



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Winter 2015

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 9 No. 1

RHWO NEWS

2014 Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Project Summary

Now in our seventh year, 2014 was a banner year for the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery. Our funding sources allowed us to hire two field technicians and afforded them enough time to closely monitor 33 active RHWO nests. Having the financial resources and the time to closely monitor nests with our cavity cameras has been crucial to our research efforts. In addition to our research at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR) we continued our habitat advocacy work with a number of land managers and land owners.

Highlights of 2014 research results

1. This year we used our cavity cameras to track both egg-laying and fledging success. Of the 33 nests monitored, 25 successfully produced a total of 54 fledglings for a **75.8% success ratio**.

2. Our lead field technician, a Master's graduate student at the University of Minnesota, took over 3000 photos of 60 different trees in gathering her data on clutch size and brood success. **The average clutch size has remained between 4 and 5 eggs** the past three years, including 2014 data. This is consistent with historical anecdotal information and RHWO literature.

3. At the same time that clutch size remains between 4 and 5, usually **only 1-3 nestlings successfully fledge**. This is also consistent with other literature on RHWO. Using nest camera data, we likely identified all nestlings produced in that area.

4. In 2014 **we banded 20 individual birds** which brings our four-year total to 102 RHWO banded. Each year we see returning birds wearing our bands so we know there is a **fairly high degree of site fidelity**. In 2014 70% of birds banded in 2013 returned. There is also clear evidence of birds reusing previous year's cavities or re-nesting in nearby trees. 45% of 2014 nests met this category **This is 'breakthrough' research on site fidelity never before reported**.

5. We continue to informally study **feeding behavior**

Continued on page 2, Highlights

Thanks to Volunteers

Since its founding in 2007, the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) has been blessed with excellent leadership and a great cadre of dedicated workers. When needed the RhWR has been able to raise the funds needed to accomplish the goals we set.

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery would like to take this opportunity to thank all our volunteers and financial contributors for their efforts. We continue to rely on a cadre of 25 volunteer surveyors who help us locate RHWO nest trees in May and June. The entire staff of Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve remains our mainstay support. We especially thank Mary Spivey, Education Coordinator and Troy Mielke, Research Coordinator. Thanks also to members of our steering committee: Jerry Bahls, Tom Beer, Gini and Jeff Brooks, Carol Carter, Rita Doucet, Jim Howitz, Dan Kahl, Sue Keator, Jake Langeeslag, Gene Merriam, Chet Meyers, Mary Miller, Lance Nelson, and Siah St. Clair. Thanks to our field technicians Brittney Yohannes and Laura Jaskiewicz and to Todd Arnold, Professor of Fisheries and Wildlife, University of Minnesota.

And thanks to our funders who make much of this work possible: Patagonia Outdoor Clothing and Gear, Minnesota Ornithological Union, Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter and the St. Paul Audubon Society. Also a special thanks to all our members who provide the base funding for the RhWR.

We would also like to give a special thanks to Jim Howitz, Siah St. Clair and Lance Nelson for the many, many hours they have spent tracking and observing the RHWO's at Cedar Creek. Without their diligent observations, much of our knowledge obtained over the last seven years would not have happened.

We would also like to thank Jerry Bahls for providing much of the administrative activity that holds the RhWR together. We also thank him for publishing "The REDHEAD" each quarter. This is a very valuable link between our membership and the general public.

Finally a very, very special thanks to Chet Meyers for his incredible leadership in guiding the RhWR along a very successful path that is certain to make a difference in the survival of our iconic bird!

Again - Thank you!!!

Highlights (Continued from page 1)

which suggests that RHWOs are food opportunists in the summer, primarily feeding on a variety of large beetles, service and raspberries and, in the fall and winter, on acorns, and hazelnuts – RHWOs are attracted to feeder foods including sunflower seeds, peanuts, and suet.

