



Siah St. Clair

# The REDHEAD



## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Summer 2017

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 11 No. 3

### RHOWO NEWS

#### Cedar Creek Research Update

The Red-headed Woodpecker Project is in full swing for the 2017-breeding season. We're about half-way into the season, and are already learning so much about this particular avian species! Our goals for the season have been to 1) find and monitor active red-headed woodpecker



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2) build port holes to extract nestlings from nest cavities, 3) capture adults and nestlings for banding, body measurements, blood sampling, and attachment of geolocator backpacks, 4) track backpacked fledgling movement using radio telemetry, and 5) recapture backpacked adults to retrieve movement data from geolocator chips. We have already achieved the first 4 goals (and continue to do so), and will complete the last goal in August.



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Continued on page 2, Captured

### A Note from the Chair

Summer 2017

Lots of news on the research end of things in our project, but I will let others update you on that. Our work with 'cluster agencies' took an upswing in June. After a four-year hiatus, we once again returned to Camp Ripley National Guard Training Center (just south and west of Brainerd, MN) and are pleased to report that the RHOWO clan at Ripley is doing well. Perhaps equally important the possibility for doing some research at Camp Ripley looks promising. The article "Home on the Range: Part 2" will update you on what's going on at Camp Ripley. Suffice to say we now feel there may be more RHOWO on the two firing rang-



Photo: Alex Svejkovsky

Camp Ripley Firing Range

es at the camp than we have on our research grounds at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve.

Our annual survey of Sherburne NWR was pretty much rained out, but I returned on a nicer day to confirm that the cluster of RHOWO in the small housing area just outside the refuge continues to harbor breeding RHOWO. We imagine there are a few breeding pairs also within the confines of Sherburne NWR. By the time you receive this newsletter we will have had our annual RHOWO open house at Cedar Creek, though this year we combined it with an introduction to something new and exciting. American bison are coming to Cedar Creek in the near future. Their job will be to keep the understory grazed – down so that we do not have to rely so heavily on our regular controlled burns. Bison are presently being used at the Belwin Conservancy another agency working to expand its oak savanna habitat, and, in our last year's survey of Sherburne NWR we saw how effectively a small herd of cattle were in keeping grazed areas of understory open for our RHOWO friends. The actual arrival of bison is probably two years in the future, but things are definitely progressing in that direction. Stay tuned.

Chet Meyers, Chair

## Note From the Editor

Thanks to Sheila Ward for her excellent article on her adventure with red-headed woodpeckers this year. Because her article and pictures were greater than we had space, the article will be published in two parts.

Also thanks to Candace Stenzel, Ornithologic Research Technician, for providing the excellent update of our research being performed this summer at CCSR.

If interested there are still Citizen Science opportunities this summer at CCSR. Contact Jim Howitz at [jlhror@aol.com](mailto:jlhror@aol.com) for more information about how you can help.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Captured (Continued from page 1)

So far, we have captured 58 birds, with 48 of them being adults, and 10 of them being soon-to-be fledged nestlings. Out of these 58 birds, geolocator backpacks were attached on the first 20 adults and first 10 soon-to-be fledged nestlings. While all of the birds seem to be doing fine post-capture (i.e., frequently re-sighted), 3 of the backpacked nestlings were predated soon after fledging, most likely from another avian predator in the area. Fortunately, we were able to recover those backpacks post-predation for future use on nestlings, and will soon be receiving an additional 5 backpacks for future nestling use as well.

One interesting thing we are finding is that the majority of the successful nests we monitor start off with 4 to 5 eggs, but only 2 to 3 eggs survive to the fledging stage. Furthermore, there is a surprisingly large ratio of dud eggs to successfully hatched eggs in each nest. Why the eggs aren't hatching has yet to be determined.

As we continue to capture adults, search for and monitor nests, retrieve and process additional nestlings, and track fledgling movement, we appreciate all of the support and encouragement you all have given us. This has been a very enjoyable and fulfilling project to be a part of!

- Candace Stenzel

## Home, Home on the Range – Part 2

by Chet Meyers

In the summer of 2010 *The Redhead* published a report from a team of our members who spent the day at Camp Ripley National Guard Headquarters, as we had heard of some RHWO research being done there by the Minnesota DNR. In that report we happily documented a number of adult and immature birds present. Though we tried numerous times it was not possible to visit the camp since then, because of ongoing troop training, due to the increasing fear of terrorism attacks. Finally, this spring we were given the O.K. for another visit, which we greatly appreciated.

Camp Ripley is located 40 miles northwest of St. Cloud. It is huge – over 53,000 acres – and serves as training ground for not only the Minnesota National Guard, but for National Guards around the country. Much of the camp's grounds are totally undeveloped and home to a variety of wildlife, including wolves, deer, fishers, badgers, nesting bald eagles and, presently, one over-wintering golden eagle. Close to 70% of Camp Ripley is forested, with another 20% in oak savanna. Within the savanna areas there are two Impact Areas (i.e. *firing ranges*) that encompass a total of nine square miles. These Impact Areas are used for a variety of types of target practice including rifles, tanks, small rockets. They are burned every year and blasted with all kinds of armaments. Much of the land resembles prime savannah, though the predominant trees are aspen. There are also stands of northern pin oak. And it is here, in this blasted environment, that two very healthy populations of RHWO have set up house keeping. That's how important regularly burned savanna is to RHWO habitat.

