



# The REDHEAD



## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Winter 2014

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 8 No. 1

### RHWO NEWS

#### 2014 Cedar Creek Research

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) hopes to continue its 2013 research at University of Minnesota's Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR) this summer. We have applied for grants to hire two research technicians part time to do this exciting research. It is our goal to continue this project for another 2 - 4 years.

We are confident that we will be successful in obtaining the \$8200 needed to pay for two research technicians. In 2013, CCESR provided the vast majority of the funds through grants from NSF LTER Education Fund and the UMN Lawrence Award with the RhWR also providing funds through a National Audubon Society Collaborative Grant.

The technician's stipend is based on 3 days/week for about 3 months. In 2013, it took 4 - 6 hours to monitor the nests with another 2 - 4 hours to process the data. In 2013, teachers Pat Hartman and Al Wachutka both Advanced Placement Environmental Science teachers from St. Louis Park High School were hired. Their investigation gave students real-world data to facilitate development of the science process skills and ecological knowledge outlined in the current Minnesota standards and the Next Generation Science Standards.

If any member would like to help fund this project, we will not refuse the offer. We are very interested in potential revenue sources for 2014 and future years. For more information 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.



Photo by Siah St. Clair

High School students assist monitoring RHWO nests

### A Note from the Chair

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Winter 2014

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) doesn't hold regular meetings in December or January and our next scheduled meeting is not until Wednesday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, but we have not been idle. Jerry Bahls and I have been writing grants to support our nest camera research this spring. We hope to fund two interns, or field technicians, who will closely monitor 20 selected nests at Cedar Creek. The difference this year is that rather than waiting until adults are feeding young (which is a sure way of discovering where the nests are), this spring we need to identify nest locations **before** the eggs hatch. That way we can collect data on clutch size (number of eggs) and brood success (how many young fledge). That's a long way of saying that this spring our surveys will begin in early May, rather than mid-June. We will mark as many potential nest sites as possible and leave it to our field technicians to figure out which ones have viable eggs present.

The cost of the two field technicians is about \$ 6000.00. If we do not raise enough money from grants we may ask you, our members, to help out. We have never done this before as generally our overall costs are very low. The research we are planning to conduct this year has never been done before and will be a huge contribution to the birding community. So, we may need your help. If you have 'deep pockets' please feel free to get in touch with us and empty them our way.

Our regular spring training session will be in late April or early May for the faithful who help conduct nesting surveys. We also plan another Red-headed Woodpecker Festival in mid-June. Dates to be announced in next edition of *The Redhead*. We plan to keep the festival simple in terms of presenters and promoters and will again focus on field trips to visit the birds. Last year we saw over 65 different species, many on breeding territory.

For those of you 'chomping at the bit' I understand there are a few RHWO that have over-wintered and can be seen basking on tree trunks on those rare sunny winter days. Finally, I hear Jerry Bahls' voice in the background urging me to remind you to renew your membership in our great endeavor.

Chet Meyers, Chair

## Note From the Editor

The feature topic this month was - "What were some of the 2013 nesting and fledging results?" The results published here don't go into great detail, but give our readers a good sense of what was accomplished this last year. As we have stated before, this was the first year of a 3 - 5 year study of the red-headed woodpeckers at Cedar Creek. We hope this will develop into a MS or PhD thesis for someone. At any event we are planning on this coming year's studies and expect to raise the funds to pay for it and to identify funding sources to complete a 5 year study.

I'd like to thank Joel Dunnette for his article. It is a great help when someone contributes to this newsletter. I hope to receive similar articles in the future.

Lastly I'd like to promote our Facebook page. I'm looking for content for it also - pictures, references to articles and the like. Thanks!

- Jerry Bahls, Editor

## RHOWO Cuisine

Last summer while monitoring red-headed woodpecker (RHOWO) nests, Jim Howitz and Siah St. Clair, observed that the pin oaks were dropping their acorns early. This caused a bit of alarm because RHOWO feed extensively on acorns and pin oak is a dominate tree on the savannah. Early loss of the acorns probably meant there was little food value in the acorns. Yet the RHOWOs were foraging on the ground for these acorns.

Siah decided to investigate by collecting a handful of the acorns for examination at home. Upon opening each acorn, he found that 24 of the 25 were infested with insect larvae. Nineteen had an Acorn Moth larva (*Blastobasos glandulella*), and 5 had several of the Acorn Weevil Beetle larvae (*Curculio iowensis*).