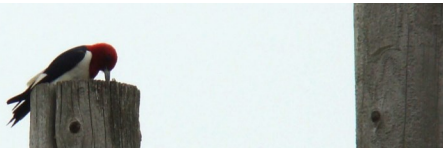
6. Primary **feeding techniques** related to insects include, in order of preference (1) stooping and hawking from perches, (2) ground feeding, and (3) gleaning from tree trunks.

Highlights of habitat advocacy efforts

1. Assisted **The Belwin Conservancy** with its first successful oak savanna burn to restore RHWO habitat.
2. Completed our second annual bird survey of **Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge** (NWR) and will closely monitor the newly developed oak savanna on the Blue Hill Trail.
3. Continued bird surveys and savanna observation at the **Minnesota River Valley Wildlife Refuge**.
4. Erected three *pilot* RHWO nest boxes at **Nerstrand Big Woods State Park**... to be monitored.
5. Completely overhauled our membership list and presently have over 80 (paid in full) **2015 members**.
6. Held our third annual RHWO **open-house** at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve.
7. Published our **quarterly newsletter, *The Redhead***, informing members of our ongoing research and activities.
8. Visited, spoke, or provided information tables, at four birding or environmental events.
9. Continued to survey the state of Minnesota for additional active clusters of RHWOs.

S. St. Clair & C. Meyers 12-22-14

Photo by Perdoni



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Change in Membership Dues

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all its operating revenues from membership dues. For the past two months, we have been trying to contact all members, old and new. If you have not received a call or e-mail from us recently, here is information you need to know.

- 1) Beginning January 1, 2015 basic membership will be \$20.00 for the calendar year (verses July 1 – June 30).
- 2) Members who contribute more will receive other benefits along with the newsletter. Those contributing \$50.00 will also receive a handsome embroidered patch. Those contributing \$100.00 will receive the newsletter, a patch, and a personal tour of the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve.
- 3) The newsletter will continue to be sent to dues paying members. We will honor a short grace period.

Send your membership applications to -

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
RhWR
PO Box 3801
Minneapolis, MN 55403-0801

Thank you for your continued support.

Note From the Editor

The highlight of this issue is a great review of our past year provided by Chet and Siah. It is amazing how much can be accomplished with great leadership and a moderate amount of money. While these accomplishments are laudable, we can't sit back and pat ourselves on the back for a job well done. We need to be continually proactive in moving forward in accomplishing our mission. Since we are an all-volunteer organization, this means we must continually recruit more able volunteers to do the work necessary to keep the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery a viable and vibrant organization. We must always be looking to the future. A big fear of any fledgling organization is the leadership becomes stagnant or moves on because of age or other

reasons. Therefore it is vital that the RhWR bring in new "blood" to help with the many activities that we have been able to accomplish.

Therefore I am asking that if you have time to assist us in our activities that you attend our next meeting on February 18th or March 18th at 7:00 at the Lund's store at 50th & France and volunteer to take on some of the tasks that are the life blood of our organization. Let me thank you in advance for your time contributions.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Red-headed Woodpecker Status

By Chet Meyers

“What exactly is the environmental status of the red-headed woodpecker?” My good friend, and fellow Redheaded Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) member, Tom Beer, posed that question to me a couple of months ago. Since the red-headed woodpecker’s (RHWO) recovery is the primary reason for our project’s existence, it seemed a fair and easy question to respond to. Wrong! I’ll ‘cut to the chase’ and not bore you with all the details. Here are some of the *nuggets* my computer uncovered via a number of hours searching RHWO status, both nationally and state-by-state.

To set a context, there are two fairly safe generalizations regarding RHWO’s overall status. In terms of the bird’s normal range maps, you can pretty much disregard our 12 states west of the Dakotas. Another safe bet is that while RHWO historically were abundant in New England, numbers are down dramatically. In fact, in the mid-19th century, RHWO’s were so common that orchard owners and farmers used to pay a bounty for them. In 1840, John James Audubon reported that 100 were shot from a single cherry tree in one day. Presently, the Connecticut Dept. of Energy and Environment lists them as “endangered” and one of the rarest breeders in the state.