Our intrepid team of surveyors left Minneapolis at 7:30 a.m., as it's about a 120-mile drive to Camp Ripley. With Keith Olstad's steady foot on the gas we made it to Camp Ripley at 9:20. There we were met by Nancy Dietz and Brian Dirks who are employed by the Minnesota DNR. Brian updated us on DNR work the past three years which has focused on study on a number of different bat species. *Virtually no work has been done on red-headed woodpeckers the past four years.* During our visit in 2010 Bill Faber (professor at Central Lakes College) had three interns working on RHWO. The DNR has kept records of sightings the past five years, and Brian gave us a map with locations indicated. As you might expect, most of the sightings have been in and around the firing ranges.

Brian spent three and a half hours with us, and during that time we made a good connection. Keith and Chet explained our present research and inquired about possibilities at Camp Ripley. It's important to understand that the DNR staff is low man on the totem pole. Everything else comes first. Thus it took us six years to simply accomplish this visit. As our trip progressed Brian seemed open to the possibility of our (at some time in the future) banding and equipping birds with satellite telemetry.

*Continued on page 4, Camp Ripley*

## RhWR Contact Information

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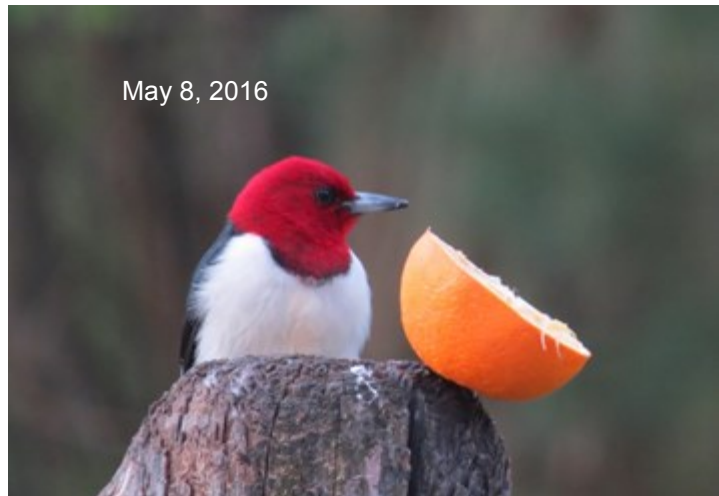
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# RHOW - The Ecstasy

## First and Second Sighting

The first time I saw a redheaded woodpecker in my yard I was beside myself with excitement! I couldn't believe it! I hadn't seen a red-headed woodpecker *in years*, and my husband had *never* seen one. Yet, there he was, at the back feeder – so very close, and so very beautiful. I raced through the house like a keystone cop, desperate to grab my camera. Thankfully, I got a few good shots as he cracked sunflower seeds on a driftwood log mounted in the yard (he did not eat the orange). I joined eBird that *very day* to submit my rare RHOW sighting (rare in my area, Southeastern Michigan) and I



cherished the photos because they were all I had. He was gone, not seen again. Fast forward to May, 2017. I was ready and waiting with the camera on the tripod, looking for the elusive RHOW. Almost one year to the day since my first RHOW home-sighting, he appeared again at the back feeder.

## Moving-In

Unlike the previous year, the RHOW stayed-on, and I could easily hear his frequent call and see him in the yard throughout May. I was happily surprised when I saw TWO RHOWs in a dead cottonwood tree in my neighbor's yard, about 50 yards from my patio and in clear view. At first I didn't realize that they were actually moving in, and I sat for hours trying to get a photo of both RHOWs. My patience paid-off as I captured *a little romance* and then the home-making. Whenever I watched, I could see that one bird primarily excavated the nest cavity (I've read the male) while the other bird preened. When I expressed concern over the branch they had selected, both my husband and neighbor kidded me about over-



analyzing and assured me that the birds have been building nests longer than I have. I needed to stop worrying and just enjoy.

Over the course of the next month, the two RHOWs were all over the yard, all day long. They were in the grass, in shrubby trees, clinging low on large tree trunks, on fence posts, on top of telephone poles. I watched as they didn't play well with others, chasing all other birds (orioles, catbirds, red-bellied woodpeckers) from the oranges in both the front and back yards. I knew they must have babies since they were catching bugs like crazy. I didn't hear them calling very much, as they had earlier in the spring, but they were more visible now. It was wonderful, I couldn't get enough. I looked for them first thing in the morning, as soon as I got home from work, and just at dusk. I no longer carried my camera, but I enjoyed watching them every minute I could. I was spoiled.

*Editors Note: Due to the length of this article it will be continued in the Fall 2017 "The REDHEAD". All pictures in this article were taken by Sheila Ward.*

Our survey tour focused on the southern Impact Area, which we circumnavigated by truck. Almost immediately we saw our first RHWO. Most birds were in the southwestern section of this impact area. The birds seemed to be setting up house-keeping. We found three pairs and four single birds. There did not seem to be any concentrated clusters. It's hard to extrapolate total birds, given that we only drove a perimeter road, as entry to Impact Areas is strictly prohibited due to unexploded ordinances. Thus, we could see no more than 1/2 mile into the vast firing ranges. There is no way to begin to estimate how many birds were in the five square miles we drove around, but having seen ten birds in such a tiny sliver of land viewed, there have to be quite a number of RHWO present. And we did not have time to even consider the other four-square-mile Impact Area. Let's just say that, conservatively, we felt there were very likely a lot more birds at Camp Ripley than at Cedar Creek. That's why we need to stay in contact with our DNR friends at Camp Ripley and encourage them to resume studies of RHWO.

### Fall Issue Topic?

Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by October 15th. Also send any photos or information to be featured in the newsletter. Have you been experimenting trying to attract red-headed woodpeckers? Let us know about your work!

### Next RhWR Meetings

The RhWR 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 16th**. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website ([www.RedheadRecovery.org](http://www.RedheadRecovery.org)) for current information.

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