



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Summer 2009

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 3 No. 3

Note From the Editor

Content in this newsletter is very important to me. The content should be new to our readers, informative, factual and science based. Because we have very limited resources, we will rely on published scientific papers and citizen science (readers and/or members observations). This month's article by Rick Pertile illustrates the latter source. Rick's article is very well done and gives specific information about observations he has made. We strongly encourage other readers and members to follow Rick's fine example and send us your red-headed woodpecker (RHWO) observations. In the future we will list a topic that we will feature in the next quarter's newsletter. Please send us what you have observed on the topic. Get it to me (rhwracm@comcast.net, electronic copy highly desirable, but will accept hand written copy [send to address on newsletter]) about 2 weeks before our publication date. Our publication dates are Winter - Jan. 15, Spring - April 15, Summer - July 15 and Fall - October 15.

The Fall issue's topic will be *"Has the red-bellied woodpecker's expansion north negatively effected the red-headed woodpecker?"* Look for Rick Pertile's article in October about his observations and conclusions. Please send us your observations (observations only, not opinions) on the topic. Send the observations even if it is only a one liner, *"Saw a red-bellied woodpecker chase a red-headed woodpecker away from my feeder."* or vice-versa. If we get several observations that report the same thing, we can then say that it has a high probability of being a behavioral activity characteristic of the species. If we get only a few of the same observations, we will report those that we feel may be characteristic of the species and will ask if other observers have seen the same behavior and if we get several more reports, we can then report it as a high probability of being a behavioral characteristic of that species. (Please pardon the scientific speak.) Also if you read about a published scientific article about the issue topic, please send the reference for it to me also. The more eyes on the topic the better.

A future topic will be related to chemically-treated wooden telephone or power poles and their impact upon RHWO populations. If you have other topics that you would like to explore send your suggestions to me.

Keep your sightings of RHWO clusters coming. We continue to have good reports.

Jerry Bahls, *Editor*

A Note from the Chair

Well, we have just about wrapped up our Cedar Creek surveys of nesting red-headed woodpeckers (RHWO) for 2009. It was a very successful year as we located 21 active nests (3 more than last year) and discovered some interesting patterns beginning to emerge. Of the 21 nests this year, 13 were either in the same tree as last year, or in a tree very near to last year's nest tree. We continue to thank the folks at Cedar Creek for their wonderful cooperation and hope to secure a grant with them that will allow us to band some of these woodpeckers (color bands) so we can see if the same adults are using the same nests sites or territories.

Readers have responded positively to an article we had in the DNR's Conservation Volunteer and that helped us locate at least two additional clusters of RHWO in Minnesota: one at Nerstrand Woods State Park, and the other at a golf course in the St. Cloud area. Please keep sending us those tips on RHWO cluster locations so we can map the state to see where they are most prevalent.

Finally, we are beginning to make more contacts with local parks and agencies who have heard about our work and want to join our efforts. And, we still need help from "golfer-birders" to identify more golf courses that sustain small groups of RHWO. Keep looking for those birdies.

- Chet Meyers

Verified RHWO Clusters

Last year at this time the RhWR had verified two red-headed woodpecker clusters (two or more breeding pair within a quarter mile of each other). Another verified cluster is at the Necedah NWR in Wisconsin. The RhWR also had about 2 more unverified clusters.

One of the goals this season was to verify as many of the reported sites as possible. Mary Miller is leading the effort to check out the sites and to maintain a database of the sites.

As of July 22nd, Mary now has 7 verified clusters in Minnesota and another verified site in Wisconsin and at least 4 to 5 unverified clusters that will need to be confirmed next season. We would like to thank those who visited the various sites to look for the reported pairs of RHWO's. One thing that was learned is that this confirmation process needs to be completed before fledging occurs.

Membership Dues

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all of its revenue from its membership dues. The RhWR dues are \$10/yr. New members will receive a packet, which will include the new RhWR button and sew-on patch as well as the latest "The RED-HEAD". Because we have decided to establish our membership year as July 1 - June 30 (all memberships will expire on June 30 of the year the membership was established). Renewals will remain at \$5/year, but will expire on June 30 of the period of renewal. Look for future announcements regarding lifetime memberships and renewal dues.

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.

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
RhWR
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Thank you for your continued support.

The following threats evaluation to RHWO's is from the **2009 IUCN Red List Category: Near Threatened** (as evaluated by BirdLife International - the official Red List Authority for birds for IUCN).

Threats

Habitat degradation, as a result of the removal of dead trees and branches in urban areas⁴, and loss of nesting habitat to firewood cutting, clear cutting, agricultural development and river channelling in rural areas^{5,6}, appears to be responsible. Collisions with moving vehicles may be a contributing factor, but persecution as a pest by farmers and utility companies is currently minimal^{1,2}.

