period of 45 minutes. It would fly away with the material and drop it quite a distance away, 50 to 100 yards. We have been trying to determine if the RHWOs ever remove the fecal sacs of the babies from their nests over the past few nesting seasons or if there is any type of nest sanitation occurring. This picture demonstrates that at least a few at least prefer to clean the nest cavity while the young are growing. This explains the fact that, when a nest tree falls and some of the nests are able to be examined before removal of material by insects or other creatures is possible, there does not appear to be fecal material in the bottom of the nest cavity. Jim Howitz subsequently has also observed this behavior in two additional birds.



Photo by Siah St. Clair



Photo by Siah St. Clair

## "Barkless Pair" Male Fledges 20

The first "barkless pair" (so named because initial nest tree was barkless) was caught in April 2012. The female, 905 (band number), was a third year bird. That is, she was in her second breeding season, likely at that location. The male, 909, was an ASY (after second year) bird, meaning he was in at least his second breeding season. They raised two broods together in 2012 and 2013, totaling eleven fledglings. She disappeared in September 2013, and was replaced by 508 in May 2014. Birds 909 and 508 fledged 3 young in 2014, 2015, and now in 2016 (barkless tree was blown down in 2015 and the pair moved to a nearby tree). In 2014 and 2015 they attempted a second brood, but fledged no young from these attempts in either year. Once again this year they are trying a second brood. This brood should fledge in early August. So he has fledged at least 20 young and quite possibly more. The only other birds producing double-digit fledglings are two males each with ten fledglings.

## Pecan Tree Planted by RHWO

We have a pecan tree in our yard that was planted by a red-headed woodpecker. The tree is now 30 feet tall. A red-headed woodpecker used one of my bluebird boxes (on my home place where red-heads are common, about 30 miles west of our current home) as a storage site for pecans about 1985. Before I could remove the old (Editor Note: *assumed to be a bluebird nest*), a red-head filled the nestbox with pecans and then sealed the entry with strips of bark, just as it would have done with a natural cavity. During the winter, the red-head removed some, but not all, of the pecans. Warm, wet weather in the spring caused some of the pecans to sprout in the nestbox. When cleaning the box, I saved a couple of the sprouts and set them in my yard. Both sprouts did well, but I had them too close together and had to remove one in order to have enough growing space for the other. The local squirrels and bluejays harvest the pecans each year.

**Dr. David Pitts—Martin, TN**

Research, (Continued from page 1)

both use of volunteers observers with training and possible use of technological devices. We want to know more about how parents interact with each other and their young and what foods seem most critical to the development of the hatchlings.

On behalf of the RHWO Recovery research team,

Keith Olstad 612/940-1534

**NEWS FLASH!**

*The RhWR was able to draft a revised research proposal that was accepted by the Administration at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR). Also a revised Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) approval was obtained and with the approval of the CCESR Administration, which was obtained, the RhWR can begin color banding red-headed woodpeckers at Cedar Creek. Banding will begin about July 25th.*

**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 gathering (4th Wed.) will be on August 24, 2016 at 7 PM. All are welcome to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website at [www.RedheadRecovery.org](http://www.RedheadRecovery.org) for current information.

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

**Save that Snag!**

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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 on right.

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