While there is general agreement that RHWO numbers are on the decline, estimates of that decline vary greatly, depending on location and your information source. We have heard that since 1960 RHWO’s have declined “over their range” anywhere from 60 to 89%. That’s a big variation, depending on the range you are considering. Even reputable sources can leave one confused. What follows are snapshots of the status of RHWO’s from a variety of sources.

National Organizations

The **Breeding Bird Survey (BBS)** is a large-scale survey that monitors the population trends for birds in North America. Since its inception in 1966, RHWO’s have undergone a significant decline of 2.6%/year between 1966-2005, corresponding to an overall decline of 66% in roughly 40 years.

Partners in Flight, a cooperative effort in North, Central and South America, list RHWO as a “Common Bird in Steep Decline.”

The **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** says of RHWO’s - “This species is of high conservation concern.”

The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** lists this species as “near-threatened.” And the Cornell Lab of Ornithology defers to IUCN echoing the “near-threatened” status.

National Audubon Society 2015 says, “Once very common throughout the east, (RHWO) have been decreasing in numbers for years, and recent surveys show that this trend is continuing.”

State status information

The **Minnesota DNR** lists them as a “species of special concern” and they are on **Audubon Minnesota’s** “action List”.

The **Wisconsin DNR** lists them as a “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” and the **Federal Breeding Bird Survey** indicates for Wisconsin “significant decline.”

The **Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas** says common until 1980, but since then populations have fallen dramatically.

The **Missouri Dept. of Conservation** considers them as “near threatened” with a 70% decline since the mid 60s.

The **Illinois DNR** indicates declining numbers due to removal of snags and dead trees.

RHWO’s have been on the **Ohio Audubon Watch List** from 2007 with a note of 78% decline (since when?).

On the other hand, the **Ohio Encyclopedia of Life** says RHWO’s are a “species of least concern”, so consider your sources.

Pennsylvania - no information available.

Birds of Mississippi says, while once common in open areas, RHWO’s are now “diminishing in abundance.” **Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Division** states RHWO’s have “a somewhat patchy breeding distribution in Florida; some areas which appear to be suitable breeding habitat are unoccupied. For unknown reasons it is clearly more widespread in the western half of the central and southern peninsula than in the eastern half.” Whereas Florida’s **Wildscreen Arkive (???)** indicates that RHWO’s are “near-threatened.”

The Texas Breeding Bird Survey says that “The Red-headed Woodpecker has declined in numbers across the United States and in Texas since 1966.”

Well, that’s probably more than you wanted to know about the RHWO status. A few things seem clear. The paucity of literature indicates that few states are paying serious attention to this bird’s plight. Reputable sources including state DNR’s and Breeding Bird Surveys agree that whatever the amount of decline, RHWO are definitely in decline, just about everywhere, except perhaps a few pockets of our southeastern states like Arkansas, Kentucky and Georgia, where their preferred habitat seems to be *pine savanna*.

Regarding the reasons for decline, there is little documented evidence, though some commonly cited causes include:

Status (Continued from page 3)

- Loss of potential nest sites (cutting of dead trees)
- Intensive agriculture and suburban housing on previous oak savanna
- Struck by cars while swooping down to harvest insects

Audubon also mentions the cyclical nature of RHWO abundance. "It appears that there has always been 'high' and 'low' years of Red-headed Woodpecker. The most likely explanation for this pattern is found in the Red-headed Woodpecker's winter diet. The hard mast (tree nuts) that they depend upon also has cycles of high and low production. Thus, it seems that the Red-headed Woodpeckers may follow the same patterns; that winters of plentiful food more birds survive and produce lots of young birds the next year and other years some may go hungry in winter."

There is general agreement that RHWO's are in decline. It would be interesting to see some reports from some of our southeastern states and to follow up on any research being done on our redheaded friend.

Spring Issue Topics?

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. 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 two meetings will be Feb. 18 & Mar. 18, 2015. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website at www.RedheadRecovery.org for current information.

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

Save that Snag!

Place
Stamp
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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
 RhWR
 PO Box 3801
 Minneapolis, MN 55403-0801