1. del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A. and Sargatal, J. (2002) *Handbook of the birds of the world, Vol 7: Jacamars to Woodpeckers*. Barcelona, Spain: Lynx Edicions.
2. Smith, K.G., Withgott, J.H. and Rodewald, P.G. (2000) Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*. Pp. 1-28 in Poole, A. and Gill, F., eds. *The birds of North America No. 518*. Philadelphia and Washington, DC: The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia and the American Ornithologists' Union.
4. Pulich, W. M. (1988) *The birds of North Central Texas*. College Station, Texas: A & M Press.
5. Ehrlich, P.R., Dobkin, D.S. and Wheye, D. (1992) *Birds in jeopardy: the imperiled and extinct birds of the United States and Canada including Hawaii and Puerto Rico*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
6. Melcher, B. (1998) Red-headed Woodpecker. Pp. 250-251 in Kingery, H.E., ed. *Colorado breeding bird atlas*. Denver: Colorado Bird Atlas Partnership and Colorado Div. Wildl.

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Editor's note: The following article is "reprinted from <http://oaksavannas.org> courtesy of Thomas D. Brock, University of Wisconsin-Madison" a nonprofit foundation dedicated to the oak savanna community. This article is reprinted with permission to give our members a better understanding of habitat favored by the RHWO. Go to the website above and get much more information about savannas and their restoration.

Oak Savanna Restoration

One of the most spirited accounts of oak savanna restoration is that of Steve Packard, for sites in north-eastern Illinois. Packard's work has been described briefly in his publications and in more detail in William K. Stevens book, *Miracle Under the Oaks*. These accounts should be read by anyone interested in oak savanna restoration.

Summary of Steve Packard's Work

Here is a brief summary of Packard's work that I (Editor's note: Thomas D. Brock) prepared for a group of interns: 1) Although the oak savanna habitat was one of the most widespread in the Midwestern United States, there are no remaining examples in pristine condition. 2) However, there are areas with original or close to original oak trees, that contain partial or degraded remnant herbaceous populations. 3) If such degraded savannas are subject to controlled burns, suppressed species in the understory are often released. 4) After burning, seeding savannas with a wide variety of species collected from nearby local areas should be done. Those that thrive are probably typical savanna species. In a sense, the restoration process itself is being used as a research endeavor, and the results help in finding out what sorts of herbaceous plants are savanna species.

What are typical savanna species? One of Packard's contributions was to discern that there were plant species that were actually unique to savannas and were absent or unimportant in prairies or oak woods. These unique savanna species may be adapted to light intensities lower than full sunlight, but considerably more than the light intensities found in oak woods. Some of these typical savanna species can be identified because they thrive under restoration conditions. Examples Packard gives of such savanna species are purple milkweed, various grasses of the genera *Elymus* and *Bromus*, upland boneset, cream gentian, broad-leaved panic grass, elm-leaved goldenrod, and Tinker's weed. Such species have been called "indicator" species, and a more detailed list was published in the 1995 Midwest Oak Savanna Conference.

Speciman for Mounting

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery is still looking for a RHWO specimen that it can mount to use at displays and events. If you should happen upon such a specimen that is in good condition, please place it in a freezer and immediately contact someone who is authorized to have migratory birds in their possession. Then contact us and let us know who has it so we can contact them and arrange to have it mounted.

Red-headed Woodpeckers in Northwest Wisconsin

No one can argue that one of the most beautiful and most recognizable birds in Minnesota and Wisconsin is the red-headed woodpecker. Our only woodpecker that sports a solid red head, it has an equally striking solid iridescent black back, shoulders and tail, contrasting with its white secondary wing feathers, sides, rump and belly making it truly unforgettable for those fortunate enough to have seen one in the wild.

For the past 5 years, I feel I've been blessed to have had these magnificent birds as permanent residents on my property in Northwest Wisconsin near the town of Birchwood in Sawyer County. Nesting and roosting habitat is truly the key to attracting these birds but the availability of food equally plays a key role in their ability to overwinter in their northern most range.

The local terrain consists of lakeshore with some sparse openings and large stands of mature trees. Tree species in the immediate area consist predominantly of red oak, aspen, and sugar maples. This past autumn there was an abundance of acorns which I believe contributed to their heightened numbers in the area.

Throughout the fall, I watched these birds constantly haul and wedge the acorns in tree crevices and behind bark to be consumed later. We counted a total of 19 birds within a 15 mile radius on our January 3rd 2009 Christmas bird count, a record number for this species from what I could tell especially this far north in winter. Many of these birds were juveniles which reiterated the fact that adults were successful in their nesting attempts in the area.

At my feeders alone I had a total of 7 different individual birds over winter which consisted of a pair and their 3 offspring plus 2 other adults. Although they were indeed aggressive to each other at times and had their definite "pecking order", the key was having several feeders spread out over the property to give them some space.