Photo by Siah St. Clair

Acorn Weevil Beetle larvae

Acorn Weevil Beetle larvae (*Curculio iowensis*).

## What makes a bird special?

When asked what my favorite bird is, I usually answer 'the one I most recently saw'. But the Redheaded Woodpecker does hold a special place in my memory.

When I was about 14 and a bicycle was my choice of transportation (which makes for a more intimate experience with nature than a car!), I came upon a recently killed Redhead along a rural road. At the time, I was not a birder. Sure I sort of noticed birds, but not the details and the variety. This dramatically colored Redhead really took hold on my senses. I was amazed that such a beautiful creature existed, and near me.

I took the body home. I pondered the amazing color, feathers, and structure. To have such a wonder in my hands was amazing. Seeing it up close, being able to touch and manipulate it to see how it was built really had an impact on me. I made an attempt to preserve it, salting it down so it would not rot. I had ideas of skinning and mounting it. With my limited manual skills, nothing ever came of that. But the impression this incredible creature made on me lasted. A few years later, with encouragement from my parents, I gradually became a birder. This hobby has added much joy to my life.

More recently, when my wife and I built a house in the country, we would occasionally see a Redhead in our neighborhood. And when I started to manage part of my woods as savanna, and planted prairie, we were blessed with breeding Redheads. By feeding peanuts, I was able to trap several and band them. Having a live Redhead in my hands is even more amazing than that childhood memory.

My thanks go out to all of you who work to help Redheaded Woodpeckers. I will continue to do my part. Together we can make amazing memories possible and perhaps open up a lifetime of joyful birding to future generations.

- Joel Dunnette

*Did you know?* Red-headed woodpeckers have a favorite spot where they "prepare" their or their young's meals. Watch for them to catch something and retire to it to tenderize, open or remove exterior parts.

## RhWR Contact Information

### Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

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Photo by Siah St. Clair



Acorn Moth larva

## 2013 Cedar Creek Research

The year 2012 was auspicious year despite the exodus by September of all the red-headed woodpeckers (RHWOs) from Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR). The return of the RHWOs was anxiously anticipated in 2013. The cold and snowy spring did not appear to delay their return much. The first RHWO in 2013 was observed on May 9th. The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery volunteers began their nest monitoring in mid-May in order to locate the twenty nests that the newly hired research technicians, Pat Hartman and Al Wachutka, would monitor and collect data on during the summer.

Pat and Al used the RhWR newly purchased camera that takes infrared pictures (it was assumed the nests would be dark).



The camera was chosen because it fit into the RHWO nest holes. The camera was mounted on a 25 foot telescoping pole in order to raise the camera up to the nests (see picture left). The camera has a remote monitor that allows the observer to see what is in the nest and to take a photo of it. Another similar camera that takes visible light pictures was purchased as a backup by CCESR. After using both cameras it was determined that the visible light camera gave better results.

Volunteers located 34 RHWO pairs in 2013, of which 27 fledged at least one young. First nest attempts fledged 50 young. There were 8 second nest attempts with 13 fledglings.

The technicians monitored the 20 selected nests three times a week and took a few pictures inside each nest each time to monitor for egg number and nestlings. The first egg, actually 6 eggs were in nest, was observed on May 25th suggesting the first egg was laid as early as May 19th. The last egg laid last summer was about July 16th. The first hatchling was observed on June 8th and the latest was on August 1st. The earliest fledge date for a first nesting attempt was July 3rd and the latest was August 26th. The largest clutch size was 6 but the most fledged was only 3!

In 2012, we banded 50 RHWOs. Thirteen of these returned in 2013 to nest. In order to positively identify the banded birds a means was needed to observe both legs. This is very difficult to do it with binoculars. However using a digital camera with a high power lens makes the very difficult job only difficult. Much patience is needed. However if an adequate picture is taken, it can be enlarged to more easily "see" the leg and consequently the bands. Siah St. Clair was assigned this task and did a marvelous job. See one of his band photos on the back page. Each nest's RHWO pair were positively identified, if banded.

When possible as soon as the birds came on territory, unbanded birds were banded. Twenty-five more RHWOs were banded in 2013.



Photos by Pat Hartman using camera



Siah St. Clair photo of colored bands

### Spring Issue Feature Topic

The Spring issue's topic will be - "Where have we found funding for our Cedar Creek research?" Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by April 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 meetings will be February 19 and March 19, 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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## Save that Snag!

Place Stamp Here



### 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 \$15/year! Please send my membership information to the address below.
- 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.

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