The red-headed was truly king of the feeder. All other birds including blue jays gave way when they flew in to feed. They even chased off the resident pair of pileated woodpeckers that would come to feast on the deer rib cages I had hung in trees. When more than one red-headed appeared to feed which was more usual than not, the dominant birds would feed first while the others would patiently await their turn.

Undoubtedly the preferred and all time favorite fall and winter food was a toss-up between corn (both whole kernel and cracked) and shelled peanuts, with black oil sunflower and rendered beef suet blocks to a much lesser extent. The birds would actively feed in the early morning and late afternoon, and what they didn't eat they carried off to cache in the numerous dead aspens throughout the property. Slightly before dusk, they would all fly off to roost in one of many available nest cavities that were in the immediate area.

This spring the resident pair that has nested for the past 3 years made their first nest attempt in late April which unfortunately was unsuccessful as strong winds took down the nest cavity which was well into incubation. Surprisingly enough, they wasted no time and started another family in an existing cavity that was used by the male for roosting this past winter. If all goes well, their fast growing chicks will have fledged by the second week of July.

It will be a joy and quite entertaining to watch them once again come to the feeder with the adults and learn how to feed. As they molt into their adult plumage over the winter, I will equally be reminded of how such an ordinary looking youngster will transform into such a beautiful adult bird by spring.

I will also have the privilege of knowing that as a property owner and bird lover, my contribution of allowing the wild to stay wild, has helped provide them with the necessary habitat to flourish in the area. I can't even tell you what a great feeling that is!

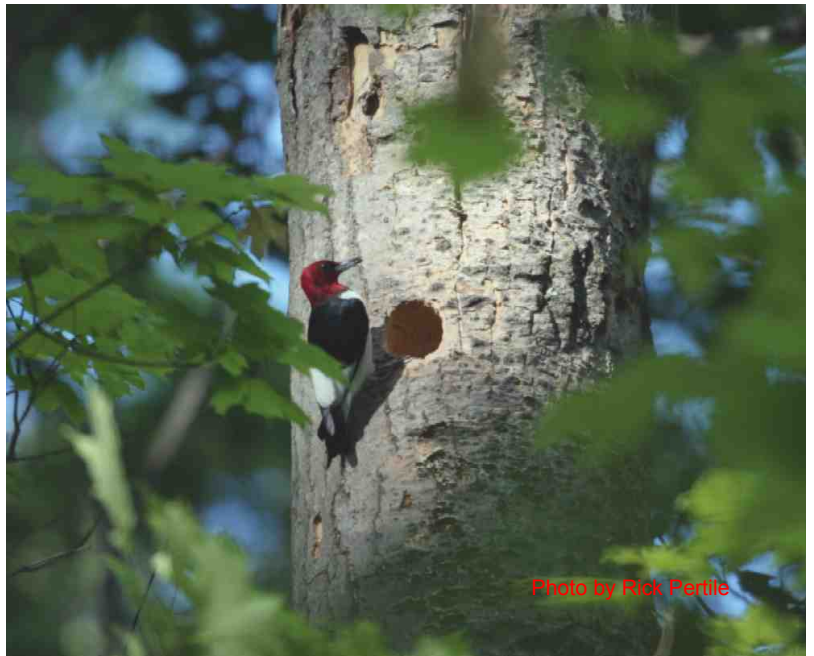


Photo by Rick Pertile

Rick Pertile
Minneapolis, MN & Birchwood, WI

The following proposal for RHWO management is from the **2009 IUCN Red List Category: Near Threatened** (as evaluated by BirdLife International - the official Red List Authority for birds for IUCN). Editor's note - This appears to be the strategy being pursued by Cedar Creek Eco System Reserve.

Conservation measures proposed

Continue to monitor population trends. Monitor rates of habitat loss and degradation. Use fire for its positive effects - prescribed burning and understory thinning increased numbers in Arkansas by creating more open forest stands, improving foraging opportunities; however, whilst burning may create nest-snags, it also destroys existing nest-snags. Creation or maintenance of snags for nesting and roosting is of prime importance. Snags should be retained, in groups if possible. Dead branches should be retained on big trees in non-urban areas and only selectively pruned where hazardous in urban areas. Selective thinning of live trees appears to have a positive effect (e.g. removal of 50% of oak trees for prairie restoration on a reserve in Ohio immediately attracted nesting birds).

Fall Issue Feature Topic

The Fall issue's topic will be "Has the red-bellied woodpecker's expansion north negatively effected the red-headed woodpecker?" Send your observations to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by October 15th. Please send observations only - no opinions! Also send any future topics to be featured in the newsletter. Thank you.

Next RhWR Meetings

The RhWR usually meets on a 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 on August 26th. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to attend also. Check our website (www.RedheadRecovery.org) for current information.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery
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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 \$10/year! Please send my membership information to the address below.

I'd like to renew! Renew my RhWR membership for \$5/year.

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 \$18/year. Please send my membership information and *Kingfisher* to the address below.

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